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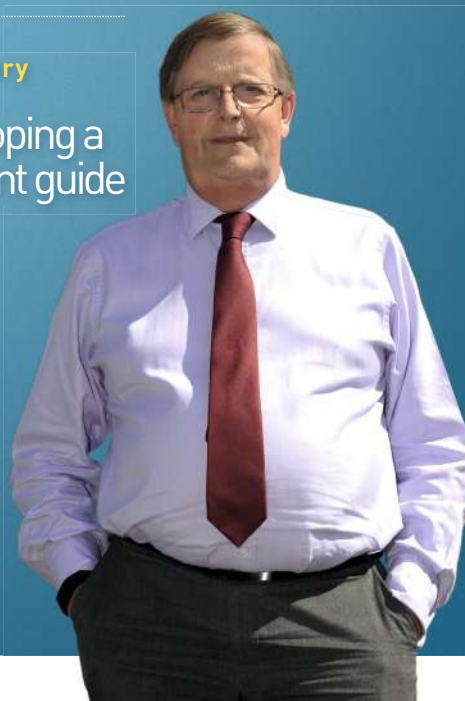
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***Important Information, Business users only.** XE Saloon 2.0D 180PS R-Sport 4dr 17MY standard specification, non-maintained. Excess mileage charges apply (at 9.7p per mile +VAT). Vehicle must be returned in good condition to avoid further charges. Contract Hire subject to status. This promotion cannot be used together with other manufacturer's promotions and is subject to availability at participating Retailers only for new vehicles registered by 30th September 2016. Contract Hire provided by Jaguar Contract Hire, a trading style of Lex Autolease Limited, Heathside Park, Heathside Park Road, Stockport SK3 0RB. †Model shown is an XE Saloon 2.0D 180PS R-Sport 4dr.

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Numbers paying BIK car tax rise for first time in 10 years

Tax take also increases with each company car worth £2,000 a year to Treasury

By Gareth Roberts

The number of employees paying company car tax has increased for the first time in 10 years, newly-released figures suggest.

The data, from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), shows that 950,000 employees paid benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax on a company car in 2014/15 – a 1% rise on the 940,000 recorded in the previous financial year.

It is the first time the number of people paying BIK on company cars has increased since 2006/07, when the number hit 1.16 million.

The 2014/15 increase puts the number of company car drivers on a par with that last seen in 2011/12, when the combination of benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax and NICs was worth £1.66 billion to the Treasury.

Three years later and the same number of company cars were worth an additional £240 million in tax to the Government at £1.9bn – a 15% increase.

It means a company car was worth, on average, £2,000 to the Treasury in 2014/15, compared with £1,747 in 2011/12.

Figures also show company car drivers have paid the lion's share of the increase, some £150m more compared to the £90m extra paid by employers.

The higher tax take can, in part, be explained by the increase reported in the taxable value over the same period. In 2014/15, the 'value' of the company car parc was reported as £3.95bn, which was £290m (7.9%) more than the £3.66bn recorded in 2011/12.

Colin Tourick, professor of automotive management at the University of Buckingham business school, told *Fleet News*:

950,000

Number of employees paying company car tax

£1.9bn

Tax take from company car tax and NICs in 2014/15

"Employees were able to opt for company cars without having an exorbitant company car tax bill"

Colin Tourick, University of Buckingham



"The economy had been doing well in 2014/15 so we can be fairly sure that more employers were employing more staff, and were offering company cars," he said. "By 2014/15, we also had some very good low-CO2 new cars available in the market, so employees were able to opt for company cars without having an exorbitant company car tax bill."

In addition, Tourick says that companies have become much more aware of duty of care issues, and realised that in order "to maximise health and safety compliance", they were better off offering company cars rather than cash



For more on 'free' fuel, visit: fleetnews.co.uk/blog-whitcombe

FEWER GREY FLEET DRIVERS REIMBURSED ABOVE AMAP RATE

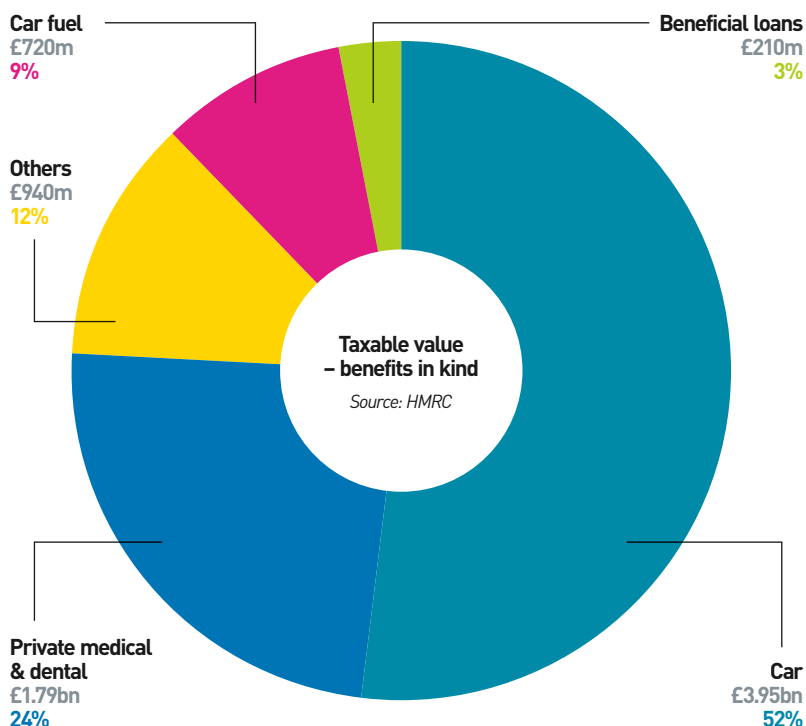
HMRC figures reveal the number of grey fleet drivers being paid more than the Government-approved mileage rate has more than halved.

The data shows that 550,000 people were being paid more than the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment (AMAP) rate in 2007/08, but by 2014/15 that had fallen to 250,000.

Alastair Kendrick, tax director at MacIntyre Hudson, believes tighter controls on business travel, the use of pool cars, an increase in salary sacrifice cars and some public sector bodies cutting mileage rates so that they now reflect AMAP rates have all helped.

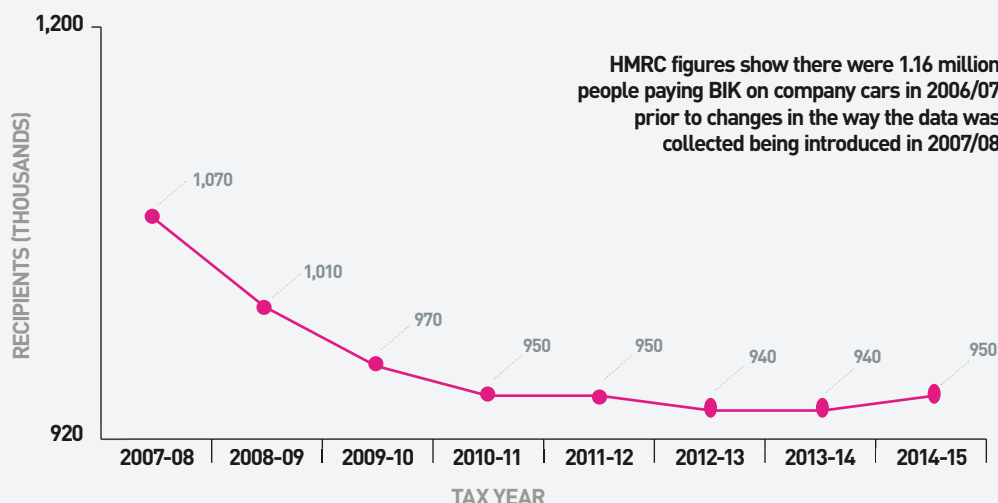
The number of recipients of taxable excess mileage allowance payments held steady until 2009-10, with a slight fall in 2010-11 from 550,000 to 510,000 and then a much larger one (to 380,000) in 2011-12.

From April 2011, the AMAP rate was increased from 40p to 45p, which also meant that employees who had been receiving AMAPs at a rate of between 40-45p no longer needed to report their benefit, or pay tax or NICs on it.



REVERSING TREND: NUMBERS PAYING COMPANY CAR TAX

Source: HMRC



HMRC figures show there were 1.16 million people paying BIK on company cars in 2006/07 prior to changes in the way the data was collected being introduced in 2007/08

allowances. "This definitely moved some companies to reintroduce company cars," he said.

"It's not possible to know how much each of these elements would have affected the overall number of company cars, but the small increase in the total company car parc is a welcome development."

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, reported around 1.4 million cars were registered to fleet and business in 2015.

With a typical annual new car market of 2m, fleet accounts for just over half, but of those 1m-plus new cars, around 220,000 go to Motability. A further 230,000 are daily rental, while captives account for around 70,000.

'True fleet' accounts for the rest, generally between 650,000 and 700,000. These are believed to be genuine, new company car registrations, although true fleet also

includes cars registered as courtesy cars to bodyshops – estimated at around 45,000 vehicles.

However, annual true fleet registrations of 600,000 would suggest a fleet of some 1.8m company cars based on a three-year cycle, or 2.4m cars on a four-year cycle.

Both are considerably higher than HMRC's figure of 950,000 company cars, which will be down to the remaining cars being used purely for business, with no private use, which would negate BIK payment.

Either way, it remains to be seen if the upward trend will continue in 2015/16, when the data is released by HMRC next year, and what effect, if any, Brexit will have.

Tourick concluded: "I suspect that the 2015/16 figures will show a similar small increase, but that the number will decline again in 2016/17 as part of the general fallout as a result of the Brexit referendum."

'FREE' FUEL RECIPIENTS FALL 42% IN PAST SEVEN YEARS

Rising fuel prices are likely to have been a key factor in the number of people receiving so-called 'free' fuel almost halving since 2007/08, says HMRC.

In 2007/08, 330,000 employees received the benefit, compared with 190,000 in 2014/15: a 42% fall.

HMRC says that the rising fuel prices probably caused employers and employees to look more carefully at whether the fuel benefit formula resulted in a tax charge commensurate with the true value of the benefit.

However, Alastair Kendrick, tax director at MacIntyre Hudson, said: "It appears whatever you do to try and change people's attitudes there will always be a hard core who will not change."

"We have seen many instances over the years when the tax an employee is paying on the fuel scale charge exceeds the actual amount it would cost the employee to purchase their

private fuel. But it is hard work to get people to give up this right and I suspect many of the remaining population are senior personnel for whom the free private fuel is simply part of their benefits package."

Despite the dramatic decline in the number of recipients of free fuel, HMRC figures show the tax take has not fallen at a similar rate. NICs paid for the benefit have fallen just £10 million over the same period, to £100m.

Meanwhile, the total amount of BIK paid for free fuel fell by £40m, from £290m in 2007/08 to £250m in 2014/15 – a 14% fall in tax take compared to the 42% drop in the number of recipients.

That can be explained, in part, by rising fuel prices. HMRC figures show that the average taxable value of 'free' fuel in 2007/08 was £2,670; in 2014/15 that had increased by 38.5% to £3,690.

The Government introduced the current CO₂ emissions-based tax regime for free private fuel in April 2003, setting the fuel benefit charge multiplier at £14,400. As a result of a series of increases this now stands at £22,200.

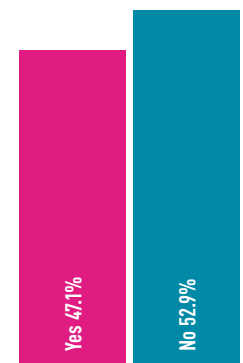
"In 1997, the then Chancellor Gordon Brown stated that he would like to tax free private fuel out of existence," said Jeff Whitcombe, tax specialist and director of business car consultancy BCF Wessex. "Nearly 20 years on 190,000 drivers still haven't got the message."

"If their justification is they're driving more than their breakeven mileage then their employers should consider how much the fuel costs, because as mileage increases the cost of the fuel rises; those employers would be well advised to buy out the benefit because they could literally save thousands of pounds, while maintaining value to employees."

FLEET FACTS AND FIGURES

OPINION POLL

Do you think changes announced to the driving test go far enough?



FleetNews view:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), has proposed increasing the 'independent driving' part of the test from 10 to 20 minutes. It will ask candidates to follow directions on a sat-nav and replace current manoeuvres with more real life scenarios. *Fleet News* welcomes any changes that ensure the test better assesses a driver's ability to drive safely.

This week's poll: Do you use the HMRC online service to check your company car tax is correct? fleetnews.co.uk/polls

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The official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the All-New Renault Mégane GT: Urban 36.2 (7.8); Extra Urban 57.7 (4.9); Combined 47.1 (6.0). The official CO₂ emissions are 134g/km. EU Directive Regulation 692/2008 test environment figures. Fuel consumption and CO₂ may vary according to driving styles, road conditions and other factors.

Honda fleet team restructured to take advantage of new Civic

Review of corporate operations also follows steady growth in fleet sales

By Simon Harris

Honda is revamping its corporate sales team, ahead of rolling out a new strategy to target fleet sales more effectively in time for the launch of a crucial new model in 2017.

The company is in the process of recruiting a manager of corporate sales operations, a position that has been vacant for more than a year, but has restructured the fleet team in a bid to take advantage of the new Civic which will go on sale in 2017.

Honda says the first phase of the strategy, currently being rolled out, is to refocus on Honda Contract Hire with its present customer base: leasing companies, fleet operators and the wider retail network.

As national leasing managers, Simon Barrett and Angela Hall will be responsible for growing sales with FN50 leasing companies. Barrett will also be responsible for growth and engagement with Motability.

Meanwhile, Jacqui Rowe, who joined Honda from Volkswagen in February, becomes corporate engagement manager, and Mark Walton will be responsible for major accounts in the south, while Ian Munro will look after the north.

Finally, Kevin Parsons, who joined Honda from pricing experts Glass's in February, will be responsible for analysing the profitability, pricing and yield of all fleet sales.

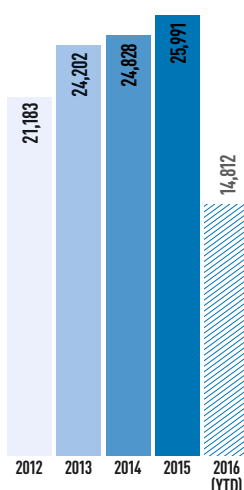
According to the manufacturer, the strategy is delivering good results, with volume growth of 103% and a 50% growth in the number of retailers working with Honda Contract Hire, as well as a quadrupling of leasing order take.

Honda will reveal details of the second phase of the 'Honda Platinum Business Programme' at a later date.

David Jacobs, national dealer programmes manager, will be responsible for the programme, aimed at increasing the number of dealers involved in supplying corporate cars.

Honda's fleet sales have grown steadily over the past few years, reaching 25,991 registrations in 2015, and 14,812 for the first six months of 2016.

HONDA FLEET REGISTRATIONS



To read about Nissan's fleet team changes, visit: fleetnews.co.uk/Nissan-fleet-team

Importantly, more than 60% of its corporate sales to-date in 2016 (9,340) are true fleet, with captive sales and Motability taking fewer than 3,000 each, and just one registration designated as daily rental.

Phil Webb, head of car division at Honda UK, said: "Following the relaunch of the model line-up last summer and ahead of the launch of the new Civic next spring, we felt the time was right to review our corporate operations."

"We absolutely want to deliver the best service we can in the corporate world and want to ensure that we work with our dedicated dealer network."

"We are confident that our new focus and team set-up will deliver our long-term vision of sustainable and steady growth as well as the delivery of the top-level customer service which customers expect of Honda."

For now, Andy Shields is interim manager for fleet sales operations on a consultancy basis while a full-time manager is recruited.

According to Honda, there is likely to be a role on the team for him after a new manager is appointed and settled in.

While the model range expanded in 2015, there are two further opportunities for the brand to engage with current and new customers.

Last year Honda launched a heavily revised CR-V, which saw the most powerful diesel version downsized from 2.2 litres to a more frugal bi-turbo 1.6, which cut CO₂ on manual versions and dramatically reduced them for automatic variants thanks to a new nine-speed gearbox.

Last summer, a new Jazz was launched, traditionally popular with public sector fleets, while the HR-V gave the company a model to compete with crossovers such as the Vauxhall Mokka and Nissan Qashqai.

The new Honda Civic will enter the lower-medium sector in 2017, a vitally important segment for fleet operators, but before that the company will launch a new hydrogen fuel cell vehicle in the UK and join the HyFive project – a Europe-wide scheme to aid the adoption of hydrogen cars.



(Left to right) David Jacobs, national dealer programmes manager, Mark Walton, major accounts south, Andy Shields, interim manager for fleet sales, Marc Samuel, national sales manager, Jacqui Rowe, corporate engagement manager, Kevin Parsons, channel and wholelife cost manager, Simon Barrett, national leasing manager, Angela Hall, national leasing manager, and Chris Valance, dealer programmes south

Beware HSE 'dirty tricks' after incidents, say law specialists

Interviewees can make mistakes without advice, conference delegates told

By Sarah Tooze

Fleet managers need to be aware of "dirty tricks" that could occur during a police or Health and Safety Executive (HSE) accident investigation. Adrian Mansbridge, of legal firm Pinsent Mason, told delegates at the Future Fleet Forum, organised by Local Authority Plant and Vehicles.

He said: "We've had cases where the family liaison officer, who is supposed to be impartial, brought the family to the site on the day they know the interview is being done with the deceased's belongings to create an emotional reaction."

In the event of a fatality involving a company car driver it will be the police interviewing the fleet manager or company representative, but if there is no fatality the HSE will investigate.

Mansbridge and his colleague Jonathan Cowlan conducted a mock PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) interview at the event to show fleet operators what a formal interview with the HSE is like.

The scenario involved a local authority refuse collection vehicle colliding with a pedestrian when reversing out of a residential cul-de-sac, causing serious injuries that could have been fatal.

The senior fleet manager was then invited for a PACE interview as numerous Health and Safety at Work Act offences were under investigation.

At the start of the mock interview the inspector dissuaded the fleet manager from having legal advice, telling him "you don't need to worry about anything here", before going on to use what Mansbridge described as "army tactics".

"He took him through stages. At no point did he appreciate the significance of the admissions he was making until the culmination of the interview," Mansbridge said.



"Don't get caught in the headlights. Keep calm – don't get aggressive"

*Jonathan Cowlan,
Pinsent Mason*



Adrian Mansbridge: 'If you're ever in an interview, my first piece of advice would be to have a lawyer'

"If you're ever in an interview, my first piece of advice to you would be to have a lawyer. Regulatory, white collar crime is the type of lawyer you're looking for, certainly for a corporate defendant."

In the scenario, the fleet manager only had limited pre-interview disclosure of documents but he should have asked for 'full disclosure' if possible, to "avoid making comments contrary to documentary evidence", according to Mansbridge.

Fleet managers should also be wary of sending emails in the aftermath of an accident.

Cowlan said: "It's dead easy to say something like 'Fred what's going on? This is just like the incident we had two months ago.'"

Cowlan warned fleet managers to avoid waiving legal privilege. In the mock interview the fleet manager gave the inspector the right to see a document which had been sent to the company's lawyer and would have been protected by legal privilege.

He advised fleet managers to be clear what offences are under suspicion and to take time to answer each question during the interview.

"Don't get caught in the headlights," he said. "Keep calm – don't get aggressive or confrontational, it doesn't help."

The HSE inspector should not ask leading questions and/or multiple questions, which can confuse the interviewee, but in practice this often happens.

"Quite a few of the questions in that interview were asking the fleet manager to agree to what the HSE inspector was inferring," Cowlan said. "It's very easy to say 'yes' and then say things you can't backtrack on."

Another technique is to leave silence so that the interviewee feels uncomfortable and thinks they had "better say something", Cowlan said.

He advised fleet managers not to fill the gap and avoid guesswork.

"If that is a fleet director's question there is nothing wrong with saying 'you'll need to speak to the fleet director about that'. But people do tend to guess. They're under pressure, they think they've got to answer that question," he said.

It can also be tempting to answer 'no comment' but Mansbridge warned: "You've got to remember the inferences that may be drawn if you don't say things in that interview."

He favours a prepared written statement "if someone has even the slightest discomfort about speaking in an interview".

"Answering questions is risky," he said. "Only answer questions if you have a really thorough understanding of the incident, background and your own systems."

Fleet managers should also be aware that the interview room should have adequate heat, light and ventilation, there is no requirement to stand and they are entitled to breaks.

PACE does not apply in Scotland, and Cowlan advised companies operating in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to understand the different rights and procedures for each.

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Fuel consumption figures for the Civic range in mpg (l/100km): Urban 37.2 – 70.6 (7.6 – 4.0), Extra Urban 54.3 – 85.6 (5.2 – 3.3), Combined 46.3 – 78.5 (6.1 – 3.6). CO₂ emissions: 145 – 94 g/km. Fuel consumption figures sourced from official EU-regulated laboratory test results, are provided for comparison purposes and may not reflect real-life driving experience.

Model Shown: Civic 1.6 i-DTEC SR Manual in Brilliant Sporty Blue Metallic.



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La meccanica delle emozioni



Model shown is the Alfa Giulietta 1.6 JTDm-2 120 hp Alfa TCT Tecnica at £20,900 OTR including Alfa White Paint. Range of official fuel consumption figures for the Giulietta Tecnica range: Urban 55.4 - 60.1 mpg (5.1 - 4.7 l/100km); Extra Urban 74.3 - 88.3 mpg (3.8 - 3.2 l/100km); Combined 65.7 - 74.3 mpg (4.3 - 3.8 l/100km). CO₂ emissions 113 - 99 g/km. Fuel consumption and CO₂ figures are obtained for comparative purposes in accordance with EC directives/regulations and may not be representative of real-life driving conditions. Factors such as driving style, weather and road conditions may also have a significant effect on fuel consumption.

BCA promises 'unrivalled' network

Paragon takeover will bring fleets end-to-end service and management

By John Charles

BCA Marketplace is promising an "unrivalled network of refurbishment, fleet management and remarketing centres for fleets of all sizes", after it bought Paragon Automotive.

It will pay an initial £105 million for the business, with further earn-out payments of up to a maximum of £30m, subject to the achievement of financial and market targets through 2016/17 and 2017/18.

The acquisition, it said, was an "important further step" in the progression of its strategy of delivering a broad-based automotive support service business which could handle vehicles throughout their lifecycle.

Paragon, headquartered in Thurleigh, Bedfordshire, and operating across a total of 12 locations, which will all be retained by BCA, provides outsourced vehicle services to major fleet operators, including rental, leasing and corporate fleets and motor manufacturers.

It was launched in 2005 and has expanded rapidly through a series of acquisitions including Autocare UK, QEK, significant elements of the Camden Group and in 2013 Stobart Vehicle Services.

The company employs more than 1,250 staff and has more than 600 acres of storage, land and refurbishment facilities across the UK. Last year, Paragon processed more than 600,000 vehicles from its facilities.

A BCA spokesman told *Fleet News*: "Paragon Automotive is a great fit with BCA and extends both our national network of sites and the range of services we can offer our customers."

"Paragon adds capacity to our portside operations and enhances our new, in-life and used services."

"Along with our recent acquisition of Ambrosetti, we now have an unrivalled network of refurbishment, fleet management and remarketing centres. This creates flexibility and efficiency for fleets of all sizes."

He added: "Fleets of all sizes will now benefit from a comprehensive end-to-end service. From vehicle ordering to vehicle preparation through to appointment booking and vehicle handover, a full service can be delivered through a national network."

Promising that it will be "business as usual" at Paragon, with the senior management team led by chief executive Ian Carlisle retained, the deal is the latest acquisition by BCA following its own acquisition for £1.2 billion by Haversham Holdings in spring last year.

The BCA Group of companies was immediately renamed BCA Marketplace and floated on the London Stock Exchange.

"The company sees significant potential to grow this new division organically as well as delivering operating synergies"

Avril Palmer-Baunack, BCA



£105m

Initial payment
for Paragon

Avril Palmer-Baunack, BCA executive chairman, said: "The [Paragon] acquisition gives us a key component in our transformation of BCA to the pre-eminent managed vehicle services provider to the UK and ultimately European automotive industry."

Palmer-Baunack continued: "Following this transaction, the company sees significant potential to grow this new division organically as well as delivering operating synergies."

It is the latest in a string of acquisitions by BCA under the leadership of Palmer-Baunack which includes: the Scottish Motor Auction Group, car transporter business Stobart Automotive and automotive services provider Ambrosetti.

The BCA family also includes the well-known Webuyanycar.com brand.

BCA, which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year, can trace its roots back to when founder David Wickins staged a sale in a marquee at Frimley Bridges in 1946 selling 14 cars.

Today, it manages more than 1.5m cars a year in the UK from the dock to defleet, and touches more than 3.5m vehicles a year across the UK and Europe, working with fleet operators, motor manufacturers and dealers.

Simon Henstock, BCA chief operating officer for UK Remarketing, has nearly 40 years of experience with the company.

He said: "Auctions are the stock market of the used car sector and handle everything from nearly-new models to older high mileage examples."

"This flexibility, and the capability to handle huge volumes of vehicles quickly and efficiently, is why vehicle auctions continue to thrive in a rapidly changing marketplace."

He concluded: "As the market leaders, BCA has evolved to meet these changing needs, improving the service to customers and offering different ways to buy."



Read a profile of Paragon
at: [fleetnews.co.uk/
paragon-profile](http://fleetnews.co.uk/paragon-profile)

EC calls for new car tax rules to incentivise zero emission driving

UK thinktank says diesel should be phased out in London to improve air quality

By Gareth Roberts

Tougher CO₂ standards for cars and vans will be introduced to help cut transport emissions and improve air quality in Europe.

They form part of a package of measures announced by the European Commission, which also include fuel efficiency targets for trucks for the first time.

EU member states, including the UK, have committed to a 40% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared with 1990 levels. Reducing emissions from petrol and diesel engines, as well as the widespread adoption of electric cars, are key to achieving those targets.

However, the EC report says infrastructure improvements will also be needed, together with changes to procurement rules for public sector fleets and company car tax to incentivise low and zero emission driving.

Transport commissioner Violeta Bulc said: "Transport accounts for a quarter of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions and is a main cause of air pollution. The transition to low-emission mobility is essential to reach the EU's ambitious climate objectives and improve quality of life in cities."

Manufacturers are already working towards an average new car CO₂ target of 95g/km by 2021, and 147g/km for all new vans by 2020. The Commission is now consulting on a new standard for 2030.

Current targets require manufacturers to reduce new car emissions by about 5% per year between 2015 and 2021, and by about 5.5% per year for vans between 2017 and 2020. But, whatever limits are agreed, the report calls for action earlier "rather than later" due to vehicle renewal cycles.

However, it is unclear about the impact on targets of the new real-life testing procedure for fuel efficiency and CO₂ emissions which will be implemented for all new cars launched after September 1 next year. The test is expected to result in a 20-30% rise in average emissions, but lobbying by manufacturers could influence those 2030 targets.

Pauline Bastidon, head of European policy at the Freight Transport Association, said: "An effective framework for low emission alternative energy and an adequate roll-out of infrastructure, are key for us and can go a long way in helping the logistics sector reduce its carbon footprint."

He added: "The Commission needs to ensure that financial instruments providing guarantees to private investors are not the only source of funding available for new technologies."

"The transition to low-emission mobility is essential to reach the EU's ambitious climate objectives and to improve the quality of life in our cities"

Violeta Bulc, transport commissioner



95g/km

Average new car emissions target for 2021

147g/km

Average emissions target for all new vans by 2020

The strategy comes in the wake of a hard hitting report from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). It welcomed the possible expansion of London's ultra-low emissions zone, announced by new mayor Sadiq Khan, and suggested diesel cars could be phased out altogether.

Harry Quilter-Pinner, researcher at IPPR and co-author of the report *Lethal and Illegal*, told *Fleet News*: "[Khan] should be ambitious going forward – only bold action will make the capital's air safe to breathe again. IPPR's analysis suggests he will ultimately need to completely phase out diesel cars and buses in order to reach legal compliance."

The think tank commissioned King's College London to understand the scale of the transformation in road usage required to clean up London's air.

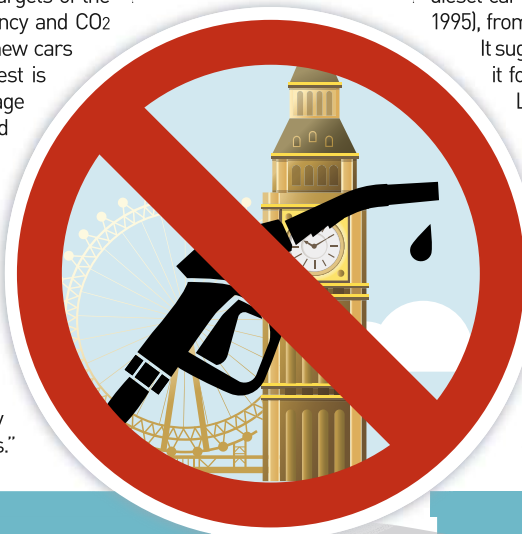
Researchers looked at an ambitious policy, measuring the impact if the capital returned to the lowest recorded level of diesel car ownership, at around 10% of the car fleet (circa 1995), from the current 57% of cars.

It suggests it would have a significant impact. However, it found a reduction in diesel alone would not allow London to reach legal compliance before 2025.

The inescapable conclusion, says the IPPR report is that, as long as some diesel cars (along with diesel buses, taxis, vans and lorries) remain on London's roads, it will remain in breach of UK law.

However, it acknowledges this would have an impact on business, given that the light goods vehicle fleet went from 51% diesel in 1994 to 96% in 2014.

Quilter-Pinner said: "With the possibility of recession, this regulation should be less stringent on vans than cars and buses, as punitive charges could have a negative impact on growth."



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***Model shown is an Infiniti Q50 2.2d Sport AT at £37,420 OTR inc VAT including metallic paint at £660 and 19" wheels (CO₂ 123 g/km).

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Vauxhall knew about fire fault earlier than previously admitted

Manufacturer first learned of problem with Zafira in 2009, MPs told

By Gareth Roberts

Vauxhall has admitted it is "fortunate" no one has been seriously injured after more than 300 Zafiras caught fire in recent years.

The fires had been caused by a problem in the heating and ventilation system, which the manufacturer had originally claimed it first became aware of in September 2014.

However, Vauxhall's customer experience director Peter Hope told MPs last week that the first recorded fire had actually been in February 2009. It was a further six years before it decided to issue its first recall in December 2015.

Hope told the Transport Committee: "Often when fires are reported it is not clear [what was the cause], because the vehicle has been totally destroyed, or because we don't have access to the vehicle to inspect it.

"For those vehicles prior to 2014, we didn't have enough evidence from the reporting system to identify this as an issue.

"We definitely need to be more assertive and more determined in making sure those inspections happen."

Pushed by MPs on how long it took the manufacturer to inform customers, he added: "I wish we could have given customers earlier notice."

The manufacturer also acknowledged it had been lucky no one had been injured as a result of the fires. Charlie Klein, executive director for Global CO2 at General Motors, who



Vauxhall says the fault only affects Zafira B models, which were on sale between 2005 and 2014

£33.6m

Estimated cost to Vauxhall

was vice president of vehicle engineering in Europe at the time the issue came to light, said: "The fact that there have been no serious injuries is very fortunate."

Vauxhall discovered that the improper repair of the blower motor resistor and its thermal fuse, which is designed to protect the blower motor system, had caused the problem.

It said that the repairs, which may have been conducted without the driver's knowledge, could lead to overheating of the system's electrical components and the potential for a fire.

An initial recall was instigated in December 2015, but following further discussions with the Driver and Vehicle Safety Agency (DVSA) additional action was agreed and a second recall involving almost 235,000 cars was announced in May.

Its latest recall will be staggered, with affected parts being replaced from this month (August).

The issue, according to Vauxhall, only affects Zafira B models, which were on sale between 2005 and 2014, not Zafira A or Zafira Tourer. The manufacturer says that Zafira B models with an electronic climate control (ECC) are also not affected.

Vauxhall said the issue will cost the company €40 million (£33.6m), but Hope said: "We don't have current plans to compensate customers for the inconvenience and the worry they have gone through this process. Our focus has to be on making these cars safe first."



Improper repair of heating components caused the issue



"Our focus has to be on making these cars safe"

Peter Hope, Vauxhall



For details of the recall, visit: fleetnews.co.uk/zafira-dvsa

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THE BIG PICTURE

By Sarah Tooze, deputy editor, *Fleet News*



How many times have experts claimed that the company car is dead? Or, conversely, that the company car is king?

Well, those in the latter camp can now gleefully point to the latest HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) figures which show that the number of employees paying company car tax is no longer in decline. In fact, the number grew by 10,000 in 2014/15 (see pages 4-5).

True, the overall number of 950,000 is far from the highs of 1999/2000 when 1.16 million people paid benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax on their vehicles, but it is the first rise in 10 years.

What lies behind the increase is open to debate. Car salary sacrifice schemes have grown in popularity in recent years and mean that some employees have been paying company car tax for the first time.

“The number of employees paying company car tax is no longer in decline”

However, they still represent a small proportion of the market. For the past three years they have accounted for 5% of funding among FN50 companies.

It is also likely that, post-recession, companies have recognised the valuable role company cars play in recruitment and retention and that, from a duty of care perspective, they are one of the best options for business journeys.

So the prophets of doom may have to go back to the drawing board (although they do have the potential outcomes of Brexit to ponder).

And what of the death of the fleet manager's role? There is more evidence of major fleets outsourcing (Amey being the latest) but this doesn't have to be at the expense of the fleet manager. And, as the July 21 issue of *Fleet News* showed, time can be freed-up to focus on strategy and ultimately make for a more efficient fleet operation.

YOUR LETTERS

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

A 'petrol-head' changes his views on EVs

EDITOR'S PICK



Richard wrote:

Having read 'London mayor plans to bring forward ULEZ introduction to 2019 and extend area' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 5), it's a shame supporters of internal combustion engine (ICE) cars remain blinkered on the issue of displacing pollution from the tailpipe to the power station stack with electric vehicles (EVs).

First, EVs are far more efficient per mile driven than any ICE car. Second, EVs get cleaner every day as our generation system gets greener (renewable generations, added daily). Third, you can generate all the electricity used in your EV from solar

PV panels with little running cost. Fourth, ICE cars pollute more from the moment they are run to end-of-life. Fifth, ICE cars produce more noise pollution than EVs. Sixth, EV ranges will improve in leaps and bounds and will soon exceed average ICE distance (the current record for a standard production EV is more than 700 miles on one charge).

Need I go on? EVs will win out, eventually. ICE cars will merely be wonderful toys to tinker around with at the weekend and show off at historic vehicle rallies. And this comes from a lifelong petrol-head who has changed his views.

■ The editor's pick in each issue wins a £20 John Lewis voucher.

DRIVER DATA

Defleet app security issue is very real

Edward Handley wrote:

Having read 'Warning on defleeted car app security' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 21), I have come across a similar, if less serious, issue with hire cars. After getting into a Bluetooth-enabled hire car, I found the touchscreen displaying a long list of mobile phone accounts, some identified with a user's full name and company. Given the time and inclination, I suspect I could have pulled up significant information on the numbers they had called.



GREY FLEET

Fleets must get to grips with private vehicles

Matt Dyer, managing director at LeasePlan UK, and vice-chairman of BVRLA, wrote:

Having read 'Grey fleet costing business billions, says BVRLA' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 20), there is a need for business owners to realise the requirement to manage grey fleet, in terms of true monetary cost, through mileage claims and car allowances, and also the significant environmental impact.

Grey fleet, in the form of cash allowances, seems

on the surface to be a convenient, low-intervention solution. But privately-owned vehicles can be poorly managed, older, have outdated emissions standards and be without modern safety features – never mind whether there is a valid MOT, business insurance and service records. There are more simple measures out there that can be enlisted such as car schemes, salary sacrifice, pool cars and daily rental vehicles.

SELF-DRIVING CARS

Autonomous does mean driverless

Brian Gilbert wrote:

Having read 'Autonomous technology need not mean "driverless", says JLR' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 26), it does have to mean driverless, as eliminating the driver saves a fortune and ends most deaths and injuries. It won't need a connection to "message boards", it will be controlled by a central computer. Hired by the trip, we will only need 10% of the vehicles.



SPORTS UTILITY VEHICLES

SUVs are good for my back

Bob the engineer wrote:

Having read 'SUV popularity could mean fleets struggle to hit costs and CO2 targets, says Chevin' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 27), personally I have back issues and the more upright position SUVs have helps avoid aggravating it. Ordinary carmakers seem obsessed with making them low slung and 'sporty' without the need.

Also, remember many drivers contribute considerable financial sums to their vehicles and therefore should have a strong say in a choice that suits family needs and not just company purposes. It's all very well setting arbitrary targets, but this is real people's lives affected.

DRIVING TEST

Back to basics, please

GCHMC wrote:

Having read 'Driving test changes to better reflect real-life driving' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 14), as so many drivers find it tempting to mess with sat-navs while on the move (a high risk activity), I would prefer to see an emphasis on going back to proper use of signs and map-reading skills first.

After those competencies are reached, sat-nav work training could then be done.

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Question:

What Olympic event would you most like to compete in?

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FLEET OPINION 1

A fresh approach to fleet telematics that'll bring a smile to your face

Appy Fleet combines the best features of traditional, hardware-based fleet telematics with the latest smartphone app technology, enabling companies to better manage and monitor the performance of their workforce behind the wheel.

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John Pryor
Chairman, ACFO

ACFO CHAIR REAPPOINTMENT

I aim to continue our good work in my third year

By John Pryor

I am delighted to have been re-appointed as the chairman of ACFO – my third year in the role – after first being elected to the board back in 2006.

It is vital for me and other people who have fleet responsibility to be able to discuss key issues with like-

minded colleagues who collectively have a wealth of knowledge and experience.

The job of the fleet manager can often be a lonely existence, as fellow employees do not have practical knowledge or experience relating to managing vehicles.

Therefore, ACFO fulfils a fundamental role in enabling members to



FLEET OPINION 2

AUTONOMOUS ADVANCES

Safety tech could leave drivers feeling redundant

By Jeremy Rochfort

There have never been more technologies available to monitor fleet driver behaviour and enhance safety. Ten years from now, the 'internet of things' revolution will have made it possible to understand your car health and book it in for whatever

repairs it might need directly from your phone. Pioneers such as Tesla are developing software updates aimed at improving the performance – and residual value – of vehicles.

One subject raised at the recent Best of Belron conference in Lisbon (organised by the parent company of Autoglass), is the impact of new

technology on the psychology of drivers.

A speaker from MIT highlighted that drivers who no longer have to pay as much attention to the road might fill their spare 'cognitive capacity' with distractions like eating or using phones behind the wheel, in the longer term becoming a less skilled back-up to the technology they increasingly rely on.

What's clear is that drivers need to be able to trust safety features to use them effectively. Our own research shows there is a job to be done to increase understanding of advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS), which support many different safety features such as autonomous braking and lane departure warnings to reduce the risk of collisions. We have found cases of drivers switching their ADAS off, failing to reap any safety



Jeremy Rochfort
National sales manager,
Autoglass

exchange ideas and information, and ACFO will be continuing the work it does in liaising with motor manufacturers and fleet suppliers plus, importantly, many Government departments and agencies including the Department for Transport, HM Revenue and Customs and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Furthermore, we continue to work closely with a number of other industry organisations including the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association and the Institute of Car Fleet Management for the benefit of members and the wider fleet management community.

This includes employees with vehicle responsibilities who hold jobs in human resources, finance and procurement.

In the next 12 months, ACFO will be looking to further broaden its membership, continue its regional briefing meetings and is currently

“It is anticipated that future seminars will be held in autumn 2016 and spring 2017 with the former focusing on the drive for mobility and the future role of the fleet manager”

planning an exciting fleet manager issue-based seminar programme.

ACFO seminars have proved extremely popular in recent years, with each attracting audiences of significantly more than 100 delegates.

It is anticipated that future seminars will be held in autumn 2016 and spring 2017 with the former focusing on the drive for mobility and the future role of the fleet manager.

Additionally, ACFO is looking to

publish best practice and advice and guidance for fleet managers on two key issues: managing parking fines incurred on private land and end-of-contract vehicle damage charges levied by contract hire and leasing companies on cars and vans.

The information will be published following ACFO debates held in the past 12 months highlighting both as contentious issues faced by fleet managers.



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- » Expenses function for quick compilation of mileage reimbursement form in-app

“More than half of drivers who contacted a dealership for ADAS calibration were given inaccurate advice”

benefits, or – worse – ignoring advice to get ADAS calibrated after an invasive windscreen replacement.

There appear to be multiple reasons behind this. Many drivers simply assume that everything is working correctly, yet even a one degree misalignment – undetectable without the required technical equipment – can cause the system to misjudge braking distances with potentially catastrophic consequences. More worryingly, our research found that more than half (53%) of drivers who contacted their car dealership for calibration were

given inaccurate advice in relation to their problem.

The automotive industry as a whole is working hard to address these challenges, but the sheer variety of different technologies in different vehicle models also makes it important for fleet managers to consider what may be needed as part of repair and maintenance policies.



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ASK NIGEL

In our regular feature, Nigel Trotman, *Fleet News* Hall of Fame member and two-time *Fleet News* Award winner, gives advice on your fleet challenges and queries

MEDICAL TESTS

Q Having read 'Business need for greater awareness of sleep disorders at work' (fleetnews.co.uk, June 7), I am concerned about how I can make sure my drivers get diagnosed and report medical issues to me. Our driving at work policy states that they must inform us of any medical issues but, as this article highlights, drivers may be worried about going to see their doctor for fear of losing their driving licence. Should the company introduce medical tests, and how do we go about this?

A Your question raises an interesting point – just how much responsibility should an organisation take for monitoring the health of its employees?

I personally believe that every employer has a responsibility to its employees when asking them to drive on business to ensure that they are fit to do so. However, adopting an approach where every driver has medical tests in order to ensure that any potential risk is captured is a serious over-reaction. In addition, such a proposal is unlikely to receive a positive response from senior management.

This is not to say that a sensible, risk-based approach to driver health is not a desirable element of a fleet policy. Your own driving at work policy acknowledges this by requiring drivers to inform the business of any medical issues that may affect their ability to drive. I would want to know whether drivers need glasses to drive, for example (to ensure they have regular eye tests), or about those with back conditions, where seat comfort and adjustment is vital. This also fits well with today's wide business focus on health and wellbeing.

As a fleet manager seeking to introduce a comprehensive driver risk strategy in a previous role, I looked at all the relevant aspects, including driver health. We concluded that we needed to focus our attention on those drivers who represented the greatest risk – typically those driving the highest annual mileages (in this case, more than 25,000 miles per annum). Our proposal was that these drivers should be offered a medical check every two years to identify any potential health issues that might arise from their extended driving. Sadly, while the HR community fully supported the proposals, it was difficult to construct a business case to obtain buy-in from senior management. I remain convinced that this is the best approach for a responsible employer.

"I would want to know whether drivers need glasses to drive, or about those with back conditions"

It is probably still the case that a proposal of this kind would be difficult to get approved and, if anything, the situation is somewhat worse in that regular staff medicals in general are less common than they once were. You don't say what your company does, but those with a strong risk culture in areas such as chemicals, heavy industry, fuel, etc. require regular medicals for staff exposed to most risk, while for the majority a simple medical questionnaire is as far as it goes.

Rather than a formal medical programme, therefore, I would suggest that you adopt an educational approach, seeking to inform your drivers about the health-related risks of driving – areas such as sleep apnoea, but also musculoskeletal risks from poorly adjusted seats, etc. This can highlight the real risks and why they need to be managed. It also underlines the fact that the driver has to take responsibility for their driving health and shouldn't ignore problems.

■ The next Ask Nigel will be in the September 15 issue.

Nigel Trotman has more than 25 years' experience in the fleet industry.

As fleet manager at Whitbread, he scooped two *Fleet News* awards – fleet manager of the year (large fleets) and UK fleet of the year – before making the switch to consultancy at major leasing companies Lex Autolease and Alphabet.

He entered the *Fleet News* Hall of Fame in 2013.

He is secretary of ACFO Midlands and is an ICFM board member.

Do you have a fleet challenge you would like Nigel to answer?
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PROCUREMENT MADE EASY

Phil Clifford hopes a new national initiative will make public sector purchasing clearer for all. *Christopher Smith* reports



Phil Clifford: 'A lot of organisations see fleet as something to be done rather than the cornerstone of operations'

The role of fleet manager is most definitely not an insular one. With multiple stakeholders within the business or organisation to satisfy, in addition to suppliers and service providers to manage, the role requires a substantial amount of communication and cooperation.

For Phil Clifford, whose role as fleet and technical manager encompasses services for both St Edmundsbury Borough and

Forest Heath District Councils, the concept of working together is vital.

Clifford's combined fleet department looks after around 187 vehicles – "a fairly eclectic mix" of cars, vans, trucks and plant including tractors, grass cutters and refuse vehicles.

"If it is road-legal and registered as such with the DVLA, it is part of our fleet and our responsibility," he says.

Not only does Clifford manage council relationships and a workshop team, he also holds a specific interest in the growth and development of fleet management.

He has been involved in a national initiative to develop a guide to fleet procurement, which he says is one of the most complex areas of working in public sector fleet.

"We invited both suppliers and buyers, to come and talk about problems, myths and look for a way to develop links going forward," Clifford says.

"Public sector procurement is regulated, but still a bit of a minefield for those who aren't au fait with it. Fleet management can be picked up if you've got half a brain, but procurement is awash with things that can go wrong. The purpose of the group is to



develop a best practice guide that's accepted by both sides of the coin, and that we get a more clearly defined route, and everyone finds it easier to deal with."

The guidebook is set to cover guidance for working within purchasing frameworks, writing and selecting tenders, and on what suppliers should include in their responses. Clifford says it should help make procurement more open, honest and transparent for all involved. "It's early days," he says. "We're only starting on the broad outline of it, but for me it's timely. I want to try and raise the profile of the fleet management industry."

He also wants it to be useful to those new to fleet. Encouraging new blood into the industry is important, but Clifford believes the role of a fleet manager isn't as well known as it should be. "We've got a severe issue with career awareness," he says. "Young people leave school, don't know what it is, and perhaps don't see it as a career. Organisations see it as just something to be done rather than a cornerstone of operations, so it won't get the 'top-down' attention it deserves. The majority of fleets are at the lighter end, where the only regulation is the road traffic act, and some businesses think

just anyone can do it. In theory they're right, but in practice there needs to be career development. I am also involved with the Chartered Institute for Logistics and Transport, and its aim is to engender people into the industry, but it's difficult. Organisations who've outsourced, who don't have their own workshops, haven't got the young people to bring up through the ranks and train up."

Clifford says recognition from the industry is ever more important in helping people progress.

"We look to ACFO, ICFM and the FTA, with great qualifica-



FACTFILE

Authorities St Edmundsbury Borough and Forest Heath District Councils**Fleet and technical manager** Phil Clifford**Fleet size** HGVs – 46, LCVs – 55, Cars – 42, Plant – 44**Funding method** Commercial vehicles and plant – outright purchase, cars – lease/flexi-rent**Fleet team** Three**Workshop staff** Six, plus apprentices

tions that make people more marketable and hopefully develop their careers,” he explains.

On Clifford's own fleet, the shared services agreement across both councils began in 2012, and has seen significant benefits in flexibility and service levels.

“Predominantly, each council's vehicles work in their respective area,” he says. “But they are contiguous, and the advantage of the shared services agreement is that, when we look at route planning and scheduling, we do cross boundaries.”

With the exception of cars, the vehicles are all outright purchased and liveried under the same ‘West Suffolk’ combined branding so can be used ‘out of area’ if required.

All staff cars are leased, with a pool car fleet of 10 vehicles – predominantly outright purchase. The implementation of a travel plan has increased usage of the vehicles across the council, and they are also available for use of Suffolk County Council staff who share the site.

“A number [of pool cars] are on flexi-rent with Northgate,” says Clifford. “So if demand drops, we can get them off fleet pretty quickly – or add to the fleet.”

He says purchasing commercial vehicles outright has several advantages.

“Because we own them, we can be very flexible at end-of-life,” Clifford says. “We look to get eight years out of a vehicle but, as they approach defleet, we assess their condition and suitability to their role, and may keep the vehicle for another year or so. There comes a point when environment, technology or corrosion will become an obstacle. The average mileage on our light commercial fleet is 6,000 a year, so mechanically they are pretty sound, and well maintained.”

The majority of vehicles on fleet are diesel and, while Clifford has explored alternative power in the past, he says wholelife costs are a little way off at present because of the low mileage of his fleet.

“On the sort of miles we do, it takes an awfully long time to get payback,” he says. “While fuel cost is important, you've got to do a massive saving to make any impact.”

“We took on some Ashwoods hybrid Transits a few years ago, but there's no real payback. We're constantly looking at electric and hybrid – they all work and are very good – but if it increases our expenditure we have to be sensible and wait at present. We're a

local authority, and we have to achieve best value for our customers, the ratepayers.”

Drivers are now starting to show interest in alternative fuels, and in certain cases the savings are worthwhile. “You can buy electric cars for not much more than conventionally powered cars now,” says Clifford. “One of our drivers has asked for an electric B-Class. For him, it stacks up as his mileage is local. But we're in a rural area, and for many of our staff, it's not yet feasible to go pure electric.”

Clifford's team operates a workshop, which maintains and services all commercial vehicles. The facility includes an MOT station, which is also open to the public.

“My personal view is that, in most cases, it's cheaper to do it yourself than to pay another firm to do it,” he says. “But if you don't manage your operation properly, it can be more expensive. The question isn't whether the services are in or out, it's about managing your operation to make sure you're getting best value for it. Every authority I've worked for has had its own workshop, but it has to be an efficient workshop. The real benefit is the ability to manage downtime. In-house, we can turn vehicles around so much quicker than outsourced providers.”

Operating a workshop put St Edmundsbury in a strong position when it came to the shared services agreement with Forest Heath. In fact, the authority had already been maintaining its neighbour's vehicles for a number of years before the larger deal.

“The more efficient we got, the less utilisation we had, so an agreement like that helps fill our capacity,” says Clifford.

“In most cases, it's cheaper to do SMR yourself than to pay another firm to do it”

Phil Clifford, St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Councils



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fleetnews.co.uk/industry-profiles

Today, the workshop also provides maintenance and vehicle repair for a number of public sector and quasi-public sector organisations, including MOTs for the police, along with service, maintenance and repair (SMR) for local dial-a-ride services and a housing association. More work means better utilisation of facilities and provides an additional revenue stream.

Having the workshop team and engineering knowledge at hand offers additional benefits when procuring vehicles.

“Once you start specifying bespoke vehicles, engineering knowledge is important,” says Clifford. “Yes, talking to drivers is important, but talking to the workshop team helps from a cost point of view. When you're investing large sums of money into a vehicle, the ability to keep it on the road and reduce downtime is paramount.”

“Talking to people and peers is important – learning from others' experience is vital. Buying what you want and what you need are two different things: you need to get personal preference out of your brain and pick the best tool for the job. It's another reason we're developing the procurement guide. When you go out to tender, you shouldn't specify exactly what you want down to every nut and bolt. Start by saying to suppliers ‘this is what we want it to do’.”

“Looking at the output is the best place to start. Engaging with the market means we can say ‘this is what we think we want, but if you have a suggestion, let us know’. A big part of my job is meeting suppliers. It may feel like a burden but, if I don't know what's coming out on the market, I'll never develop and evolve. An open mind is paramount. The more suppliers and manufacturers engage with fleets, the more they can pick up from us on our needs and requirements.”

Further investment in workshop facilities is around the corner, too. The combined authorities, together with Suffolk County Council, are developing plans for an operational hub with new, enlarged facilities on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds.

If approved, the facility is due to open by late 2018, and that will include an ATF lane for the testing and approval of HGVs.

“At the moment, our site is old and not really designed for ‘customer facing’ business,” Clifford says. “The brand new, state-of-the-art workshops will be a little more commercial in their outlook, and give us far more potential to expand further.”



Phil Clifford is developing plans for a central workshop with Suffolk County Council

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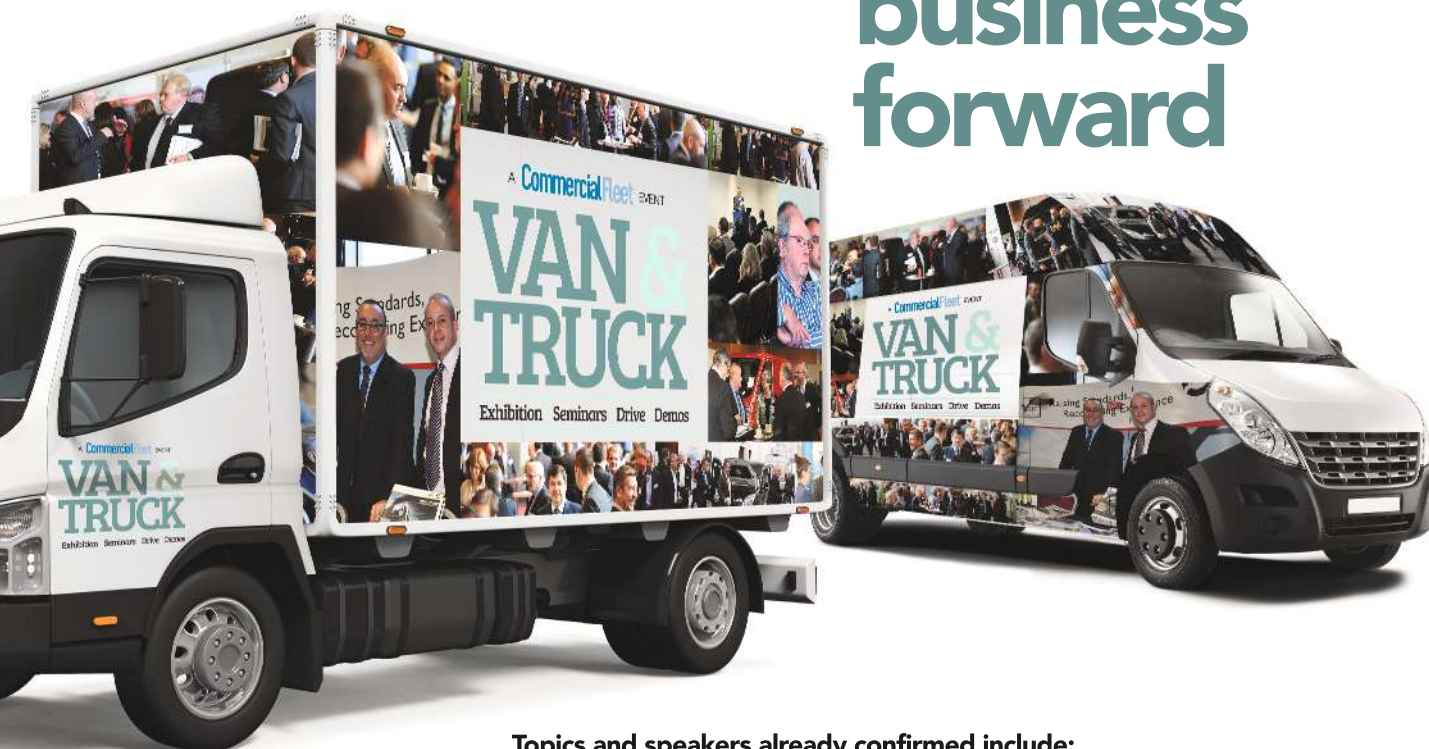
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'THIS IS OUR BUSIEST YEAR EVER FOR NEW MODELS'

Francis Bleasdale tells *Andrew Ryan* why FCA can now offer fleets 'much more'

When fleet and business sales director Francis Bleasdale describes what 2016 means to Fiat Chrysler Automobiles UK (FCA), "big" and "important" are words which feature prominently.

Big in terms of the number of new vehicles launched, and important because of the sectors they go into.

It is a significant period in the short life of the group, now in its third year after being formed to look after the Fiat, Fiat Professional, Alfa Romeo, Jeep and Abarth brands. "This is our busiest year yet for new model introductions," says Bleasdale.

New models already launched include the refreshed Fiat Fiorino, Fiat Fullback pick-up and Fiat Qubo MPV, while the Alfa Romeo Giulia (autumn), Fiat Tipo (autumn), and Fiat Talento (September) are among those to follow.

"The Giulia puts Alfa back in the D-segment after nearly six years, Fiat Professional is entering the pick-up sector for the first time with the Fullback, and Fiat is also returning to the C-segment after quite some time with the Tipo," says Bleasdale.

"We've got a new medium van with Talento which will fill the space between Doblo and Ducato, we've got a refreshed Fiorino and then we have the 124 Spider. Although that is limited in terms of fleet potential, it is still a model we are excited about and also makes a really positive statement about where the brand is going.

Francis Bleasdale: 'People, fleet customers in particular, want a one-stop shop'



"It's a big year, an important year, and it's really the year that fills all the spaces we've had in the range, so it's given us a full line-up for quite some time."

Despite the gaps in the model range, last year FCA saw fleet registrations, helped by the launches of the Fiat 500X and Jeep Renegade, increase by 23% to 39,859 compared to 2014, a year which itself saw fleet sales rise by around 2,000.

This year, to July 27, fleet registrations were 23,585, 17% greater than in the same period last year.

"I think we were constrained by the fact we didn't have C- and D-segment cars, but now with the total power we have by coming together as FCA we can offer much more," says Bleasdale.

"We have a complete range of commercial vehicles and SUVs with Jeep, a sporting brand in the form of Alfa Romeo and a performance brand in the form of Abarth.

"People, and fleet customers in particular, want a one-stop shop. They want, through their manufacturer fleet representative, access to all the products and brands that are available.

"Customers don't want to see different representatives from the same group.

"They'd rather have that convenience and reassurance that despite the fact that our brands are relatively – in terms of share – quite small, when put together we offer a very interesting package.

"For instance, take Giulia: there are lots of fleets currently running BMW 3 Series, Audi A4 and Mercedes-Benz C-Class models,



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Fiat Fullback: helping Fiat Chrysler enter the pick-up sector for the first time



and there are many company car drivers who will appreciate and are looking for an alternative to those brands," he adds.

"They are great products and great brands, but I think there is a general desire for something a bit different and I'm really optimistic we're going to tap into that groundswell of opinion."

Bleasdale also has high hopes for the Fullback. "What the Fullback gives us is not just a fleet solution but an offering into the small business marketplace, which is so important for pick-up sales," he says.

"Many companies that run a pick-up will also run two or three vans, so it gives us a real opportunity to target those customers and get a foothold in that marketplace. Our dealers are really welcoming the opportunity."

However, despite his obvious enthusiasm for the opportunities the new vehicles will bring, he is more reticent about what it will mean to fleet registrations.

"We are not wedded to a particular number," he says. "Obviously the market will change and develop, it depends on how the new models are received. But the key is [growth has] got to be sustainable. It's got to be sustainable in terms of bringing your dealers along with you, it's got to be sustainable in terms of residual values (RVs) and it's got to be sustainable in doing the right kind of business."

FACTFILE

Organisation Fiat Chrysler Automobiles UK

Brands Abarth, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Fiat Professional, Jeep

Fleet and business sales

director Francis Bleasdale

2016 fleet registrations to date (2015) 23,585 (20,146)

2016 fleet registrations to date (2015) 23,585 (20,146)

2015 fleet registrations 39,859



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"Fullback gives us not just a fleet solution but an offering into the SME marketplace"

Francis Bleasdale, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles UK

Improving RVs has been an "unerring focus" for Bleasdale. "We are benchmarking ourselves and our competitors to see where we are and we want to make sure that when we launch a new vehicle it is positioned with the RV guides in the best possible way, giving them access to early drives and range line-up, and making sure they are familiar with what we do," he says.

"The vast majority of cars are leased in one way or another. Whether that's a PCP, a PCH, salary sacrifice, or whether it's a conventional company car user-chooser, we are all more reliant on leasing. And that provokes a challenge for us in terms of RVs. They are such a cornerstone of a lease product and I now have a dedicated RV and service, maintenance and repair (SMR) manager whose job is to make sure product launches properly within the RV community."

"He also monitors where we are on SMR and total cost of ownership, and acts as our conscience in terms of making sure everyone in the business is working in the right way to make sure our RVs are protected."

The launch of a new approved used car programme across the group this year will also help improve RVs, according to Bleasdale.

"We already have a used programme, but the idea will be that we have a new and improved programme which will really make sure that customers can buy from a Fiat dealer, Alfa Romeo dealer or Jeep dealer with all the reassurance that the cars are fully checked, that the cars are refurbished to a really high standard and they have the usual customer reassurances, mileage checks and condition checks, so that will be very important for us," he says.

"We've done a lot of work behind the scenes – myself and the used car team – to make sure that that programme when it launches will be one of the best in class."

FLEET SPECIALIST DEALERS TO RISE FROM 25 TO 40

FCA UK is aiming to increase the number of fleet specialist dealers in its network from 25 to 40 over the next year.

"Part of that will be done by strengthening our aftersales proposition, so we'll be more prescriptive about the aftersales charter for business customers," says Francis Bleasdale.

"That will be absolutely fundamental to growing sales within the SME sector. We all think that the big fleets are the most demanding, but mobility is probably of even more critical performance for a small business."

"A big business has access to rental, it can have pool cars, it has that flexibility that comes

with scale.

"But if you're a business with two or three vans and you lose one van, that's 30-50% of capability down straight away, so you need that reassurance that if you select a brand or product then, a) that product is up to the task and, b) the structure will be there to support you if things do go wrong."

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DOES YOUR FLEET MEASURE UP?

Benchmarking your fleet's processes and collision rates to other companies can have far-reaching effects on safety and costs. *Andrew Ryan* reports

Benchmarking is not a new concept in fleet: operators have been using it for years to reduce costs and maximise efficiencies.

Less common, however, is the use of it to cut road risk, but those organisations that do can reap significant benefits.

For example, eDriving Fleet (formerly Interactive Driving Systems) says that the 12 organisations most active in its fleet safety gap analysis programme, representing 170,000 drivers and 80,000 vehicles, have saved more than £11 million in direct cost reductions over three years.

"These are some pretty significant results in terms of cost and collision rates, so if you do benchmarking well there are some opportunities in it," says Will Murray, research director at eDriving Fleet.

"Typically, when people talk about benchmarking fleet safety, they talk about collisions, but it is important to focus on process as well.

"Collision numbers are important, but if you focus only on these figures then some people tend to cheat and do everything they can to make the numbers look better, sometimes without actually improving the process."

He said this can happen when fleets do not record certain incidents as 'collisions', meaning they do not appear in their reports.

While, on paper, this can make it seem like a fleet has a low incident rate, it often means the causes of collisions are not identified or addressed.

"We think fleets should class everything as a collision but some people don't," says Murray. "Essentially, the better you count things, the higher your collision rate will look. But if you don't count everything you are missing the opportunity to address any problems."

Iron Mountain records every single vehicle incident, including stone chips, in its benchmarking process and has found that 60% of them are low-speed reversing incidents.



"Collision numbers are important, but if you focus only on these figures then some people tend to cheat and do everything they can to make the numbers look better"

Will Murray, eDriving Fleet

CASE STUDY:
PFIZER

Benchmarking road risk has led to a "significant improvement" for pharmaceutical giant Pfizer's fleet.

The company benchmarks through eDriving Fleet's fleet safety gap analysis tool as well as via trade bodies such as the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry.

"It is very important to us to gauge our level of success and where we are in the hierarchy of companies managing fleets," says Simon Webb, senior director and regional EHS lead for global operations for Pfizer.

"For a pharmaceutical company like us, the

biggest risks have traditionally been via explosions or chemical-related incidents.

"By and large we've managed to put in sufficient controls which means that, now, by far and away the biggest risk for anybody within Pfizer arises when they drive.

"It's only in the past five years or so we have looked at the controls associated with driving and we do that through a number of ways, but benchmarking is particularly important.

"It means we can bypass the innovative thinking and just steal with pride and that's a massive shortcut, not only in terms of the time it takes to reduce risk, but also expense.

"Also, you don't have to spend lots of hours

scratching your heads, you can just talk to your competitors and say look, we've all got the same problems, it is in the interests of everyone if we share."

Webb says Pfizer is benchmarking against rival pharmaceutical companies, but also with logistics and distributor companies who have focused on road risk for many years.

"We are trying to catch up as fast as we can and that might mean becoming a lot more familiar with the technologies they use," he adds.

"While our safety culture may be mature, they have got a much better handle on vehicle technology such as telematics which they have been using for a long time."

Data created through benchmarking can also raise awareness of road risk within a company and achieve buy-in to initiatives from senior management.

"Data is very helpful in an organisation like mine," says Wallington. "You don't get to be chief executive of BT without being ambitious and wanting to be better than everyone else, so proving to him that he's not better than everyone else is quite a good motivator at times.

"Benchmarking data does help you get road risk on the agenda and that's really valuable, but if you know you are behind in terms of performance, that's an opportunity and it opens your eyes to things that you should be focusing on."

Organisations such as insurer Zurich also offer their own gap analysis tools, and it, together with eDriving Fleet and a range of other fleet-related organisations such as FTA Van Excellence and Rospa, have collaborated with Occupational Road Safety Alliance to launch a Fleet Safety Benchmarking tool.

Backed by the Department for Transport, the free tool – found at fleetsafetybenchmarking.net – is an enhancement of eDriving Fleet's Fleet Safety Gap Analysis and uses 30 questions to examine an employer's current practices across six key areas (see panel page 35 for examples of sample questions).

"It takes about 20 minutes and gives you immediate feedback on both your processes and outcomes, and benchmarks you against everybody else who has put data in," says Murray.

Completing the survey produces an instant report which provides question-by-question responses and feedback, including questions scored and reported against averages determined from other users' information, data tables and graphs.

Data analysis will provide information on collision rates per vehicle and per one million kilometres driven, as well as by vehicle and incident type and location.

Registered participants will also be able to access resources, including links to best practice and case studies, surgery and good practice request processes and conference call discussions.

However, while benchmarking can be a vital tool in improving safety, Andy Price, practice leader – EMEA, motor fleet at Zurich, who was a member of the working party that was instrumental in the development of the Fleet Safety Benchmarking tool, warns there is a potential downside.

"There are risks that a business discovers it is doing well and then becomes complacent," he says.

"However, there is always scope for improvement that will continue to reduce both the total cost of risk and the total cost of ownership."



This trend analysis led Rory Morgan, head of logistics support, Western Europe at Iron Mountain, to make reducing the number of low-speed reversing incidents his priority for 2016.

"Through benchmarking, if you can see the categories where incidents happen – low-speed reversing, car parks, at-fault etc. – and compare your record with similar and different fleets, then you have an idea of what best practice looks like and an action plan can be implemented," he says.

"Other companies must be suffering similar incidents and some may have implemented solutions to solve the problem.

"Benchmarking promotes discussion and investigation, and the sharing of best practice."

It is this collaboration between fleet operators which has helped BT Group reduce its collision rate among its 22,000-strong fleet of vans by 50% in the past 15 years, leading to savings of £14 million a year. This is equivalent to an extra turnover of £100m.

"Nobody knows what all the answers are in this space, so talking to people who are practitioners and work with this stuff on a day-to-day basis is probably your best source of information," says Dave Wallington, head of safety at BT Group. "Things like the Health and Safety Executive guidance are all well and good, but they are highly theoretical and difficult to apply in the real world, so getting a group of practitioners together to argue about what is the best approach is often the best solution."

This altruism is very important to helping reduce risk, says Wallington. "My view is that if you want anything from me, or you want a copy of anything we've done, then you can have it," he says. "None of it is commercially sensitive information, and BT's position is that if it is going to help people stay safe, then we'll share it.

"In my experience, almost everybody is like that. So don't be afraid to approach other companies and ask for more information. Nine times out of 10 they will be happy to help."

He adds: "If you can find somebody who has got a good idea, borrow it. Don't try to reinvent the wheel.

"If someone knows how to fix a problem, then fix it. Benchmarking is a great tool to find out how to improve things."

50%

Reduction in BT Group collision rate, in past 15 years

£100m

Effective extra turnover brought about by BT collision rate reduction

"Benchmarking promotes discussion and investigation, and the sharing of best practice"

Rory Morgan, Iron Mountain



FLEET SAFETY BENCHMARKING: SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Occupational Road Safety Alliance's Fleet Safety Benchmarking tool puts 30 statements to participants to measure their at-work road safety against a wide range of other organisations.

These statements cover six areas, with participants able to choose between 'yes', 'moving towards' and 'no'.

Once completed, the process gives an overall risk rating as well as question-by-question benchmarks and feedback.

Here is a selection of the statements and the results:

ROAD SAFETY MANAGEMENT POLICY

■ We have a comprehensive written, dated and published work-related road safety policy and strategy signed by the chief executive officer (or equivalent), which includes clear objectives and a commitment to improving driver safety performance over time.

■ Our road safety policy and strategy is fully understood and applied by all employees at all times.

ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ROAD SAFETY CULTURE

■ We are committed to a culture of continuous improvement and zero collisions.

■ We have a culture that encourages our people to be comfortable with evaluation of their safety performance and to accept coaching and guidance to reduce their risk exposures and those to the wider community in which they drive for work purposes.

JOURNEY AND MOBILITY MANAGEMENT

■ We have a detailed travel planning and journey optimisation strategy in place covering both commuting and driving for work purposes.

■ Our work schedules allow sufficient time to complete journeys safely and efficiently at all times.

DRIVER RECRUITMENT, SELECTION INDUCTION MANAGEMENT AND WELLBEING

■ We have documented recruitment and selection policies and procedures which must be followed at all times for each driving category of employee, including professional, business and occasional users.

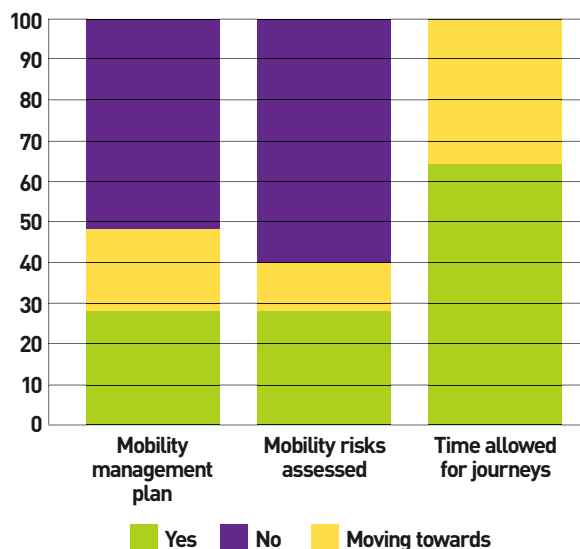
■ Our induction/orientation and training procedures require all new employees who will drive for work purposes to successfully pass a knowledge-based assessment of our road safety policies and guidelines during their probationary period.

VEHICLE SELECTION, SAFETY, MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY

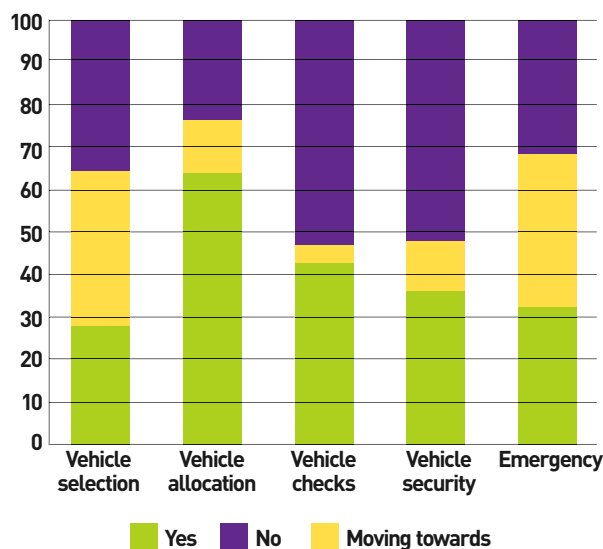
■ All vehicles driven for work purposes are rated NCAP five star and include the very latest safety features available such as autonomous emergency braking.

■ Policies and procedures are in place to promote routine vehicle safety checks by drivers and planned vehicle maintenance in line with manufacturer recommendations.

JOURNEY AND MOBILITY MANAGEMENT



VEHICLE SELECTION, SAFETY, MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY



Managing driver risk via a permit-to-drive

Implementing a permit-to-drive scheme can enable you to deal with complex duty of care and safety responsibilities

Imagine this. You are in charge of a significant fleet of drivers. They are driving different vehicles at different sites. You want to ensure that you're fulfilling your duty of care responsibilities, as well as ensuring that your drivers are as safe as possible. Not sure what to do?

One answer is to implement a comprehensive permit-to-drive scheme. By introducing what is in effect an 'internal driving licence', you're able to ensure your fleet drivers are legal, have the correct category entitlements, are properly assessed and, where needed, trained for the specific vehicles they drive.

The concept of a permit-to-drive is not new. But a programme of this complexity and variation can be challenging to implement unless you have a robust, flexible and adaptable IT infrastructure to manage it.

The drivers

First, you'll need to look at your driving community. Do you have drivers who not only drive cars, but potentially vans and trucks too? Do they operate from one site, or do they move between sites? What do they need to show a transport manager to get permission to drive a vehicle, particularly one that is more regulated, such as a large goods vehicle?

The scope of the permit

Often the biggest challenge is simply working out what your permit covers. Is it just for business or professional drivers, or all your staff? And does it include both permanent and contract drivers? Do you automatically get a permit when you get certain conditions, or do you need to introduce a provisional permit as drivers go through the programme as well? How do you manage joiners, movers and leavers? Will you allow people to drive your vehicles if they have not had their licence checked or, in some cases, refused to sign off your mandate to check them? What are the rules

The screenshot shows the 'FleetRiskManager' interface with a yellow header. It includes navigation links like 'MY HOME', 'MY GROUPS', and 'MANAGER HOME'. A search bar is present with the text 'What are you looking for?'. Below the header, the 'Assessment Results' section displays a table of driver assessments. The table has columns for User, Type, Started Time, End Time, History Score, Knowledge Score, Skill Score, Attitude Score, and Overall Result. Each row represents a driver's assessment, with icons for vehicle types and checkmarks for scores. A 'Show Details' link is provided for each entry.

User	Type	Started Time	End Time	History Score	Knowledge Score	Skill Score	Attitude Score	Overall Result
Cornish, Owen	Car	10/12/2015 15:56	10/12/2015 16:14	✓	✓	✓	✓	High
Abraham, Gavin	Car	11/06/2015 14:00	11/06/2015 14:32	✓	✓	✓	✓	High
Manning, Robert	Car	05/06/2015 10:42	05/06/2015 10:59	✓	✓	✓	✓	High
Morgan, Vanessa	Van	21/05/2015 13:47	21/05/2015 14:17	✓	✓	✓	✓	High
Randall, Kevin	Car	20/05/2015 16:02	21/05/2015 10:08	✓	✓	✓	✓	High
Morgan, Vanessa	Car	20/05/2015 16:01	20/05/2015 16:34	✓	✓	✓	✓	High

"An 'internal driving licence' can bring real business benefits"

for withdrawing a permit? If someone has a crash, does that impact your process?

The permit

Permits can be paper based, card based or even electronic. In most cases, they identify the name of the driver and the start and end date of the permit. Photographs can be added, as well as categories of entitlement, to drivers if that is required. However, the permit itself is only the physical aspect of the programme. The programme can also maintain information on driver risk assessments, licence expiry dates, training history (internal and external), 'black box' telemetry data, eyesight tests, medical

completion dates and accident management. Triggers can also be set to send alerts by email to key managers if certain information is received or changed.

The IT infrastructure

At AA DriveTech, we have experience in implementing permit-to-drive schemes and use our own FleetRiskManager web portal to provide the IT infrastructure to manage the programme on a day-to-day basis. It's robust, flexible and available 24/7, enabling you to manage your fleet at your fingertips.

In essence, implementing an 'internal driving licence' can bring real business benefits for the multi-driver, multi-vehicle, multi-site fleet, by ensuring duty of care compliance, lower risks to drivers and better control of your driving community.

For more information call us on: 01256 495732, email: tellmemore@AAdrivetech.com or visit: AAdrivetech.com



THREE WAYS SAFETY BENCHMARKING HAS HELPED BT GROUP

1 INCIDENT RATE

Data from benchmarking helped Dave Wallington, head of safety at BT Group, engage senior management to support the safety agenda. Analysis of collision data showed that, over a 14-year period in which its claims per 1,000 vehicles fell from 59 to 27, the company made its most significant improvements in the first five years of the programme.

"We have seen probably about 75% of our improvement in the first five years of our benchmarking programme," says Wallington, head of safety at BT Group. "Since then the improvement has been smaller, but it is still an improvement, and that can be a difficult message to sell if a

company is investing a lot of money in a programme. However, we had a PhD student and gave him all the data and asked him to tell us what it meant."

His analysis showed that the reduction in all collisions involving BT vehicles was faster than the decline in the number of people killed or seriously injured (KSI) on the UK's roads. "Not only do we have a much lower rate of all collisions compared to the rate of KSIs in the UK, but we have beaten the rate it has fallen over that period of time," says Wallington.

"This means we can show that the reduction in our incident rate is not just about what is happening in society generally, it's about what we're doing."

2 KNOWING WHEN TO MAKE A CHANGE

"We've really struggled with driver licence checking," says Wallington. "Over the years we have used line managers to get people in once a year, look at their licence and say 'yes, you can drive', but that's appalling practice and something that we have wanted to change for an awfully long time.

"However, the big stumbling block for us was always around the administration around paper mandates that the DVLA required.

"We pleaded our case with the DVLA and explained the economics of paper mandates wouldn't work for a fleet of around 60,000 drivers. As a result, we ended up spending three years negotiating with the DVLA and other companies to get to the position where

the DVLA let us become the first company to take on electronic mandates, with the roll-out happening last month (July)."

Benchmarking and collaboration with other companies over issues they were having with the paper mandate helped generate an understanding of what the problems were.

"That helped us internally instead of jumping in feet first with something that was going to cause us a huge logistical nightmare," he says.

"We managed to delay the implementation of our driver licence checking and get more momentum around the control that managers had to apply at business. It has resulted in a very positive change for us."

3 IN-CAR DISTRACTION

BT had a "very animated debate" around 18 months ago over whether employees should be banned from using hands-free mobile phones while driving, says Wallington.

"The operational team said they couldn't sustain the ban, our sales team said they couldn't work with it, so we decided we would commission some specialist benchmarking in this area," he adds.

"When we got the data back, we found very few companies had actually gone down the route of a complete ban.

"Most people had gone for some form of restriction on incoming/

outgoing calls on hands-free devices.

"It allowed us to go back and have a sensible conversation with the business and say 'we can live with your policy, but you've got to work harder to make sure it is enforced'.

"Benchmarking was a real benefit to us in that discussion because it was getting to be a real political hot potato.

"It helped us to say that we're not going to be taking a decision that's out of the mainstream. It's not that benchmarking made our minds up, but it gave us the confidence to make the decision that was right for the business."



FleetNews

BUYING GROUP

BETTER DEALS, QUICKER.

A free service that combines the demand of hundreds of businesses to deliver competitive prices for cars and vans



The problem... and the solution

Companies like yours tell us that leasing or buying a car or van can be complicated, time-consuming and confusing. There are so many vehicle suppliers and funding options to consider, while the amount of time it takes to get a good deal can be a major distraction for smaller companies.

Instead of spending their time running their core business, companies feel that they waste time negotiating with vehicle suppliers with no guarantees that they are getting a good price or the best service.

What smaller companies really want when they are sourcing new cars and vans are value for money, swift answers and a hassle-free service.

Wouldn't it be great if you could get the right vehicle at the right price,

quickly and simply, from a business you can trust. Well, now you can.

THE SOLUTION

Since 1978 Fleet News has been dedicated to helping you reduce costs and increase effectiveness. Fleet News Buying Group (FNBG) is the perfect extension of this approach. By combining the demand from hundreds of businesses like yours, we get bigger price discounts from our panel of top leasing companies and dealer groups who compete to win your business.

FNBG is free to use and enables companies to make the right buying decisions for their business each time they need a new car or van. We'll show you how much money you are saving and we'll even bring you special offers on relevant vehicles when they are available.

Who is FNBG for?

FNBG is for company owners and directors who are responsible for buying or leasing cars or light commercial vehicles. They want to get a good deal but they do not have the benefit of a dedicated fleet manager or fleet procurement support.

► IS THIS YOU? THEN READ ON. ◀

The benefits to you

FNBG is different to any other offer in the market. Our service is free to you because we take a fixed marketing fee from the leasing company or dealer group for every transaction.

The marketing fee is the same irrespective of the vehicle you choose or the company which supplies it, which means we have no bias about your choices.

We will provide you with a personal account manager and we guarantee you will receive your quotes within one hour.

How does FNBG work?

Fleet News Buying Group has partnered with leading leasing companies and dealer groups who will provide competitive pricing for your cars and vans.

When you register your company with FNBG you just need to provide information about your vehicles and when you are intending to procure. This is called the Customer Action Plan (CAP), which is a non-binding agreement between you and FNBG.

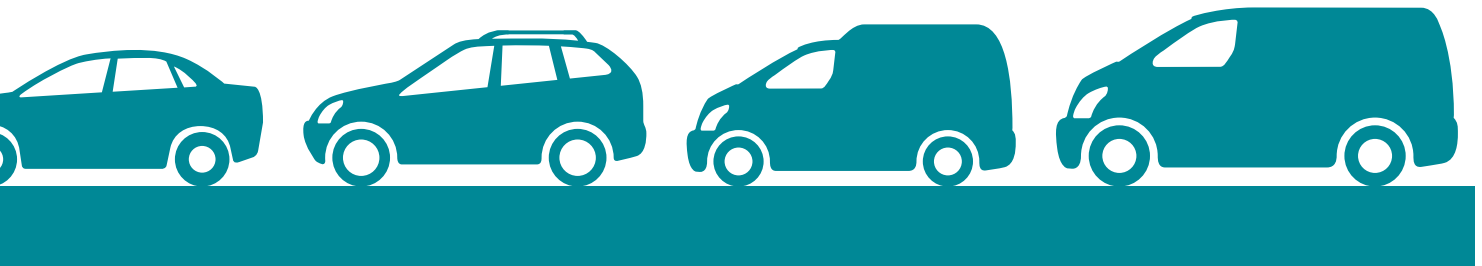
When the time comes to make the transaction, FNBG has created a simple five-step process:

1. We contact you as agreed in the Customer Action Plan.
2. We help you specify the vehicle and provide real quotations, simply and quickly from our vehicle suppliers.
3. We show you how much money you can save.
4. We confirm your order and you authorise it.
5. We check that you're happy with our service.

Once you have a vehicle shortlist (3 or 4 choices), you can start the buying process.

Once the order is placed, the supplier will let you know when you can expect to take delivery. Your personal FNBG account manager will always be on hand to help you with any queries.

www.fnbg.deals



Giving you confidence...

- 1 We provide you with all the information, reviews and funding advice you need to decide which car or van is best for your business.
- 2 We offer a service that has your best interests at heart.
- 3 You have a choice of all brands – car and van – from an independent business that you can trust.

Saving you time...

- 1 Multiple quotes delivered to you within one hour.
- 2 A mutually agreed action plan based on your individual requirements and a timescale that suits your business needs.
- 3 A personal FNBG account manager that you can trust.

Saving you money...

- 1 The combined demand of hundreds of businesses like yours
- 2 Multiple companies competing for your business
- 3 A service that's completely free to use
- 4 Special offers brought to you when they're available

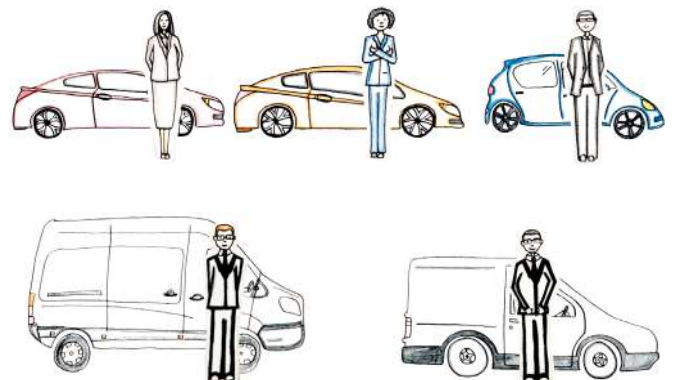
What happens next?

FNBG will begin trading in August 2016 and is now looking for expressions of interest from businesses like yours.

Demand is likely to be high and we would advise a quick response to be among the first to benefit from this service.

Registration and the agreement of your Customer Action Plan will be completed with you in early August and trading will start immediately.

If you're interested in better deals, quicker, go to **www.fnbg.deals** and complete the FNBG preregistration form to secure your membership.



TRANSPARENT ✓

UNBIASED ✓

HAPPY IF YOU'RE HAPPY ✓

BETTER DEALS, QUICKER.

FleetNews

AWARDS
2016

Sponsored by

Interactive
Fleet Management
FORWARD THINKING FOR FLEETS

We're delighted to have sponsored the best short-term rental company of the year at this year's *Fleet News* Awards.

Congratulations to Thrifty Car & Van Rental for winning this extremely competitive category.

As a fleet management specialist, Interactive Fleet Management provides companies with an over-arching vehicle, driver and supplier management solution – acting as their outsourced fleet department.

Whether you contract hire your vehicles, or own them, our fleet management team will remove all the burden of operating a vehicle fleet, and save money. As a result of the role we play, we work with many of the award winning companies in this year's *Fleet News* awards to provide a truly first class service to our customers.

As part of the Grosvenor Group, which has been serving fleets for over 35 years, we have seen the *Fleet News* Awards go from strength to strength and we were delighted to have been part of its success this year.

Andy Reed, commercial director.

THRIFTY CAR AND VAN RENTAL

'The corporate sector is our sector – it's the one we excel in'

With businesses making up most of its customer base, Thrifty prides itself on providing great customer service

By Christopher Smith

More than 75% of Thrifty Car and Van Rental's business is from corporate customers, so for Caroline Gallagher, sales director and Linda Malliff, director, central services, their *Fleet News* Award win – for the second year in a row – is highly valued.

Fleet News: Why is the award win important to Thrifty?

Caroline Gallagher: It's such a huge accolade to win for all our branches, and staff in the business who worked towards it. People often think of larger rental companies before us, and so it's great to be recognised.

Linda Malliff: The corporate sector is our sector – it's the one we excel in, and drive our efforts toward. We will continue to focus on looking after our business customers as a priority.

FN: How do you ensure the corporate sector is well served?

LM: We pride ourselves on customer service, and the flexibility we can offer. We're a company that can tailor and adapt our services to suit a businesses objective.

CG: Our branches are not targeted on sales, utilisation or anything else – they're not cost centres. They just have to collect and deliver vehicles, and provide excellent customer service.

We provide the branches with bookings, vehicles and manage their reporting and staff. It means they aren't looking at bookings and prioritising those retail bookings that they think are most profitable.

LM: All the branches are ours, not franchised. We're even going one step further: to take pressure off the locations from retail bookings by opening a retail reservation centre in High Wycombe to reduce calls to the branches, to allow them to focus on the day-to-day excellent customer service we expect, not answering time consuming calls.

The centre is to start operating next month, and we're quite excited as it will free up branches to focus on the business user.

FN: How do you work differently to support fleet managers?

CG: I think our customers expect us to be proactive, and want us to work with them, not against them.

We'll look at trends in bookings, and identify users who never refuel vehicles, or high-mileage, high-accident drivers, and advise fleet managers on a duty-of-care basis. We have a new computer system, Thor, that allows

a fleet manager dual level authorisation. It means any driver can make a booking, but the system can decide to email a line manager for approval if it is more than three days, or the fleet manager if it is more than five days, for example.

We can also manage vehicle size – giving different levels of staff permissions, so a driver can book a small vehicle automatically, but require permission for a larger car.

It's about helping fleet managers, so they don't have to be involved in every single decision in the business. They can see everything in comprehensive reports, but don't have to manage it all.

We'll send exception reports so the workload is manageable. Now the level of reporting is a bit more targeted.

FN: How do you look after corporate business through leasing companies and rental brokers?

CG: We're a big supplier into the leasing and rental broker market, and we're very happy with that supply chain. In a sense, they act as an extended version of our own sales team, and we support the sector.

We offer their customers the same customer service standards as our own. Where we're on a panel of suppliers, we are consistently one of the best performers in terms of our service levels. We don't mind where the customer comes from, as long as they recognise our service is the best – they will then hopefully ask their service provider to use us when they can.

All branches belong to Thrifty – none are franchised





Linda Malliff (front left), MD Roger Hancock (front centre) and Caroline Gallagher (front right) celebrate their win with colleagues

"We offer leasing and rental customers the same customer service standards as our own"

Caroline Gallagher, Thrifty Car and Van Rental

This year, we were extremely proud to win Nexus's customer service award, and to win LeasePlan's supplier of the year for the second year in a row, along with the *Fleet News* Award.

FN: How have last year's changes to your flexible rental service affected customers?

CG: We changed our product to allow customers to really specify their vehicles – everything from make, model, CO₂, P11D and sat nav, and we have seen a massive take-up of that. There's more and more focus on how much benefit-in-kind a driver is paying. When they get a rental vehicle, they don't want to suddenly find their car tax has doubled. If they can choose a vehicle by CO₂ and P11D value, it becomes a lot more manageable, particularly when it's not their fault that they have a rental vehicle.

To be able to match or provide something on a par with an ordered vehicle pre-contract has been a massive success for us, and we continue to grow in that area. In terms of total corporate rental, 60% of our rental is now under flexifleet.

We're not the biggest rental provider out there, so we looked at what we were good at, and how we could develop that offering into something unique. We think we are very nimble, and can change things very quickly. It just worked, for us and for our customers.

LM: We have a new product in trial to benefit companies who offer salary sacrifice and cash options, and hope to bring that to market within the next couple of months.

It's a little more of a retail proposition but available to staff of businesses – if a driver is pre-contract, or taking cash and needs a vehicle, we can help. Whether a customer is referred from a fleet or a leasing broker, they will come to us and we will provide the systems and vehicles.

FN: Has the move towards longer-term rental affected the make-up of vehicles on your fleet?

CG: I think the only change we've noticed is more requests for hybrid vehicles, so we've brought more of those onto the fleet. Our fleet was already one of the newest, with five-star Euro NCAP ratings and a high standard specification, to meet customer demand.

We never get asked for pure electric, which is quite surprising.

FN: Are you encouraging customers into lower-emission vehicles?

CG: Drivers at one of our customers didn't want to drive the new 1.0-litre three cylinder petrol engines. They saw them as a downgrade, and believed they were entitled to a higher grade vehicle than that. We took some vehicles down to the customer and let the drivers test them at no charge, so they could see how powerful and economical they were, and help them understand it wasn't a downgrade.

Things like that mean a customer can choose a more environmentally friendly vehicle – sometimes even go down a group – but still get the same power because of manufacturers' technological developments.

Helping customers and providing good levels of service is the overriding factor in the business initiatives Thrifty is pushing forward. Spotting potential opportunities that can make life easier for both fleets and drivers has led to high take up of the flexible product in particular, and reduced some of the frustration points that drivers experience when taking a rental car for an extended period of time.

FACTFILE

Company Thrifty Car and Van Rental

Sales director Caroline Gallagher

Director, central services

Linda Malliff

Branches 97; six planned

Corporate business 75%

Average vehicle age Three to four months

Fleet size 20,000

Judges' comments

"Thrifty prioritises fleet rentals and has opened strategic locations specifically to support existing fleet customers."

It operates extended opening hours, as customer demand dictates, and it can meet vehicle requirements at short notice. Thrifty is hot on customer service and its flat structure makes it easy to get straight to the people you need to."

KIA NIRO

Company's first hybrid crossover, expected to appeal to business users



NEED TO KNOW

- 1.6-litre engine, with 32kW electric motor
- Low operating costs and CO₂ from 88g/km
- Roomy, versatile interior and wide-opening doors

By Maurice Glover

A new development in hybrid motoring promises to open the door to fresh opportunities for Kia in an area of the fleet market set for rapid growth over the next few years.

But officials at the Korean firm's UK subsidiary have already decided that the first utility vehicle to come with a petrol-electric powertrain will not be made available to daily rental fleets when it reaches the showrooms this month.

The combination of a 1.6-litre engine and a 32kW motor

74.3mpg
Fuel efficiency



For full running costs,
visit fleetnews.co.uk/running-costs

should allow the Niro crossover to cater for fresh potential in the corporate market, believes John Hargreaves, general manager of fleet and remarketing.

"We are looking to concentrate our efforts on standard channels such as small businesses, medium fleets, public sector and contract hire," he told *Fleet News* as the Niro was being launched in Spain. "We want a good presence in fleet, but not one that is achieved at any cost. So there will be no rental business with this car.

"Our fleet volumes are increasing and we are becoming less involved in the daily rental sector because we don't need it. At 2.9% of total fleet registrations, the level of our business is now running at almost double what it was five years ago and there's no doubt that almost all of the normal channels represent major growth opportunities."

Only 400 to 500 examples of the chunky, plastic-clad model are likely to figure in the 45,000 fleet registrations Hargreaves is targeting for this year, but the car is still regarded as representing a significant contribution to Kia's plans to be offering more alternatively-powered vehicles by the end of the decade.

"This car fits in well between the Ceed and the Sportage in size and bridges a gap in the market that we think is not covered," he said. "It's an important addition to our line-up and we expect its low emission performance will appeal to business users.

"Our toe-in-the-water exercise with the Soul EV last year has been a success, with 200 sales to-date and we're now making further investment so the whole dealer network will be capable of maintaining more hybrid, plug-in hybrid and EV models in future."

Four versions will be available, two fitted with 18-inch wheels to give tail-pipe emissions of 101g/km, but fleets are expected to show greater interest in the versions on 16-inch rims which have emissions of 88g/km.



'Chunky, plastic-clad' model, sitting on a longer wheelbase than the Sportage



Digital radio is standard, with sat-nav and reversing camera on mid-range 2 version

"Niro is regarded as representing Kia's plans to offer more alternatively-powered vehicles"

Commercial director Simon Hetherington added: "In the first six months of this year, SUV sales were up by 25% in the UK and the hybrid market also grew by 23%, so we're introducing this car at just the right time. The interest shown so far suggests we're being conservative in our forecasting. I think fleets could well account for more than half of sales."

Despite being shorter than the Sportage, the Niro sits on a longer wheelbase to provide a surprisingly spacious interior with generous head and legroom. Thanks to positioning the lithium-ion battery pack next to the fuel tank under the rear seat, boot capacity is a generous 427 litres and load volume, with rear seats folded, is 1,425 litres.

All versions will have alloy wheels and digital radio. The mid-range 2 version, which has the smaller alloy rims, comes with sat-nav, reversing camera, lane keeping assist, automatic climate control, cruise control, heated and folding door mirrors, privacy glass and roof rails as standard.

A slightly higher ground clearance and wide opening doors allow easy access to a versatile interior with good detailing and an uncluttered dashboard with clear instrumentation and neat switchgear.

Smart away from rest, the Niro is nimble and makes hardly any mechanical noise unless maximum revs are needed for overtaking. Switching from petrol to electric power is imperceptible and the smooth-changing six-speed dual clutch transmission plays a key role in maintaining quiet, unruffled progress.

Multilink rear suspension helps keep body roll in check through corners and, with composed handling and a smooth ride over most surfaces, this is a no-compromise hybrid offering comfortable and relaxing multi-purpose transport with a potential range of more than 600 miles from its 45-litre fuel tank.

COSTS

P11D price	£22,740
BIK tax band (2016/17)	15%
Annual BIK tax (20%)	£682
Class 1A NIC	£470
Annual VED	TBC
RV (4yr/80K)	TBC
Fuel cost (ppm)	TBC
AFR (ppm)	13
Running cost (4yr/80K)	TBC

SPEC

Power (hp)/torque (lb-ft)	139/195
CO ₂ emissions (g/km)	88
Top speed (mph)	101
0-62mph (sec)	11.5
Fuel efficiency (mpg)	74.3

KEY RIVAL

Prius Hatch 1.8VVT-h 122 Business Extra	
P11D price	£24,140
BIK tax band (2016/17)	11%
Annual BIK tax (20%)	£531
Class 1A NIC	£366
Annual VED	£0
RV (4yr/80k)	£7,900
Fuel cost (ppm)	5.41
AFR (ppm)	13
Running cost (4yr/80k)	28.82ppm

Running cost data supplied by KeeResources (4yr/80k)

THINKING CAP



By Martin Ward, manufacturer relationships manager

cap hpi

Monday Down to the Midlands to drive the mildly facelifted Volvo V40 and V40 Cross Country. Not a lot has changed, but the most recognisable differences are new front LED headlights, a new grille and a few interior improvements. But for company car drivers, the reduction of CO₂ from 94g/km to 89g/km on the D2 manual Drive-E will be welcome. The V40 is well put together and drives really well, but is one of those cars that made a huge impact when it was first launched and went into the shadows. So it is good to have these small facelifts so we can re-examine and get re-familiarised with what is, after all, a pretty good premium hatch that fits well on company fleets.

"The European motor industry shuts down in the summer, until September"

Wednesday Over to Paris to talk about future product. We had to have this get-together in mid-July as the European motor industry shuts down in the summer and doesn't really start again until the first week of September. This shut-down has happened for years, and no doubt will continue well into the future. But it does have a knock-on effect in the UK, as getting information and data, and ordering vehicles becomes really difficult for importers.



Thursday Cheltenham, for a Quattro day with Audi. The SQ7 is a high powered V8 TDI that produces a whopping

435hp, goes from 0-62mph in 4.9 seconds, and is a delight to drive. It won't be on many fleet lists, though, being priced from £70,970 and having prohibitive CO₂. The good-looking Allroad is a great all-rounder: an estate with a ground clearance 34mm ground clearance more than the A4 Avant, Quattro as standard, loads of room, and a good choice of petrol and diesel engines. We took it off-road and it behaved impeccably, doing everything that was asked of it. Prices start from £36,010.

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BETTER DEALS, QUICKER.

TOYOTA HILUX

Latest version of 'granddaddy' of 4x4 trucks proves versatile and safety-conscious



More space, more comfortable seats and a wealth of practical storage spaces

NEED TO KNOW

- Available in single-cab version
- Payloads from 1,025-1,055kg
- New 2.4-litre engine, with improved mpg

By Trevor Gehlcken

The Hilux is the granddaddy of 4x4 trucks, having been launched in the UK in 1972. To-date, some 18 million Hiluxes have been sold worldwide and last year it was Europe's bestseller in the sector.

The new model is available in Active, Icon, Invincible and Invincible X equipment levels and prices go from £19,177 to £29,435 ex-VAT.

One point to note for fleet buyers is that, unlike rivals the Nissan Navara and Volkswagen Amarok, the new Hilux will be available as a single-cab. In fact, 20% of sales at present are for the 'cooking' version. There will also be extended cab versions with occasional seats along with the double-cab versions, which were the only models available for driving at the launch event.

The new truck has more interior space, more comfortable seats and a wealth of practical storage spaces.

The driver's seat has been raised by 10mm and 15mm has been added to the seat's height-adjustment range. The steering wheel is now adjustable for reach as well as rake and the front seats provide 8mm more headroom and 19mm more shoulder space. The intrusion of engine, wind and road noise into the cabin has been reduced and is now at class-leading levels.

The cargo deck, meanwhile, has been made larger and stronger, with maximum deck width increased from 1,544mm to a class-leading 1,645mm. The tailgate is fitted with stronger, link-type hinges, with support from heavy-duty steel plate brackets when in the open position. Towing weight is 3.2 tonnes (being upgraded to 3.5 tonnes from the end of the year) while payloads go from 1,025kg to 1,055kg.

SPEC

Basic prices (ex-VAT)
£19,177-£29,435
Gross vehicle weight (kg)
3,080-3,210
Power (bhp/rpm)
148/3,400
Torque (lb-ft/rpm)
295/1,600-2,000
Load volume (cu m)
n/a
Payloads (kg)
1,025-1,055
Comb fuel economy (mpg)
36.2-41.5
CO₂ emissions (g/km)
178-204

KEY RIVAL

Ford Ranger
Basic prices (ex-VAT)
£18,871-£31,494
Gross vehicle weight (kg)
3,200
Power (bhp/rpm)
160/3,700-200/3,000
Torque (lb-ft/rpm)
284/1,500-2,500-346/1,500-2,750
Load volume (cu m)
n/a
Payloads (kg)
1,033-1,269
Comb fuel economy (mpg)
31.7-43.5
CO₂ emissions (g/km)
171-234

Running cost data supplied by
KeeResources (4yr/80k)



The truck is slated to return up to 41.5mpg on the combined cycle, with CO₂ emissions from 178g/km.

On the safety front, the Hilux gets the usual ABS and electronic stability control systems plus a plethora of airbags, together with vehicle stability control, crosswind assist, trailer sway control, active traction control, downhill assist and hill-start assist. There's also a pre-collision system with pedestrian detection function, lane departure alert and road sign assist. Whether or not these items are included depends on the spec level chosen.

We tested the new Hilux both on and off-road in Invincible guise mated to a six-speed auto box.

Climbing aboard revealed a stylish cab with plenty of black and silver flashings everywhere, while the driver's seat is big and firm yet superbly supportive at the sides and in the lumbar area. We particularly liked the large screen infotainment and sat-nav system which turned out to be a £750 option, so many fleets won't invest in it.

Quite how the designers have managed to engineer such versatility into this truck we are not sure, but hats off to them anyway – the Hilux simply knocks all the other contenders into a cocked hat when it comes to on-road manners.

FleetNews PORTFOLIO

WHAT WE DO IN YOUR INDUSTRY

Fleet News magazine

The leading business publication for the fleet sector, offering insight, analysis, best practice and in-depth profiles of fleets and suppliers every fortnight. But don't take our word for it: 96% of readers say *Fleet News* is the most useful fleet publication (*Fleet News* reader survey). Every issue is packed with information that helps companies to run efficient and effective fleets – and our readership of 16,000 is restricted to named decision-makers, running fleets of 10-plus vehicles.

Commercial Fleet magazine

Commercial Fleet offers insight into the world of light commercial vehicles and trucks to provide operators with detailed analysis on key topics such as operations, safety, remarketing and the environment. Case studies in every issue provide best practice advice to help you to improve your efficiency. The magazine is supported by the commercialfleet.org website and events.



Fleet events

Fleet News events are the biggest and best in the sector. Our annual awards night attracts more than 1,500 people; the FN50 Dinner sees 950 leasing, manufacturer, rental and supplier companies networking and *Commercial Fleet* Summit provide insight into key areas of fleet operation; monthly roundtables enable 10-15 fleets to discuss issues and share solutions.



Driving Business magazine

This quarterly magazine is sent to managing directors and finance directors at 25,000 small to medium enterprises (SMEs) that are running fewer than 50 vehicles. Focusing on the key elements of running cars and vans, *Driving Business* provides practical advice to reduce cost and improve safety with a minimum of time and effort.

Websites and newsletters

The *Fleet News* website is an extensive library of best practice advice, fleet case studies, news and tools. Compare car and van running costs, check how much tax employees will pay and find out which models use the least fuel with our easy-to-use tools. We also send *Ignition*, a monthly newsletter which contains car reviews and interviews not included with our print magazine.

Fleet Leasing magazine

Fleet Leasing provides insight and analysis to board level executives, senior management and regional sales staff at contract hire and leasing companies. Its objective is to inform and educate about fleet trends, new models and technological developments, once a quarter, supported by a website regularly updated with the latest leasing news.

Bespoke publications

Magazines, supplements, brochures and digital products are produced for commercial partners. These bespoke publications inform fleets about companies and topics relevant to their business. They include manufacturer and supplier reports, in which *Fleet News* journalists interview key personnel to unearth the developments of interest to fleet operators.

RENAULT KADJAR

Niggles aside, this is a capable performer



Surprisingly engaging on the road

COSTS*

P11D price	£24,140
BIK tax band	20%
Annual BIK tax (20%)	£966
Class 1A NIC	£666
Annual VED	£0 then £20
RV (4yr/80k)	£7,000/29%
Fuel cost (ppm)	6.78
AFR (ppm)	10
Running cost (4yr/80k)	32.76ppm

SPEC

Engine (cc)	1461
Power (hp)	110
Torque (lb-ft)	1,844
CO ₂ emissions (g/km)	99
Fuel efficiency (mpg)	74.3
Max speed (mph)	112
0-62mph (sec)	11.7
Test mpg	60
Current mileage	934

*Running cost data supplied by KeeResources (4yr/80k)

By Stephen Briers

An internal swap of long-term cars recently put me behind the wheel of our Renault Kadjar for a week. It's been a while since I last drove a Renault, so I was looking forward to seeing whether the experience had improved.

It had: the car was comfortable, surprisingly engaging to drive for a mid-size SUV – with lots of grip and minimal body roll – and easily returned mid-60s fuel consumption. The 1.5-litre engine was smooth, quiet and responsive.

However, there were a few glitches with the automatic gearbox. The transmission was slow to engage, especially from first to reverse. I also encountered issues with the stop-start, which was lazy to fire up, particularly when the car was stationary for more than a minute. On one occasion, it even rolled back a couple of inches when I lifted my foot off the brake before the engine came to life, something I've never had happen before. Another time, the car simply refused to restart while I was sitting at the lights – it required moving the gearstick to park and pressing the start button.

I also had an 'interesting' experience with the trip computer related to the mileage countdown until empty. I rarely allow the tank to go below a quarter, so this might be an anomaly on other cars, but on one journey, safe in the knowledge that I had a good 30 miles in reserve, I pushed on rather than pulling into overpriced motorway services.

However, when the countdown reached 50 miles to go, it disappeared from the screen, replaced by a series of dashes (see picture, below). Why? It was disconcerting, especially when the final bar of fuel disappeared four miles from my chosen fuel station.

Such niggles aside, it's obvious why the Kadjar has already sold 10,619 units year-to-date, of which 68% are in fleet (more than the Škoda Yeti and BMW X1, but 23,000 off the class-leading Nissan Qashqai): it has the looks, drawing admiring glances from onlookers; it is a capable performer on the road; and has excellent seat comfort and leg/headroom.

So, lots of positives. Just opt for manual – three-quarters of buyers already do.

Honda Jazz 1.3 I-VTEC Ex Navi



I'm beginning to wonder if I have a magnetic field that interferes with vehicle technology – as a second car in my care within a six-month period has completely lost its bearings.

A decade ago, the media was full of stories of hapless drivers who found themselves on clifftops, in rivers or even in different continents after following sat-nav instructions. Drivers now seem to have mastered following computer-aided directions, though the computers themselves may still have the odd hiccup.

Our Mazda CX-3 decided it was in Russia three months ago, and this time, while enjoying the summer sun on the north Norfolk coast, our long-term Jazz decided it was in Luton.

"Now fully working, the touchscreen system isn't particularly user-friendly"

Thankfully, I knew where I was and was able to navigate home, stopping in at the local Honda dealer two days later for a check-up. The staff did a system reset and I was back on the road 15 minutes later – with the car once again correctly identifying my location.

However, the staff told me they could apply a software update, and booked the car in a week later. The completion text came within an hour of drop-off, and so far, the car (and driver) have kept themselves safely on roads!

Although it may now be fully working, the touchscreen system supplied on the Jazz isn't particularly user friendly. Key options – such as full lists of digital radio stations – are buried away in menus three deep, and the home and menu buttons result in frequent wrong presses.

Switching from Bluetooth music streaming to digital or FM requires at least four taps, with changing station or track requiring far more than necessary, which could possibly distract drivers and divert their eyes from the road.

Locational blip excepted, the Garmin-powered sat-nav software is one of the positives of the system. The app is standalone, and may appear slightly dated in design, but provides clear, readable instructions along with reasonably truthful traffic markings – rare in many built-in systems.

Christopher Smith

See extended long-term tests at fleetnews.co.uk/cars/car-reviews/



Fuel gauge scare: dashes replace mileage countdown below 50 miles remaining

FleetNews

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Focus Focus 1.5TDCi Titanium



According to our Focus I am now an 'eco champion', with a five-petal rating for gear shifting, anticipation and speed. I haven't been driving in a particularly eco-friendly manner, instead simply sticking to speed limits and, most of the time, following the gear shift indicator.

Despite my eco champion status, a colleague has achieved better mpg than I have in the Focus (65mpg while I am averaging 60.9mpg) even though he dropped a few petals. The higher mpg may be down to journey type with him putting the Focus to the test on longer motorway journeys. He is also a fan of the Focus's adaptive cruise control (a £550 option on our test model), which could help achieve better mpg if set at 60mph on the motorway.

"The jury is still out on whether the sat-nav is a good option or not"

However, we have discovered that the trip computer appears to be overestimating by 9mpg, meaning that we are actually averaging in the 50s rather than 60s.

Our views differ on the sat-nav (a £300 option). My colleague didn't find it user-friendly, particularly when inputting addresses, and preferred to use the Sync voice commands, while I favour the touchscreen. We also differ over the chimes which sound when it is time for you to take an exit on a roundabout or leave a junction. He chose to switch them off, while I find them useful. On two occasions the sat-nav has not recognised a postcode and neither have been obscure locations – one was the Leicester Forest East Services on the M1 and the other was the train station carpark in St Albans.

So the jury is still out on whether the sat-nav is a good option or not.

Sarah Tooze



See extended long-term tests at fleetnews.co.uk/cars/car-reviews/

1.6 CDTI 136 SRI NAV

VAUXHALL ASTRA

Award-winner makes way for petrol version



The Astra covered 10,223 miles and averaged 57.6mpg

COSTS*

P11D price	£22,895
BIK tax band	23%
Annual BIK tax (20%)	£1,053
Class 1A NIC	£727
Annual VED	£0 then £30
RV (4yr/80k)	£5,525 (24%)
Fuel cost (ppm)	8.13
AFR (ppm)	9
Running cost (4yr/80k)	32.97ppm

SPEC

Engine (cc)	1,560
Power (hp)	136
Torque (lb-ft)	236
CO ₂ emissions (g/km)	103
Fuel efficiency (mpg)	72.4
Max speed (mph)	127
0-62mph (sec)	9.0
Test mpg	57.4
Final mileage	10,223

*Running cost data supplied by KeeResources (4yr/80k)

By Andrew Ryan

Our Astra has returned to Vauxhall after a six-month loan, during which it proved to be an impressive performer. The new model has been recognised as a significant improvement over its predecessor, winning awards such as best lower medium car at this year's Fleet News Awards as well as gaining the European car of the year title.

My experiences with the Astra back this up. It's good to drive and efficient, practical and comfortable, while its wholelife costs are competitive (see previous report). During our test, the Astra covered 10,223 miles and averaged 57.6mpg. Its official combined fuel economy figure is 72.4mpg and, although the car's optimistic trip computer reported economy around 10mpg higher than the real-world figure, I never got close to it.

Gripes have been few. While the split rear seats fold, they do not create a flat load area: instead, there is a significant step to the seat backs which impacts on practicality. Also, I borrowed our long-term Ford Focus and Mazda CX-3 – both diesel models – for short periods, and found that engine noise in the Vauxhall was noticeably more intrusive.

The SRI's return doesn't bring our time with the Astra range to an end, however, as Vauxhall has replaced our diesel model with a 1.0i Turbo 105 Elite petrol model.

Earlier this year, we ran a feature comparing the wholelife costs of diesel models against the latest generation of small capacity petrol engines (Fleet News, February 18). This was on the back of the increased efficiency of petrol models and rising concerns over diesel emissions, as well as the Government U-turn over abolishing the 3% benefit-in-kind tax diesel surcharge. The feature found minimal differences in the running costs for low-mileage fleets, although the gap widened in diesel's favour as mileage increased.

Let's see how the real-world performance of our petrol replacement compares with the theoretical figures.

"The Vauxhall Astra is good to drive and efficient, practical and comfortable, while its wholelife costs are competitive"

SARAH EASTON

DIRECTOR, FLEETONDEMAND

She doesn't have a passion for cars, but is proud of her success in the fleet leasing industry. Sarah Easton would also like to give something back to those less fortunate

I would tell my 18-year-old self to always wait, think and ponder before you react. In other words, sleep on it.

My favourite film used to be *Gone with the Wind* – I admired Scarlet O'Hara's strength. Now, however, and having watched it several times with my youngest son, it has to be *Forest Gump*. What a classic.

Away from the office, I enjoy 'extreme' walking (for charity) and spending time with my husband, three children, grand daughter, friends and three dogs – usually with a few drinks (bubbles) along the way! I have also earned the nickname Judith Chalmers from my colleagues – I think that tells you all you need.

I would like to be remembered as successful, kind, trustworthy and always up for a good laugh.

If I was Prime Minister for the day, I would abandon HS2 and give the go ahead to build Heathrow's third runway.

I don't really have a passion for cars but, rather than choosing three cars for my garage, I would always like to have the following four options in any car: parking sensors, sat-nav, Bluetooth and heated seats.

The book I would recommend is *Before I go to Sleep*, by SJ Watson. I couldn't put it down, from start to finish. You have to read the book before you watch the film though.

One of my earliest memories associated with a car was driving down to Spain with my family in an orange Morris Marina.

The pivotal moment in my life was meeting my husband Guy. His love, encouragement and sound advice have supported me immensely both personally and professionally.

My pet hate is dental costs – these are extortionate and should be subsidised.

"My pet hate is dental costs – these are extortionate and should be subsidised"

First fleet role My first role was as a short-term hire controller at Barlow Handling, renting out fork lift trucks. From there I got into renting out cars and vans – and the rest is history. It is a great industry full of many colourful characters, and I have made many good friends over the years.

Career goals

Being successful in all I do is my life goal, so with Fleetondemand I would like to continue to build on the success of the business to-date and take our new and existing technology platforms into the global arena.

Biggest achievement in business

Moving from employee to director and shareholder and building a successful and profitable start-up technology business.

Biggest career influence There are many people who have influenced my career over the years, but having to choose between commercial and operations when at LeasePlan set the scene and direction for future years.

Biggest mistake in business

I don't think I could single out any specific big mistakes that I have made. I have certainly learned from many of the challenges and experiences that I have had to face and deal with.

Leadership style I am inclusive, consultative, collaborative and empowering. I like to bring the best out in the people around me.

If I wasn't in fleet I would like to work for a charity or give something back to the disadvantaged. I am lucky to have had a good life so far and would like to give something back to those less fortunate.

Childhood ambition I never really had a vocation, but the following professions came in and out of favour for me: accountant, flight attendant and physiotherapist. I ended up doing a degree in history and American studies.

Next issue: Matthew Thompson, chief commercial officer, Zenith

On the Edge – new upscale SUV from Ford



Sophisticated driver assistance features and class-leading driving dynamics

The all-new Ford Edge upscale SUV delivers premium levels of comfort, sophisticated driver assistance features and class-leading driving dynamics.

It is available in Zetec, Titanium and Sport series, and with a choice of 180PS 2.0-litre TDCi diesel engine with six-speed manual transmission or 210PS bi-turbo 2.0-litre TDCi diesel with six-speed PowerShift automatic transmission; both engines deliver 48.7mpg, with 149g/km CO₂ emissions.

The all-new Edge is well equipped as standard, offering Ford intelligent all-

wheel drive, Active Noise Control, Pedestrian Detection, Ford DAB audio with SYNC connectivity, privacy glass and 19-inch alloy wheels.

Other innovative features available include Adaptive Steering, which automatically optimises the steering response according to the vehicle's speed, making it easy to manoeuvre at low speeds, while remaining precise and intuitive at higher speeds.

There is also the Front Wide View Camera, which makes restricted visibility junctions or parking spaces easier to negotiate.

The all-new Ford Edge sets new stand-

ards in its class for interior space, with class-leading second-row headroom of 1,023mm and shoulder room of 1,536mm and front row passenger space among the best in its class.

The finely crafted interior offers comfort and convenience features including heated and cooled front seats and a panoramic roof.

The luggage capacity of 1,847 litres, with the rear seats folded, is among the largest in the segment.

The luxury Ford Edge Vignale, with features including standard SYNC3 communication and entertainment system, will be on sale later.

OWEN GREGORY NEW HEAD OF FORD OF BRITAIN FLEET OPERATIONS



Owen Gregory has been appointed Ford of Britain fleet operations director, succeeding Nick Themistocleous, who has retired.

Owen joined Ford as a graduate in 1999 and held a variety of positions in sales and marketing, including UK dealer and consumer marketing manager and UK product marketing manager.

He then moved to Germany in 2014 to become European brand manager for Focus, C-MAX and Kuga.

Ford of Britain chairman and managing director, Andy Barratt, said: "Owen is ideally suited to this position and will be a great addition to our team. He brings a fresh perspective to the role with his extensive knowledge of our

dealer network and background in both Ford of Britain and Ford of Europe.

"Owen will build on the excellent foundations provided by Nick as we move into the launch of the Ford Edge, our flagship SUV, the expansion of the Vignale range with S-MAX and Kuga and the continued strength of our commercial vehicles."

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Fuel consumption information is official government environmental data, tested in accordance with the relevant EU directive. Vauxhall ecoFLEX range fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km): Urban: 40.9 (6.9)-83.1 (3.4), Extra-urban: 64.2 (4.4)-94.2 (3.0), Combined: 54.3 (5.2)-91.1 (3.1). CO₂ emissions: 120-82g/km.

Official EU-regulated test data are provided for comparison purposes and actual performance will depend on driving style, road conditions and other non-technical factors. Corsa 5dr hatchback 1.3CDTi (95PS) Start/Stop ecoFLEX Elite model shown above is for illustrative purpose only and features optional Dark Sea Blue pearlescent paint, with CO₂ from 85g/km, fuel consumption up to 88.3mpg, range up to 874 miles and power up to 95PS. * = Terms and conditions apply and vehicles are subject to availability. Please call 0870 240 4848 for full details. All figures quoted correct at time of going to press (August 2016).