

Florida Trend

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Oscar J. Horton, owner,
Sun State International Trucks, Tampa

Family and Friends

- **Owner:** Oscar J. Horton
- **Company:** Sun State International Trucks, Tampa.
- **Mentors:** "My dad was always there as my role model," says Horton. Growing up in Camden, Ark., Horton got his first look at the entrepreneurial way of life watching his mom and dad run a liquor store and restaurant/cafe. But it was in his early career at International Harvester, now known as Navistar International, that Horton met the man who would change his life, Daniel Ustian. "He really opened a lot of doors and took a chance on me," says Horton of Ustian, now chairman and CEO of Chicago-based Navistar.
- **Learning the Industry:** Horton, 53, was recruited by International Harvester after he graduated from the University of Arkansas. Along the way, he worked in truck sales, finance, labor relations and foundry operations, where he was vice president and general manager. In 2000, when an opportunity came up to run a dealership selling International trucks, parts and service on the west coast of Florida, Horton took it. "International certainly helped me get started," he says, noting that the cost of a dealership is typically several million dollars.
- **Growth Mode:** This year, Horton projects revenue of \$100 million, up from \$80 million in 2005, with 45% coming from the sales of new trucks, which average \$65,000 without the trailer. Customers include Home Depot, Tropicana, Pepsi, Coke, TECO and Progress Energy. "We are very heavily employee driven," says Horton, noting that his workforce of 225 meets regularly to discuss the business and its goals.
- **Just a Businessman:** Horton doesn't dwell on his status as a minority-owned business. "We focus on the fact that we have a quality product at a good price and we give excellent service," he says.
- **The Next Generation:** Although his 26-year-old daughter, Kelli, now lives in Los Angeles, Horton hopes that she will eventually join the business. He says, "We have worked on a position description to bring her back into the company."



Oscar J.
Horton