

Oil firm is getting together with islanders to take fuel prices lower

By Katie Macleod

Highland Fuels, the community-friendly, independent oil supplier, has been serving the islands of Lewis and Harris for nearly four years, and has recently expanded to serve the Southern Isles.

Operating out of their headquarters in Inverness for more than 50 years, Highland Fuels delivers tractor diesel, marine gas oil, petrol, diesel, and kerosene, to both the commercial and domestic markets throughout Scotland.

The company delivered 246 million litres of oil last year with the help of their 41 trucks. Having an experienced driving team and owning their vehicles allows Highland Fuels to offer a flexible approach to business.

"Our drivers are our ambassadors," says Sales Director Pamela Maclean. "We currently have two full-time drivers and three trucks based in Stornoway, with a 'roving' driver who travels to the area to cover peak demand."

Pamela explains that Highland Fuels came to Stornoway in 2010 to bring competition to the islands.

While Highland Fuels uplift fuel from the same terminal in Stornoway as Scottish Fuels, the two companies are not related, and are direct competitors.

Certas Energy Ltd owns the terminal, while Phillips 66 (the company which Highland Fuels has a direct contract with) ships the oil from their Immingham refinery in north-east England to the terminal in Stornoway.

As well as access to the local depot, Highland Fuels also have fuel tanks located by Stornoway Airport. This independence lends itself to a business that feels more like a family-run company than a medium-sized organisation, with a small management team in Inverness.

In addition to reducing the cost of fuel in the islands, Highland Fuels runs a number of promotional offers that benefit local customers. One of these is the '10 pence off' initiative: when customers buy a delivery of heating oil from Highland Fuels, they receive 10 pence per litre off the pump price of diesel and petrol at participating filling stations. The offer is valid on presentation of the delivery note, to a maximum tank fill of 50 litres per transaction.

The Welcome Inn in Barvas, Engebret in Stornoway, Gordon Diesel Services in Back, Ardhaisg Filling Station in Harris, and Ravenspoint in Lochs all participate in the promotion. Pamela points out that "Fuel poverty is a real issue, so this is another way of supporting local communities."

Emergency containers of heating oil are another added advantage for customers in the area. If a customer runs out of heating oil, 20 litre containers are available for collection in the evenings and at weekends to keep properties warm until Highland Fuels can replenish the customer's oil supply.

The Highland Fuels interest-free payment plan also aids customers, giving them the option to spread the cost of fuel bills by setting up a monthly direct debit. Customers pay a minimum of £90 into their account each month, and when they are ready to order, 50% of the total value of the delivery is required; for example, a customer would need to be £150 in credit to pay for a £300 order. "We're going into better weather so this is an ideal opportunity to start budgeting for next winter," Pamela suggests.

Having listened to customer comments expressing a desire for smaller deliveries at competitive prices, Highland Fuels now operates buyer's cooperatives. These buyer's cooperatives or community buying groups involve a group of like-minded people in one geographical area ordering fuel at the same time.

Trucking costs are reduced through this scheme, and the reduction is passed on to the customer, who benefits from both a lower price and the desired quantity of oil. A member of the local community can organise the co-operative, or a dedicated member of the team in Inverness can take the reins and lessen the workload.

In an effort to serve communities in the Southern Isles too, Highland Fuels is attempting to gain access to the fuel depot at Loch Carron in Uist. While the situation is the same as in Stornoway - Certas Energy own the terminal, and Phillips 66 ship the oil in from Immingham - Highland Fuels have as yet been unable to purchase the product from P66 at the Uist location.



Until then, they are transporting fuel by truck and ferry on a weekly basis to Uist, in order to offer customers in the Southern Isles the same choice and service as their neighbours in Lewis and Harris. While this method is not without its difficulties - inclement weather can leave drivers and trucks stranded and out of operation for days at a time - Highland Fuels are committed to serving these communities.

"The community in Uist and Benbecula have been very supportive about what we're trying to do, and we will keep fighting to get access to fuel - why should customers in the south be penalised?" says Pamela.

"We are community-minded and committed to the Western Isles," she continues. "We're a people's company, and appreciate the support and business that we have gained since arriving to the Western Isles. Please be assured that there is an alternative to Scottish Fuels."

Pamela encourages customers to give their friendly, professional team a call on 0800 224 224 or visit their website at www.highlandfuels.co.uk. You can also follow them on Facebook and Twitter for the latest news, views and promotions.



• HEATING OIL • MARINE GAS OIL
• TRACTOR DIESEL • COMMERCIAL FUELS
• OIL STORAGE TANKS



CALL US FREE ON 0800 224 224
www.highlandfuels.co.uk