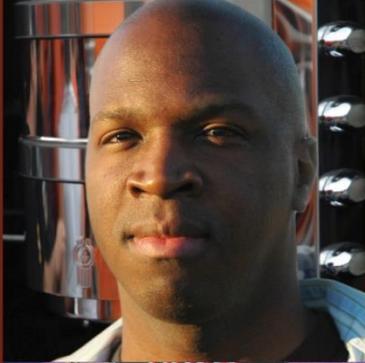


**Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association Foundation**  
*A subsidiary of Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association Inc.*



# 2020 Owner-Operator Member Profile Survey



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## Profile of the Owner-Operator

The typical owner-operator member of OOIDA is a Caucasian male, 58 years of age, standing 5 feet 10 inches tall, and weighing 225 pounds, which results in a body mass index (BMI) of 32.2. Although BMI has several limitations, as it does not take into account a person's body composition, age, or gender, it is often the measurement of choice to determine overall health. According to the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH), 26 percent of truck drivers are overweight (BMI 25.0-29.9) and 64 percent are obese (BMI >30.0),<sup>1</sup> which suggests that the 2020 OOMP Survey results are in harmony with other industry research.

It has long been demonstrated by medical studies that the sedentary lifestyle of a trucker can lead to many health issues, including weight gain, diabetes, and hypertension. In the 2020 OOMP Survey, 53 percent of the respondents stated that they took maintenance type prescriptions. Of those drivers who took prescriptions, most indicated that they were for high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes. The subject of driver health, which has affected the trucking industry for several years, continues to remain an area of concern as 33 percent of owner-operators do not have a health insurance plan.

In regards to starting their career in the trucking industry, the majority of owner-operators continue to come from blue-collar occupations such as farming, construction, manufacturing, etc., while others indicated that they chose to drive a truck either due to their upbringing as a multiple generation truck driver or due to their career in the military. In fact, 34 percent of the respondents stated that they had served in the military at some point in their life.

The average member has been involved in the trucking business for more than 30 years, and has been an owner-operator for more than 20 years. During this time, the typical owner-operator has accumulated approximately 2.9 million miles of driving, most of which was without a Department of Transportation reportable accident<sup>2</sup> resulting in 40 crashes per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, or almost 3.8 times below the national crash rate for the overall trucking industry.

The owner-operator generally owns one to two trucks, although the number of small fleet owners has increased from 2 percent in 2016 to 7 percent in 2020. The average price for a new vehicle was over \$140,000, whereas the cost for a used was nearly \$60,000. The majority of owner-operators however have paid off their truck while very few have entered into a lease purchase plan. Most operate a Class 8 truck with a gross vehicle weight of 33,001 pounds or more. The average engine continues to have an excess of over 450-horse power, equipped with a 13-speed transmission, and received 6.2 miles per gallon.

In addition to the truck, most owner-operators under their own authority owned at least one trailer. Members indicated that a new trailer typically costs approximately \$60,000, compared to \$30,000 for a

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<sup>1</sup> W. Karl Sieber et al., *The National Survey of Long-Haul Truck Driver Health and Injury*, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (2014).

<sup>2</sup> A DOT reportable accident is a crash that resulted in either (1) a fatality, (2) an injury receiving treatment immediately away from the accident scene, or (3) disabling damage to any vehicle involved

used trailer. Both the owner-operator under their own authority and the fleet owner primarily pulled a flatbed trailer, while leased-on owner-operators generally pulled dry van trailers. All segments indicated that they predominantly haul general freight.

For those owner-operators under their own authority, a majority have established their business as a Limited Liability Corporation. Moreover, they primarily utilize brokers to obtain freight. Whereas leased-on owner-operators focus chiefly on freight rates, the amount of freight, and the company's reputation before signing on with a carrier. The typical leased-on operator has been with their present carrier for more than 11 years.

Overall, the owner-operator drives solo rather than in a team operation and operates mainly in the north and south central regions of the United States. He or she drove 121,000 miles last year while 26,000 of those miles were deadhead miles, representing 21 percent of all miles driven. Most drove between 501 and 1,000 miles for a typical load's length of haul followed by 151-500 miles and 1,001 miles or more. These trips necessitated being away from home for more than 200 nights per year.

The gross income for the owner-operator under their own authority was nearly \$190,000. However, he or she typically accumulated a gross expense of almost \$124,500 per year, with a large portion attributed to fuel (\$42,865),<sup>3</sup> maintenance (\$21,000), tires (\$5,000), and tolls (\$3,000). After figuring for all miles driven in the previous year, those under their own authority received an average *net* income of \$0.53 per mile, while leased-on owner-operators earned \$0.48 per mile. The most common type of compensation was per trip pay followed by percentage.

Although the prevalence of technology has grown in the trucking industry over the years, the owner-operator segment of the industry remains vastly different from that of the large motor carriers. When asked if they had any advanced driver assistant system (ADAS) technology equipped on their truck, such as automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning, road-facing camera, etc., 29 percent of members stated they did not. This is probably because most members believe the technology has no effect on safety nor any positive benefits to their bottom line. Moreover, the vast majority also do not have a maximum speed setting on their truck, i.e. a speed limiter. For those few who did, the maximum setting was 74 miles per hour.

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<sup>3</sup> 17,713 gallons of fuel purchased × \$2.42 (the average cost per gallon of diesel fuel for the U.S. at the start of August 2020 according to U.S. Energy Information Administration <https://www.eia.gov/petroleum/gasdiesel/>) = \$42,865.

## 2020 Owner-Operator Member Profile Survey Results

The *2020 Owner-Operator Member Profile Survey* marks the eleventh in a series of member profile surveys. These eleven surveys, which span more than 20-years, have either confirmed static trends, such as the vast majority of the trucking industry is male, or have assisted in shedding light on new and current trends, for an example, the steady increase in the use of automatic transmissions. Through this anonymous survey, OOFI has been able to track the dramatic changes in the owner-operator segment of the industry.

Frequently, OOFI is asked (1) who are the members of OOIDA, (2) what is their professional experience, and (3) what do they believe is important in initiating change in the trucking industry. The purpose of the OOMP Survey is to gather sufficient information in order to address these questions so that OOIDA can more accurately communicate the professional opinions of the small business owner and leased-on owner-operator with federal, state, and local agencies. Regrettably, most studies focus almost exclusively on the large carrier owners, business managers, dispatchers, and safety directors for information on various economic and regulatory issues. Hence, the OOMP Survey is critical in gaining a better understanding of the industry from the owner-operators' perspective.

Again, this survey is unique in that it represents the small business men and women who truly drive the economy and embody the trucking industry. It appears that few lawmakers and regulators have an adequate understanding of the many difficulties associated with being an owner-operator.

Thus, OOFI has continued to conduct these member profile surveys in order for OOIDA to present the collective voice of the small business owner on issues specifically related to him or her. For organizational and analytic purposes, OOFI has separated the survey questions into the following ten distinct sections, including one for both of the two different types of operation that owner-operators experience, namely those leased-on to a motor carrier and those operating under their own authority:

1. **Personal Information:** The section consisted of questions on the demographics of the owner-operator members, such as type of operation, gender, ethnic background, marital status, etc.
2. **Management of Business:** The trucking industry today is incredibly diverse; thus this section was designed to gather information on the various types of business models as well as the different levels of experience obtained by owner-operators. The questions in this section touch on a number of issues ranging from income to the number of owned trucks and trailers.
3. **Medical Issues:** Since 2014, drivers have been required to obtain medical certification from a Certified Medical Examiner (CME) in order to maintain their commercial driver license (CDL). This has raised a number of concerns within the industry and among OOIDA members. This section focuses on a variety of health and medical issues, including sleep apnea.
4. **Environmental Issues:** Over the past decade, the trucking industry has witnessed a higher awareness of environmental issues, and in particular, the focus on the reduction of greenhouse

gas (GHG) and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by various government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the California Air Resource Board. The two questions in this section give a glimpse of the overall utilization of environmental technologies and their return-on-investment.

5. **Your Trucking Business:** This section provides further information concerning the business operations of owner-operators, including in what regions of the United States OOIDA members conduct most of their operations and the average weight of the load they haul.
6. **Your Truck:** This section characterizes the type of truck that a typical owner-operator drives and focuses on the power of the engine, the transmission, and the fuel mileage. Moreover, though interest in ADAS is growing within certain segments of the industry, such as large asset-based motor carriers, the trucking industry overall has yet to experience a large scale adoption of ADAS as owner-operators and small fleet owners often do not receive direct benefit of these technologies within their operations. Therefore, this section also focuses on the adoption of certain ADAS technologies.
7. **Maintenance:** This section assists in determining the variable costs that owner-operators must budget for in their cost of operations. The questions focus on how much members spend on maintenance costs and how much is related to emissions-related equipment and/or to poor road conditions.
8. **Trucker Trivia:** This section is important to help formulate an accurate picture concerning the background of the owner-operators as well as some of their reasoning behind choosing to become a truck driver. From these questions, OOFI has continued to learn what compels an owner-operator to remain in the trucking industry. Past member profiles have depicted that approximately 36% of OOIDA members have served in the military during their career.
9. **Owner-Operators Leased-On to a Motor Carrier:** This section is directed specifically to the leased-on owner-operators. The questions under this section address not only what a leased-on owner-operator considers when selecting a motor carrier to work for, but also their work experience with their motor carrier, which includes important questions addressing the issue of misclassification. The section also gathers data on motor carrier size and by what method leased-on owner-operators are compensated.
10. **Owner-Operators under their Own Authority:** Although nearly half of all motor carriers are one-truck operations, this segment of the industry is not well understood. Thus, OOFI has attempted to formulate a profile of the owner-operator operating under his or her own authority. This section contains questions that not only assess the owner-operators' business type, but also includes information about the utilization of CSA, the DataQ system, and the greatest challenges they see in trucking today.