

A SPECIAL REPORT BROUGHT TO YOU BY **FleetNews**



# THE AA – A 120-YEAR HERITAGE OF INNOVATION

How The AA is innovating to assist fleet customers in decarbonising and achieving zero emissions, ensuring a high standard of driver behaviour and maximising their overall value and performance

In association with







# Key milestones of The AA



1905

Founding of The AA

Formed on 29 June 1905 by a group of motorists to help drivers avoid police speed traps. Originally called the Motorists' Mutual Association, it quickly became The Automobile Association

1906

The AA salute and speed trap warnings

AA patrols used a salute system to discreetly warn members of police speed traps. This practice became iconic and symbolised The AA's early advocacy for motorists

1912

Introduction of The AA hotel star ratings

The AA began inspecting and classifying hotels, introducing the now-famous star rating system, which remains a trusted standard in UK hospitality

1920s

Deployment of The AA sentry boxes

More than 600 sentry boxes were installed across the UK, offering members shelter, supplies and a direct line to The AA's headquarters. These became a symbol of roadside assistance

1920

First roadside petrol pumps

The AA pioneered the installation of roadside petrol pumps, making refuelling more accessible for early motorists

1951

Royal endorsement and presidency

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh became president of the AA, marking the beginning of a long-standing relationship with the Royal family. The AA-owned BSM driving school even taught Queen Elizabeth II to drive

1961

Introduction of four-wheeled patrol vans

The iconic yellow AA minivans replaced motorcycles, enhancing the efficiency and comfort of roadside patrols

1973

Launch of The AA Relay service

A major innovation in breakdown recovery, the Relay service allowed vehicles to be transported anywhere in the UK, not just repaired on the spot

1986

Command and control centre goes paperless

Breakdown calls taken at The AA operation centre begin digital transition as computers help improve the speed of patrol attendance. System is a precursor to the 'AAHELP' systems used today

1999

Online route planner launch

The AA brought its route planning services online, revolutionising how drivers navigated the UK. It served more than a million routes within six months

2020

Support during the Covid-19 pandemic

The AA's patrols supported ambulance services across the UK, ensuring emergency vehicles stayed operational during a national crisis

2024

Launch of electric vehicle fleet

The AA's breakdown services and driving schools begin using electric vehicles across the fleet to help rescue drivers at the roadside, while preparing new drivers for the changing automotive landscape





# Innovating to be Always Ahead with support for modern fleets

**M**odern fleets are experiencing a period of unprecedented change. In an already unpredictable business environment, fleet managers are facing a sector-wide shift away from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles amid calls for greater sustainability, along with a need for proactive and more insightful vehicle and driver management.

In the face of such challenges, The AA combines 120 years of experience in fleet management and technological development with its 'Always Ahead' approach to deliver a range of innovative solutions.

*Fleet News* spoke to Paul Kirby, managing director of EV Essentials, commercial vehicle expert and founder of the EV Café, about how The AA has established itself as a trusted presence in fleet for more than a century, and how this heritage informs its current strategy of leading through innovation.

## A WEALTH OF EXPERTISE

As of 2025, The AA has been campaigning for drivers for 120 years. The organisation runs more than 2,600 patrols on UK roads and offers end-to-end services for businesses on a 24/7 basis, all year-round. This level of experience and engagement puts The AA in a prime position to understand the current priorities of fleets across the UK.

Kirby says: "The AA is able to serve fleets really well because it is a fleet in its own right. There is such variety and diversity across The AA's fleet that it is able to fully understand what's going on in the fleet world."

The AA's approach is summed up in two words: 'Always Ahead'.

Rather than simply providing services for existing issues, the organisation leverages insights from fleets across the UK to identify where the sector is headed and then develop innovations that prioritise customers and their upcoming needs.

## TRANSITION TO ZERO-EMISSIONS

Fleets are experiencing a paradigm shift towards decarbonisation as customers and regulations – such as the government's Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Mandate – are increasingly calling for an industry-wide transition to zero-emission vehicles.

Kirby comments: "Over the next 10 years, we are going to change everything we've been doing for well in excess of 100 years. We have been used to relying on ICE for many a year. But now we are changing, and the scale of change is something we've never seen before in the transport sector."

The AA supports fleets as they decarbonise and transition away from ICE vehicles, offering insights and practical solutions to reduce emissions.

"Transport doesn't necessarily need to be electric," Kirby notes.

"It most likely will be electric, but we are going to be moving to a different way of doing things."

The AA has adopted an innovative approach of 'test, learn and scale' with electric vehicles (EVs) and alternative fuel sources, such as hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO).

Kirby says: "It has HVO and EV in its fleet, has tested hydrogen; and it's starting to utilise AI to support fleets and their breakdowns. The reality is that The AA is leading and others can look at where it gets the wins."

The testing processes also benefits The AA's fleet customers in a more academic sense.

Any insights are captured and compiled, before being made available as specialised yellow papers.

This strategy enables greater confidence from The AA's fleet customers as they can act on real-world data that demonstrates the impact of any recommended solutions.

## FLEET MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

Vehicle management and maintenance are familiar concerns for any modern fleet and are passed on to fleet service providers. The ideal for any fleet manager would be a service that can identify problems before they could happen.

Kirby comments: "Many people talked about being able to do this. But nobody actually delivered on it."

The AA has developed a new solution that incorporates cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to deliver predictive and proactive vehicle insights.

The solution provides fleet managers with a unified platform for managing fuel and vehicle health, with alerts for potential issues that enable significant reduction in vehicle downtime, and behavioural insights that allow for greater management of driver performance.

Kirby says: "It's able to understand what's going on in a vehicle based on different sensors, incorporate different elements that have gone wrong in the past, and bring all of that together to the point where you can predict where something's going to happen with that vehicle. You can begin to identify trends and things that happen, and then you can intervene with confidence."

By developing innovations that incorporate AI and automation, The AA empowers its fleet customers to make strategic decisions – based on accurate and real-time data – that maximise driver performance and vehicle management.

"It's very forward-thinking," Kirby says.

"To be able to deliver a solution that keeps vehicles on the road even more than they do today. Not being reactive but instead, proactive."

## UNLOCKING DEVELOPMENT FOR FLEET DRIVERS WITH DRIVETECH AND HALO

Drivers, already crucial to any fleet's operations as vehicle operators, are also relied upon to be public-facing representatives for their fleets. This requires a high standard of work and behaviour, which must be maintained – both on the road and in an ever-shifting business environment with frequently evolving regulations and equipment.

Drivetech, a driver training solution from The AA, provides drivers and fleet managers with a suite of products and services designed to reduce risk and ensure safer driving.

Kirby comments: "I think Drivetech is able to support drivers in improving, adopting new technology and new practices to really think about how they're driving."

The AA is further innovating its Drivetech service with new resources for eco-driver training and sustainability practices, and the HALO platform – a centralised source of data, products and services.

Kirby explains: "HALO is really about getting under the skin of the driver behaviour, providing insights to fleet managers and drivers, so they can confidently introduce changes that make everybody safer."

## DELIVERING CONFIDENCE THROUGH FORWARD-FACING INNOVATION

With its focus on innovation, guided by a 120-year heritage of supporting drivers and their vehicles, The AA is always working to develop the latest solutions and strategies for the fleet sector.

"The AA has proven that it is looking at every option," Kirby notes.

"It has HVO in its fleet, hydrogen, and EV; it's starting to utilise AI to support fleets and their breakdowns. The reality is that The AA is leading and others can look at where it gets the wins."

With its willingness to innovate and trial new practices or technologies, The AA does a great deal to raise the confidence of developing fleets – particularly in areas of modernisation or decarbonisation – while also establishing a robust fleet strategy that can serve as a template for the wider market.



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Paul Kirby, MD of EV Essentials



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