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## Comfort for the Road

The Latest in Custom Sleepers for Expeditors

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# Panther

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 Monte Stetler ...VP of Business Development  
 Jeff Blakemore..... Creative Director  
 Joshua McCord.....Interactive Developer  
 Michael Sams.....Interactive Developer  
 Debbie McCord ..... Accounting  
 Carol Hill.....Subscription Manager

**EDITORIAL**

Jeff Jensen ..... Editor Posthumous  
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COVER STORY

# Q&A: Panther Premium

By Lawrence McCord, Publisher

## A One On One with Panther Premium's C.E.O. & a Look at Their New State of the Art Headquarters

### What prompted the decision to build a new corporate headquarters?

Over the past several years, Panther has grown year-over-year to the point that we needed to expand and provide additional room for our Operations. Of central importance to us was to make sure we offered a nicer environment for owner operators and fleet owners. Our new building offers more space, includes an office for visiting truck owners as well as amenities like washers, dryers,



and showers just to mention a few. It is definitely a better experience for our owner operators when they are here.

### How important are fleet owners to Panther's business model?

Panther was one of the first expedite companies to encourage growth and expansion amongst our Owner Operators. As time passed, many single truck owners reinvested their earnings back into their business and grew into successful fleet owners.

There is nothing we enjoy more than to see individuals buy their first truck and then grow their business into a small or large fleet. We spend a lot of time and resources in making sure that fleet

ownership at Panther remains the great opportunity it is.

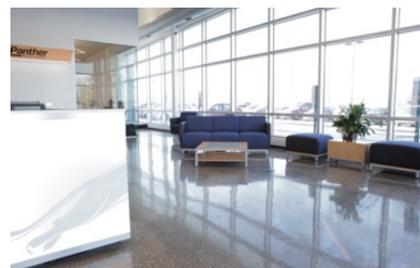
### Where do individual owner operators fit in?

Individual owner operators are the backbone of our fleet, and where everything begins. These small business owners are extremely valuable to us. We work hard to make sure that we are offering the best opportunity and owner operator experience in the market.

building is much larger. It is a single story building, providing an open air environment to promote interaction of all departments, visiting contractors, and visiting customers.

### What can you tell us about your new Fleet Mobile App?

Our new Fleet Mobile App is an incredible leap in technology and is being released to the fleet right now. The App allows a Contractor to update their availability, accept loads,



### Can you tell us more about the new location?

Our new 50,000-square-foot headquarters is located at 84 Medina Rd (ST RT 18) in Medina, Ohio. It is a state-of-the-art facility built around what has made Panther successful – Independent Contractors, customers, employees, and technology. The

complete loads paper free, and send any documents to Panther instantly, run operational and financial status reports... all from the comfort of their truck or home. Our goal is to make life easier for our fleet, and I believe that we have made significant strides towards this goal.

## PANTHER PREMIUM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

### How has Panther changed since it was purchased by ArcBest (formerly known as Arkansas Best Corporation) in 2012?

Being purchased by ArcBest in 2012 has given Panther incredible opportunities that we would not have gained on our own. Our fleet not only has access to new customers and resources, but it has also become aligned with one of the most established and most respected names in transportation. This partnership has also given Panther the ability to make long term capital investments in the fleet. We have purchased new Qualcomms and trailers so that our owner operators are outfitted with top of the line equipment. We invested over \$1 million directly into the fleet in 2014 with our new contract and rate structure. In 2014, we introduced a new Operating Agreement to our fleet which increased our already outstanding compensation package by over 1 million dollars annually.

### What different types of equipment is Panther interested in contracting with?

Panther is comprised of customer-oriented contractors that own, lease, or operate three types of trucks: cargo vans, Sprinters, straight trucks, and tractors. There are also opportunities for contractors to increase the rates per mile paid to the truck by obtaining their HazMat endorsements, running as a team, or by running specialty freight with our Life Science, Government Services, or Flatbed Divisions.

### Panther also has a number of truck purchase and "Lease to Own Programs" you are partnered with, correct?

Correct, Panther has partnered with several different truck purchase and leasing companies that offer straight truck and tractor leasing opportunities. We are committed to defining a clear path to ownership for entrepreneurs that have the ambition of obtaining a truck and operating their own business.

### How would you describe the culture at Panther?

We are a fast-paced, truck owner-, driver-, and customer-focused organization. Our goal is to provide world-class service to the Panther fleet as well as the customer base. This is obviously not an easy task, but when you have the best employees and independent contractors in the market, it becomes a little easier. We want to treat our drivers like everyone else at Panther and communicate openly and give them the information they need to do their jobs. We also provide easy access to the management team.

### How can someone learn more about Panther and get in touch with one of your representatives?

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by Shelly Benisch, C.I.C.

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Matthew 28:6

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# Comfort for the Road

## The Latest in Custom Sleepers for Expeditors

By Sean M. Lyden, Staff Writer

For an expediter, a custom sleeper is much more than a sleeping quarters; it's a home away from home.

"Expeditors tend to spend a lot more time in their sleepers in between loads. So it needs to be more of a living area than just a place to sleep," says Jim McFerrin, sales manager for Freightliner of Knoxville ([www.thetruckguys.com](http://www.thetruckguys.com)). "For typical long-haul tractors, most of the sleepers will have a bunk, refrigerator, television, microwave, but they often don't have a lounge area. For expeditors, we're putting in a bottom bunk that turns into a 'booth' with a table and sitting area. Whereas the freight hauler is going to drive his eight hours, get another load and then keep going, the expediter will unload and might sit there for two to three days."

That's why sleepers for expedite trucks are designed with comfort in mind, says Bobby Snyder, sales representative for Fyda Freightliner ([www.fydafreightliner.com](http://www.fydafreightliner.com)), based in Columbus, Ohio. "The sleeper design is for drivers to be able to stay out on the road a little longer because expeditors are having to wait in the cab more often than those just

running dedicated freight. Expeditors live in their trucks, so they want it to be as comfortable as possible, especially when they're husband and wife teams."

A typical custom sleeper for expediter trucks ranges from 96 to 100 inches in length, which allows for up to 22-foot freight box, while staying within the 40-foot overall truck length requirement. But some expeditors are requesting larger sleepers, says Brian Callan, president at Bolt Custom Trucks ([www.boltcustom.com](http://www.boltcustom.com)).

"Traditionally, the largest sleeper we install on an expedite (straight truck) is 100 inches long," says Callan. "However, it now looks like we will be building at least one 130-inch sleeper on a straight truck in 2015. We have another customer talking about doing a 150-inch sleeper on a straight truck. These larger sleepers are not unusual for us to install on a tractor with a fifth wheel, but the longer sleeper takes away from the full potential of freight box size with a straight truck. It's a matter of striking the right balance to give customers what they want (and need) for their particular application."

### Integrated vs. Bolt On

Integrated or bolt-on sleeper, what's the difference?

"An integrated sleeper is where we cut the roof and the back wall out of the chassis and make the sleeper a seamless extension of the cab, where you can stand



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CONTINUED ON PAGE 30  
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## COMFORT FOR THE ROAD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

up from the front seat and walk all the way to back of the sleeper," says Don Bentz, sales manager for Bolt Custom Trucks ([www.boltcustom.com](http://www.boltcustom.com)). "A bolt-on sleeper is separate from the cab, bolted onto the chassis, with a boot that connects the cab and the sleeper. There's a hole cut in the back wall of the chassis, and you will need to duck down to walk from the cab and through the boot into the sleeper."

According to Bentz, a key advantage to the integrated custom sleeper is aerodynamics, which helps fuel economy because there is no gap between the cab and the sleeper.

The primary advantage of the bolt-on sleeper is the price point. "The bolt-on is less money upfront and the customer can also take it off and put it on a new chassis," says Bentz. "You can get pretty much the same amenities in the bolt-on as you can the integrated sleeper, it's just that the integrated unit offers better fuel economy and more overall space."

Bentz says that integrated sleepers comprise 90-percent of Bolt Custom's sleeper sales.

### Spec'ing a Sleeper

While most expediter truck sleepers come fully loaded, there are some spec adjustments to consider, depending on whether you're an owner-operator or fleet owner.

If you're an owner-operator, have a clear idea of your ultimate goal, advises McKeen with Freightliner of Knoxville.

"Are you looking to maximize income? Or, are you an expediter because you want to travel and see the country? The one looking to maximize income is going to spec a sleeper differently (with fewer bells and whistles) than expediters looking to subsidize their RV travel

experience," says McKeen.

### What About Fleet Owners?

"They are going to do what they have to do to attract the drivers, which often means putting in more amenities," says McKeen.

Fleet owners also need to keep durability in mind, especially since the drivers don't own the trucks and may not take the same level of care of the sleeper as most owner-operators would.

"Instead of putting carpet in the sleeper, for example, a hardwood laminate floor or a linoleum type of flooring is one way to do it. (The hard surface floors) are much easier to clean and keep clean and may hold up longer," advises Snyder with Fyda Freightliner.

### Lightweight Trend

The recent trend toward using lightweight materials, such as aluminum, in sleeper construction enables expediters to reduce truck weight and increase payload capacity, without sacrificing the amenities they like to have in their sleepers.

For example, Bolt Custom Trucks began using aluminum in their cabinet construction about eight years ago.

"We used to use wood cabinetry like you would have in your kitchen, but a few years ago, we went to all-aluminum construction in our sleeper cabinets, which has taken a lot of weight out of the sleeper," says Bentz with Bolt Custom Trucks. "We use a wood face cabinet door, which gives the cabinet the look and feel of one in your kitchen, while the rest of the cabinet is constructed out of lighter-weight aluminum."



## Larry & Marie Lewis: Why Stoops Freightliner?

Larry Lewis, and his wife Marie have over 14 years of driving experience. They know all about life on the road.

In 2000, after interviewing with several expedite carriers, they settled on the decision to contract with FedEx Custom Critical. Shortly after, the Lewis couple were referred to Jeff Jones by an industry veteran. "By working with Stoops Freightliner, we not only get a great truck the way we want it, and great customer service, but also we gained a friend in Jeff Jones. We had visited other truck dealers and were not impressed with the trucks that they had shown us. Jeff was very friendly and answered all of our questions in detail. We asked if he would be able to include an automated transmission and he set us up in a 2001 Kenworth T-300 with an Eaton-Fuller 6-speed automated transmission and a beautiful 84 inch Bentz sleeper." They both agree that this made their entry into the expediting business much easier than anticipated.

"This truck was far superior to any of the other trucks we looked at!"

When they went to spec out a new truck in 2006, they gave Jeff Jones a list of ideas. In no time at all, they were provided with exactly what they were hoping for. "Everything we asked for was there plus a few extras!" When they purchased a truck with Jeff Jones, they were also purchasing years of experience and knowledge in the industry.

In the span of 14 years, Larry and Marie have purchased five trucks from Jeff Jones and have been happy each time.

The Lewis ended their comments by saying, "The point we hope to convey is Jeff is a wonderful and caring person who took the time to mentor us and make us successful in our business."

**Stoops**  
Specialty Trucks



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## New for 2015

So, what are some design or product enhancements can expeditors expect to see in 2015?

Here are three product updates Bolt Custom Trucks will be releasing in the upcoming months.

## 1. New Bed Configurations

“Traditionally, when we install two beds into a sleeper, we build a bunk bed that folds out of the wall above the first bed,” says Callan. “Although this is a more efficient use of space, many of our customers don’t want to try to climb into an upper bunk (whether because of their age or physical condition). So, we will shortly be coming out with two side-by-side beds on the floor with storage underneath and cabinet storage overhead.”

## 2. Enhanced Aerodynamics

Bolt Custom will be offering skirt fairings that will run the entire length of the sleeper and freight box area with the ability to easily move the fairings out of the way, allowing for convenient access to tires, tool boxes, and generator.

“The advantage of the fairings is to maximize fuel efficiency,” says Callan. “The challenge is to still provide easy access to the areas underneath the truck by conveniently moving the fairings out of the way. We have some new bracketry that we have just developed which will facilitate this.”

## 3. Improved Aesthetics

“At the request of a few customers, Bolt Custom Trucks will be developing some new skirting with steps to cover up some exposed areas on a couple truck models,”

says Callan. “This is more for aesthetics, where a truck manufacturer has not bothered to cover those areas but some customers want to make their truck look a little more classy.”

## The Bottom Line

When it comes to spec’ing your “home-away-from-home,” trust the expertise of your sleeper manufacturer and truck dealer, says Snyder with Fyda Freightliner.

“Don’t over-think it. There’s a reason these sleeper companies have come up with a standard spec to fit the majority of expedite truck applications. They’ve done a lot of the work upfront and take a lot of time to listen to customers to determine what works best for expeditors,” says Snyder. **EN**

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# Empty Nest Leads to Expediting with XPO Express: Ben Brooks

By: Sandy Long, Staff Writer

Ben Brooks was looking for a motor home after his children grew up and went off to college. Instead of finding a motor home, a friend told him how he could get into expediting and make money while traveling the country. Intrigued, Ben started researching expedite trucking.

Realizing that one never starts at the top of anything, Ben started out driving for a fleet owner for two years to learn if expediting really was for him and to learn the business. At the end of those two years, Ben bought his first truck. Ben started with XPO Express in 2007 and bought his second truck in 2010.

"I did a lot of research about XPO Express before leasing on there, then they went through some changes, I got the 'grass is greener' syndrome and went elsewhere for a bit, but it was not as good as XPO Express so I quickly went back, been there ever since," Ben related. "With XPO Express, I really appreciate the family orientated atmosphere and the good money I make there. I am treated like an individual and a person, they say



Meet Steve James at Expedite Expo 2015. July 24 & 25 in Wilmington, OH

"Hi Ben", not a truck number."

"I have four trucks now, mostly Freightliner straight trucks with dry boxes, leased on with XPO Express, but my own personal truck is a 2004 International straight truck, a 7500 series with an Alumi-Bunk sleeper and a 22-foot dry box. It is an older truck, but we suit each other. I hope to add two more trucks in 2015, of course to be leased on with XPO Express."

Ben has run team with his ex-wife Cheri since early in 2014. "We make a good trucking team and expediting with XPO Express allows us to get around and see our two children and two grandchildren and still get plenty of miles," Ben said.

To learn more about expediting check out [expeditersonline.com](http://expeditersonline.com). To learn more about XPO Express be sure to visit their booth at the ExpediteExpo 2015 July 24th and 25th in Wilmington OH. **EN**



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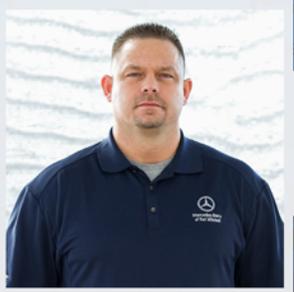


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# From the Forum



We asked the members of the ExpeditorsOnline.com Open Forums to tell us which states and provinces they've been to over the course of their expedite career and here is a sampling of the responses:

**TeamCaffee** - in ten years we have been in all of the lower 48 and all of the lower provinces in Canada.

**Turtle** - 48 and 8

**xmudman** - All CONUS except WA and NV (46); NB and NS only.

**layout shooter** - 49 states, 10 provinces.

**joerger** - 48 states

**mjmsprt40** - I've been mostly Eastern half of the US, no Canada. Can I name them? Well, let's see h'yar. ND, SD, KS, NE, OK, TX, MN, IA, MO, AR, WI, IL, MI, IN, KY, TN, AL, GA, FL, SC, NC, VA, WV, OH, PA, NY, MA (That's 27)

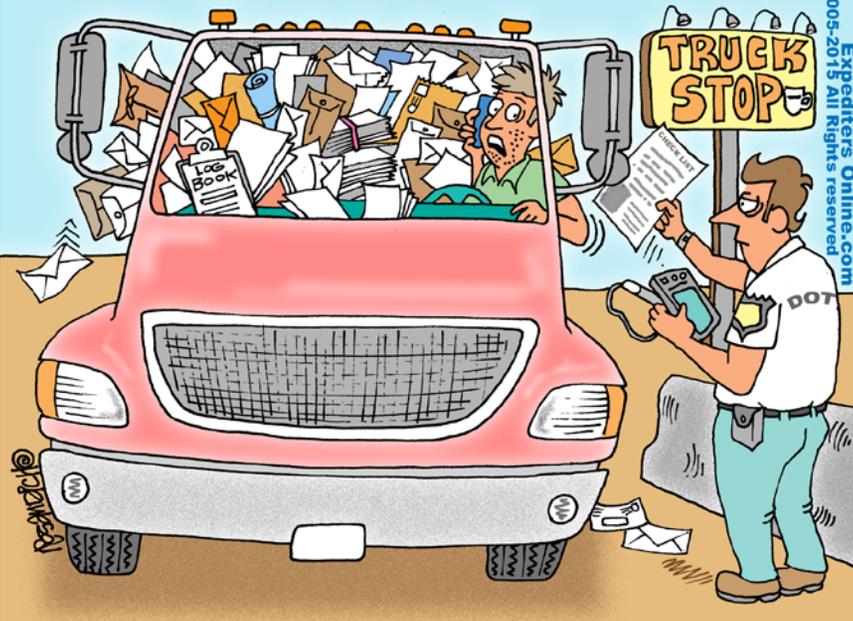
**TDave** - 46 states and one province; everywhere except Alaska, Washington and Maine and just Ontario province

**cheri1122** - Every state except Alaska & Hawaii [why won't they build a bridge?!], and only one province: Ontario.

**tknight** - I have been to every state in the USA including Alaska and Hawaii, been to every Province in Canada.

**CharlesD** - 48 states and Ontario.

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