How to run an effective fleet

Advice to maximise on-road time and minimise costs

Fit for purpose
Improve your business with the right van choice

Fleet best practice profiles
Kwik Fit and Stannah share their tips for success

Reliability
We are pleased here at Mercedes-Benz Vans to be working with Fleet News to deliver an insight into the fleet industry. Fleet News is one of the leading publications within the fleet sector and is perfectly positioned to work with Mercedes-Benz Vans promoting best practice and sharing our joint experience.

The Business Services and Facilities Management industry faces challenges with many factors to take into account, not least with running a safe vehicle fleet. We have a complete line-up of product ranges to suit all safety requirements, as well as dedicated Strategic Accounts and Business Development teams to support the industry through every step of the buying and owning process.

We are also one of the few manufacturers to boast a dedicated commercial vehicle network which offers extended opening and service hours, in many instances round the clock, so that we can work around you to ensure your fleet is always kept moving.

At Mercedes-Benz Vans, we are committed to providing consultative support to our fleet partners and work with our customers to make the right decision about their vehicle. Van Fleet Insight enables us to share our knowledge and we hope that you find it a useful read.

Andrew Lawson
Head of Strategic Accounts – Vans

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Brought to you by FleetNews
Recovery drives business services sector growth

High business confidence see 60% of companies planning to spend more on vans

The business services and facilities management sector’s continued success is good news for the UK economy. It accounts for 7.5% of all UK economic output and is a major employer, illustrating its importance to the country’s recovery and positive GDP performance.

It accounts for more than 10% of all UK jobs and has a nationwide reach. For example, compared to another significant sector, financial services, jobs in the business services and facilities management sector are far more evenly spread across the UK.

Outside London, the share of business services and facilities management sector jobs in a region varies between 7.25% and 13.5%, whereas for financial services the variation is between 4.75% and 10%.

It is also a significant taxpayer. Businesses in the sector pay almost £14 billion per year through the three main business taxes. This, in turn, pays for public services equivalent to the total spend of the Department for Transport in 2011/12.

In addition, the services it provides span the public and the private sectors. Figures from the Business Services Association (BSA) suggest that 64% of the work it does is carried out for private sector clients with the remaining 36% for work it does are carried out for private sector clients.

The more sophisticated type of services being procured, from input-based to output based.

The upward revision of 0.4 percentage points in 2014 and 0.2 percentage points in 2015 from the last forecast in April was the largest upgrade of any major western economy for both years.

Britain is now expected to grow faster than countries including America, Germany, France and Canada.

John Cridland, CBI director-general, says: “While there are still risks to growth at home and abroad, we are hopeful the economy will keep moving along at a steady pace for the rest of the year and next.”

Reflecting the positive economic outlook, the top 20 companies in the business services and facilities management sector, according to a fleet size, are operating 8.9% more vans than they were last year.

The number of vans in the sector has increased by 2,956 units to 35,984, while cars fell 1,755 units to 17,487, to give an overall fleet of 33,471 vehicles – a rise of 1,201 units.

Fleet2000, an annual survey conducted by Sweets on behalf of Fleet News, suggests that business confidence in the sector remains high, with 60% of respondents saying they were planning to increase their spending on vans.

It’s worth noting that these are some of the largest fleet operators in the country. For example, The AA is ranked as the biggest fleet in the sector and is the seventh largest overall in the Fleet2000 with a fleet of 7,962 vehicles, including 4,742 vans.

Meanwhile, the second largest fleet, Mitie Group, has 7,234 vehicles and just behind it in third place in the business services and facilities management sector is G4S, which operates a fleet of 5,217 vehicles, including 3,370 vans of which 1,400 are Mercedes-Benz Sprinters.

The G4S fleet has grown by 677 vehicles in the past year, while other notable increases have included Integral, which reported an increase of 319 vehicles to 1,600 - growth of 25%.

Growth in the business services and facilities management sector has been driven by wider growth in the UK economy as well as a growing trend in outsourcing, benefiting those companies in the sector which operate in that space.

Ian Sarson, chairman of the BSA, says: “Through building, designing, operating and maintaining the national physical and digital infrastructure networks that allow people to do business in Britain, outsourced service providers are a vital cog in our private sector economy.”

“More than 60% of outsourcing is between private sector companies”

Ian Sarson, chairman of the BSA

“More than 60% of outsourcing is between private sector companies.”

Mark Fox, chief executive of the BSA, adds: “Too often, Government views providers of outsourced and business services simply from their perspective as a public sector client.

“Your belief is that outsourced and business services providers do a huge amount of work with the private sector and are big employers and wealth creators nationwide and globally. They are great British businesses and this is too often forgotten.”

Already large, the size of the corporate market for outsourced bundled services is fast increasing, valued at £19.5 billion and forecast to grow to more than £10 billion this year.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) suggests that budget constraints in both private and public sectors are helping to drive the choice towards outsourcing, best-in-class solutions and redefining the type of services being procured, from input-based to output based.

Costs remain top of the agenda, however. The more sophisticated providers recognise that value is gained through both re-engineering delivery processes and achieving cost savings in the client’s in-house procurement and administrative functions.

There’s a continuing trend away from ‘lowest price’ services following the failures of high-profile facilities management contracts in recent years, says PwC.

Sarson concludes: “Outsourced and business services providers contribute to Britain’s effort to thrive in a 21st century globalised world and are a modern British success story exported globally. They are also a magnet for foreign direct investment to our nation.

“With demographic change in our society, demand on our public services is only going to increase. That means, to stay within budgets, innovation is going to be more important than ever.”

Payment of taxes by the outsourced services sector in 2012/13

Outsourced services market breakdown by client base

Outsourced activity by type of service provided as a percentage of total outsourced activity

Source: Oxford Economics – UK outsourcing across the private and public sectors
Fit for purpose

“Reliability is critical to our business as it doesn’t reflect well if our own van breaks down on the way to a customer. This is why the Sprinter suits our needs”

Peter Lambert, fleet director, Kwik Fit

While considering the range of duties and responsibilities, it becomes increasingly clear that the van need any work. Using the information from a fleet management provider coupled to first-hand experience of a new van and benchmarking it against your current fleet will enable the right choice to be made.

Neil Parsons, fleet operations manager of Hoover Candy Group, is currently assessing vans for his fleet, including models from Mercedes-Benz. He says: “The all-new Vito closely matches the specification of van we need. While this van won’t be available until next year, Mercedes-Benz has provided two existing Vitos with racking and livery for us to trial. “This is essential for us to get a good idea of how the van will fit into our operations and how a relationship with this manufacturer will work.”

Parsons says it is important to look at residual values when benchmarking vans as they can have a big effect on monthly leasing rates. Then there is the cost of converting the van to suit the business’s needs, which is why the new Vito appeals to Parsons as it will be able to use the same racking that is fitted to Hoover Candy’s current vehicles.

Fuel is typically the second largest cost after the price of the van, so economy remains a key factor when it comes to choosing a vehicle.

Mercedes-Benz has recently developed an active DPF which means that, if the vehicle fails to clear the filter because of a short or cold journey, the vehicle will start a regeneration cycle to clear the blockage. Fuel is flared into the exhaust bringing the DPF up to the required temperature to incinerate the sooty build up. If the vehicle is stationary, the engine revs may also rise to aid this temperature increase.

Fuel is not the only consideration for fleets: reliability, servicing and repair, and downtime are also crucial factors. While most vans are reliable performers, for companies in an industry where customers expect them to be on time every time, reliability assumes a vital role.

Peter Lambert, fleet director of Kwik Fit, runs a fleet of 200 vehicles and says: “Reliability is critical to our business as it doesn’t reflect well if our own van breaks down on the way to a customer. This is why the Sprinter suits our needs.”

As more fleets increase the length of their replacement cycles, often swapping drivers as one shift takes over from another to maximise vehicle utilisation, strong aftersales support is also a must. Manufacturers such as Mercedes-Benz operate 24-hour servicing, which greatly increases convenience to fleet users and reduces downtime as a van can be serviced when it may otherwise be sitting unused overnight.

One aspect of selecting a van that is often overlooked is the image the van portrays to customers. Jean Gilding, fleet controller of Stannah Management Services, says: “Our company has a strong brand image, so Mercedes-Benz vans suit us as they send out the right message when we arrive at a customer’s home. While a customer may not notice the van, they certainly would if it was something less suitable.”

 Meeting the varied demands of fleets and customers alike makes business services and facilities management among the most testing environments a van can work in. To succeed here, a van must excel in all areas.

Improving your business with the right van choice

The correct vehicles will reduce costs, increase reliability and improve brand image
Running a reliable fleet

Maximise vehicle on-road time to reduce fleet costs

Round-the-clock servicing keeps vans on the road to improve business efficiency

Maintenance control key to wholelife costs

Wholelife costs, dealer performance and aftersales support are among the key priorities when choosing a van supplier.

Control of maintenance and aftersales costs are key within wholelife costs. That means relationships with suppliers are important to ensure the fleet is treated as a high priority — “the impact on downtime can be massive”, said one fleet manager.

A Sewells Research & Insight report says: “It is not always about the discount you get upfront; it’s about downtime and parts availability.”

“The amount of time a van is off the road can turn into a lot of money.” Concerns among fleets include the fear that multiple drivers per vehicle may make it difficult to control unexpected costs such as damage, and that reporting systems work on different platforms which means there may be no single source of management reports to reach a conclusion on wholelife costs.

“The time a van is off the road can turn into a lot of money”

Hydraquip Group is bucking an industry trend for longer replacement cycles. The average age of its vans is reducing as part of an initiative designed to maximise uptime by reducing potential problems with vans as they age. Managing director Duncan MacBain, who founded the company in 1989, is rejuvenating the fleet as part of an ongoing review of all areas of fleet operation.

He says: “We are trying to have a programme of renewing vehicles and replacing older vans as much as we can. “We are trying to avoid breakdowns and problems. The intangible costs of having a vehicle off the road are high and there is a lot of disruption. It creates issues with lost business, moving other vehicles around and the management time involved in handling the issue, so I have changed strategy to improve the age of the fleet.”

The company has also reviewed its funding, shifting from outright purchase to leasing, and this has led directly to other initiatives that are aimed at maximising on-road time.

Analysis by its leasing partner Ogilvie Fleet to help with van choice focused on reliability and proximity of franchise service centres to the company’s business locations when deciding on potential vehicle suppliers.

As a result, the van fleet will be composed of Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 313 CDI high roof models operated on three-year/120,000-mile replacement cycles. Vehicles are fitted with racking and storage solutions by Bott before taking to the road.

Critically, many Mercedes-Benz dealers offer through-the-night servicing and MacBain is working closely with business partners Rossetts Commercials of Crawley and Sparshatts of Kent in Sittingbourne. Hydraquip Group offers its own customers a 24-hour service, including weekends, so the ability to access round-the-clock vehicle servicing and maintenance is critical to reducing downtime and further improving fleet flexibility.

MacBain, who operates around 100 vans, adds: “Managing drivers can be a challenge because they are spread across the country.”

“You get a mixture of driving styles and different levels of vehicle care.” To encourage drivers to keep vehicles in the best condition possible, Hydraquip is planning to provide an app that allows drivers to carry out vehicle checks before they start driving.

The app will also be used to deliver training and key safety messages. Hydraquip Group is also looking at upgrading its telematics system to provide more benefits.

MacBain says: “We currently use telematics. The biggest benefit is providing accurate arrival times to our customers, which is very important for our service centre staff.”

Customer service is also critical for Alf Tail Lifts, which installs and repairs tail lifts, shutter doors and other commercial vehicle body components.

“Customer service is our most important asset,” says managing director Phil Gibbs.

“Whether we’re dealing with a single vehicle owner or a national fleet operator, they can be assured of the same high level of attention.”

“We expect the same level of commitment from our suppliers.”

Alf Tail Lifts operates a fleet of 37 Mercedes-Benz Sprinters supplied by dealer Orwell Truck & Van and backed by the manufacturer’s complete care repair and maintenance contracts.

It is an approved contractor to all the major lift manufacturers and in addition to its workshop function, its vans serve as mobile parts counters.

As a result, they are close to fully loaded all the time.

To minimise any reliability risks, vehicles are serviced overnight.

Gibbs adds: “The fact that an engineer can drop his van off at the end of the working day, go home in a courtesy vehicle, and then pick the van up next morning ready to start work means we suffer virtually no downtime. This high-quality back-up helps us to live up to our commitment to our customers.”

This flexibility is provided to the Alf Tail Lifts by Mercedes-Benz dealers through the manufacturer’s 24-hour servicing programme.

“The intangible costs of having a vehicle off the road are high and there is a lot of disruption”

Duncan MacBain, managing director, Hydraquip Group

Encouraging drivers to reduce wear and tear is the most straightforward way to minimise garage bills and keep vehicles on the road.

Educating drivers to be sympathetic and gentle with their vehicles is a proven way of reducing SMR costs.

In addition, careful drivers tend to use less fuel and have fewer accidents, so ongoing training can keep maintenance bills down.

Drivers should also know the importance of looking after their vehicles, with regular checks of key areas such as oil, water and tyres, particularly on high mileage and heavy wear fleets such as those in the transport and distribution sector.

Tyres typically represent up to 40% of a vehicle’s maintenance budget and something as simple as incorrect tyre pressure can affect fuel economy by 10%.

Driving on tyres that are under-inflated by 20% could also mean a driver gets 23% fewer miles out of a set of tyres. This could be reduced further through harsh acceleration, braking and cornering.

Fleets can maximise efficiencies through the combined impact of reducing off-road requirements and having a strong service network partner, with a ‘right first time’ mentality among technicians.

Straightforward way to reduce wear and tear

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Key areas to benchmark for running a reliable fleet

- Breakdowns
- Warranty claims
- Driver feedback
- Dealer opening times
- Dealer training
- Off-road repair vehicle
- Wholelife costs per vehicle
- Wholelife costs per mile
- Driver performance

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Keeping drivers safe can deliver a competitive edge

Reducing risk is one way companies can get ahead in business services sector

The service sector is notorious for being an intensely competitive market, where customer service is vital and failing to deliver is a mortal sin, which puts intense pressure on fleet managers. When customers remember only that they were kept waiting or their supplier let them down, excuses about drivers encountering bumps and scrapes can be little comfort.

As a result, keeping drivers out of trouble isn’t just a concern for fleet managers in business services companies, it is a core service delivery issue that plays an important part in giving companies a competitive edge.

For Steve Haigh, group transport manager at asbestos management and abatement company Rhodar, minimising the risk of accidents and keeping drivers as safe as possible was one of his most important priorities after taking over the role of group transport manager nearly four years ago.

Since then, he has introduced a raft of best practice measures to ensure both its vehicles and drivers are safe and legal on the road. This protects more than just vans and drivers, as they may also have specialist equipment in tow. For example, some drivers tow mobile decontamination units, which are effectively highly-specialised caravans, divided into three compartments.

After working on an asbestos site, operatives enter at the ‘dirty end’, remove all their protective clothing, then move through to the middle section, which is equipped with showers, before exiting through the ‘clean end’.

Among safety strategies used by Rhodar are daily checking of vehicles, vehicle defect reporting, the introduction of driver handbooks, behind-the-wheel driver assessments and driving licence checking.

Wider-ranging initiatives have included the introduction of an occupational road risk policy, annual refresher training that covers both theory and practical assessments, and the introduction of a vehicle tracking and driver behaviour system in vehicles.

Haigh says: “On the back of these core policies, we have introduced a system of driver induction, whereby a driver completes a joining pack at the time of accepting a position.

“This allows us to gather basic information prior to the start date regarding licence status. The driver then completes an online assessment on day one of employment and, based on the results, a behind-the-wheel assessment can be completed.”

Once drivers are employed by the business, there is ongoing encouragement to be careful on the road, including a scheme to reward drivers for not having ‘at-fault’ accidents.

For the company, the rewards are equally attractive. “On the back of these policies, we saw a drop of more than 90% in at-fault driver accidents and an increase in fuel economy of 9% across the van fleet,” says Haigh.

Rhodar recently acquired 14 Mercedes-Benz Sprinters and a Vito to replace models from another manufacturer. This means the overwhelming majority of Rhodar’s fleet of more than 180 vans are now Mercedes-Benz models.

At car parts distributor Andrew Page, delivery in a time-sensitive environment is a key part of the job, so the company does all it can to avoid missed deliveries through accidents.

The company, which has recently added Mercedes-Benz Sprinters to its fleet, uses Masternaut’s fleet management solution to monitor, manage and improve driver behaviour, create a more efficient fleet and provide environmental cost savings.

Managers with fleet responsibility will now have access to extensive reports – all with the aim of improving vehicle efficiency and productivity.

From an HR perspective, fleet managers will be able to monitor and benchmark driver behaviour in order to provide feedback on driving habits. This allows them to educate and improve driver performance, helping to create a safer and more efficient mobile workforce.

Andrew Page decided to take on Masternaut’s product following a successful trial, which delivered a 7.1% improvement in fuel economy and a 47% reduction in ‘harsh events’, such as violent acceleration or braking.

Mark Saunders, chief operating officer at Andrew Page, said: “This is a major step for us in safeguarding the future of our business and we are delighted to be working closely with Masternaut.

“We pride ourselves on supplying the very best service to our customers and value the high standards we work to.”

At Evander Glazing and Locks, which has a fleet of 280 vans, the safety challenge is more difficult because these vehicles are often driven with large sheets of glass attached to the side of them.

Graham Short, fleet manager, said: “There is a big focus on health and safety. We employ glaziers and locksmiths, not drivers, so it’s up to me to make sure that they are able to work safely and efficiently.

“Also, our vans are quite prominent. They are all sign-written so they can be our best or worst advertisement.”

Among changes to make sure the fleet is sending out only positive messages on the road, is the introduction of telematics and a driver training programme, which includes post-collision assessment for repeat offenders.

A good starting point for van fleets that want to ensure they are following risk management best practice is taking part in the Van Excellence programme from the Freight Transport Association (FTA), according to Richard Stansfield, director of business development at Auto Electrical Services.

The programme helps fleets to achieve agreed standards of fleet management, which can then be audited by the FTA.

Stansfield says: “It has taken the risk of not knowing away. To know that we’re compliant is a weight off my mind.

“We can now stand up and say we do it right.”

What do fleets think of Mercedes-Benz vans?

Visit: www.mbvans.co.uk/fn
How the latest van safety technology can save lives

We look at some of the developments keeping drivers and other road users safe.

van safety technology has developed rapidly in recent years, with systems such as anti-lock braking and electronic stability programme now fitted on many models.

Mercedes-Benz has calculated that the number of single-vehicle accidents involving its vans fitted with this safety technology has fallen by 64% since 1999, with the biggest drop—39%—due to the introduction of ESC in 2002. Here we spotlight some of the latest technology available on the latest vans.

Electronic stability programme (ESP)

This was developed to help prevent sideways skids and control oversteer. All vans made after October 1999, with the biggest drop—39%—due to the introduction of ESC in 2002. It works and is estimated to save around 4,000 lives a year across Europe. It works by detecting when a vehicle may be skidding and automatically correcting it.

Anti-lock braking system (ABS)

If the system feels the wheels locking, it automatically turns the brakes on and off in rapid succession to ensure the vehicle can still be steered. The Bosch system appeared first as standard on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter in 2003 and is now standard on almost all new vans in the UK.

Autonomous emergency braking

AEB uses technologies such as radar, lasers and optical sensors to identify other vehicles and, in many cases, pedestrians, regulating brake application pressures if the driver does not appear to be responding in time to avoid a collision. It is available as Collision Prevention Assist on the new Sprinter.

Crosswind Assist

A boxy shape, which is, by definition, what a van presents, is vulnerable to the effects of crosswinds, with even moderate gusts capable of blowing them into an adjacent lane before the driver can react. Mercedes-Benz has developed Crosswind Assist, a system that utilises Adaptive ESP to apply a braking force to a wheel or wheels on the side the wind is coming from, the result is a much smaller deflection, “centimetres rather than metres”.

Lane Keeping Assist

If the system detects that the vehicle is drifting from one lane to another due to driver distraction or inattention it raises the alarm, allowing the driver to correct their mistake.

Blind spot monitoring

Blind spot monitoring systems are becoming common on modern cars, but larger vehicles present greater challenges due to their physical size. The Mercedes-Benz solution to the increased blind spot that a van has is to mount multiple sensors, giving a suitably wider angle of monitoring.

High beam Assist

Another Mercedes-Benz development, it uses a forward-facing camera to detect light sources in front of the vehicle, helping it decide whether high or low beam is appropriate before switching between them automatically.

Contract hire dominates business services sector

Vehicle funding method frees up capital for companies to use in other areas

T he business services and facilities management sector has one of the highest proportions of van fleets funded by contract hire. According to analysis from Sewells Research & Insight, it is third only to the Heavy industries/ Mining/Engineering/Other industries and IT/Software/Leisure/ Media sectors.

Contract hire is the main form of funding for 69% of van fleets in the sector. Just 13% opt for outright purchase, with the remainder using finance lease.

The sector is home to a range of well-known brands including The AA, ADT Fire and Security, Countrywide Estate Agents, Enterprise, Foxtons, Integral, Mitie, MacBain, Rentokil Initial and Stannah.

For a company such as Rentokil Initial, partnering with a leasing company helps the fleet department to have a more effective overview of the business’s transport needs, with fewer distractions from day-to-day operational challenges.

Richard Tiffany, global fleet director at Rentokil, said: “We have a lead role in a sale and leaseback of the firm’s 4,000-plus fleet when he was working with leasing giant Lex Autolease before joining the business services company.

He believes that leasing companies are a key factor in ensuring fleet departments can have a clearer view of strategy.

“ESP is estimated to save around 4,000 lives a year across Europe”

“ESP is estimated to save around 4,000 lives a year across Europe”

Contract hire 82%

Outright purchase 13%

Contract hire 69%

Outright purchase 13%

Other including finance lease 18%

Other including finance lease 18%

Contract hire 82%

Business services sector share of van finance

Source: Sewells

Source: Sewells

For more information on Mercedes-Benz vans, visit www.mbvans.co.uk/fn

Tiffany says: “We are here for strategy, car and van policy reviews, innovation and costs savings—we add value.

“We outsource all our car/fuel policy management, pool vehicles, driver queries, accident management, SMI and insurance — there is no point in us doing something that the leasing company can do better.”

For Hydraquip Group, opting for contract hire has helped the company manage strong recent growth, driven by organic expansion and the result of the collapse of competitors in the recession.

According to managing director Duncan MacBain, contract hire has freed up capital that was previously tied up in outright purchasing vehicles, including around 70 vans. The money has since been directed to funding expansion.

He says: “I had never thought of leasing vehicles before, but quickly discovered the benefits. In relation to providing the company with monthly fixed costs, reducing our maintenance bills and improved vehicle downtime management.”

In addition, expertise within its leasing partner has enabled the company to review its van choice list, leading to it opting for Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 313 CDI high roof models operated on three-year/120,000-mile replacement cycles.

Mercedes-Benz Financial Services has more than doubled the number of vehicles it finances since 2009 and now provides funding for one in every three Mercedes-Benz commercial vehicles.

The manufacturer’s leasing arm claims to supply credit to four out of every five customers who apply for funding. Although contract hire is a clear favourite among companies in the sector, their choices are constantly under review to ensure they remain cost effective.

Mite head of fleet management Justin Patterson keeps a steady watch on funding options to reflect the company’s ongoing acquisition and disposal of other businesses.

In addition to contract hire, his other funding method considerations range from structured finance lease to finance lease and hire purchase.

At lift manufacturer Stannah, vehicles are outright purchased. As Martin Carter, operations director, notes: “It depends what you would be doing with the cash.

If it’s just going to be sitting in the bank with poor interest rates we might as well put it to use.”

contract hire 82%

Business services sector share of car finance

Source: Sewells

Source: Sewells

Fleet financing

Contract hire 69%

Outright purchase 13%

Other including finance lease 18%

Other including finance lease 18%
Internet revolution changes demands on Kwik Fit’s fleet

Growth of mobile tyre fitting service places extra requirements on company’s vans

The internet has revolutionised the way many people buy tyres and how they have them fitted. Visiting a tyre depot is no longer the only option as many tyre-fitting companies have introduced mobile services.

One of the market leaders is Kwik Fit and its fleet director Peter Lambert is quick to identify the growing online trade as a key driver of his van fleet choices. He says: “More and more customers are shopping online, so our mobile tyre fitting service is very popular and growing. This means our mobile fleet has to grow to meet demand. At the moment, around 20% of our mobile business is for retail customers who buy online.”

At present, Kwik Fit Mobile fleet has 200 vans. They are predominantly Mercedes-Benz Sprinters whose robust and durable characteristics are ideally suited to Kwik Fit’s demanding requirements. These include more than the usual business requirements of load capacity and weight. Lambert explains: “We use high roof Sprinters as this enables our technicians to work in the van safely and comfortably when using the tyre fitting and balancing equipment. “By the nature of the work we do, our technicians often visit customers in residential areas or company car parks where space is at a premium. The Sprinter’s excellent manoeuvrability and turning circle is a big asset.”

Wholelife data analysis

While Kwik Fit Mobile does operate some other makes and models of van, the Sprinter continues to be the most popular vehicle on the fleet. A fundamental part of the purchasing process is the completion of an in-depth wholelife cost analysis. Reliability is a prerequisite and access to an aftersales network that is available 24/7 also ranks very highly in the list of must-have attributes. “Aftersales is hugely important because as well as optimising uptime, we also want to operate the vans for longer each day and the days of a van being allocated to an individual driver are long gone,” says Lambert. “Mercedes-Benz is very good in this respect as it offers out-of-hours servicing. This suits us as our drivers can finish a shift late in the evening and then the van is taken away to be serviced or repaired and is back returned ready for the first shift the following day.”

Another element of the benchmarking process for Kwik Fit is using telematics to monitor fuel cost and driver behaviour. In the future, the functionality of the telematics system will be enhanced to include route optimisation which, when combined with live access to centre and warehouse stock, will enable customers to place their orders later in the day and still have their tyres fitted on the same day. “Having the three-pointed star on the front of our vans helps to reinforce our brand values of quality, reliability, value for money and, above all, outstanding customer service.”

Despite the low mileage, the engines in Kwik Fit Mobile’s Sprinters are hard working as they have to supply the power required to operate the tyre fitting and balancing equipment and the air compressor. It goes without saying that the reliability of its van fleet plays a critical part in Kwik Fit being able to deliver its customer promise.

Responsible driving behaviour

While telematics is important to assessing a van’s potential for Lambert, he also believes driver behaviour can have an impact on residual values. “We are a high-profile company so our drivers need to demonstrate common courtesy to other road users,” he says. “Driver education is critical and this is one of the reasons why Kwik Fit is enrolling in FTA’s Van Excellence programme.”

As well as reducing accidents, this programme should also lead to lower fuel and maintenance costs. “While the majority of Kwik-Fit Mobile’s technicians will tell you that they prefer the Sprinter, if the sums don’t add up our technicians might be disappointed. “However, the Sprinter’s wholelife costs continue to be competitive as the excellent residual values and fuel consumption plays a big part in offsetting its initially higher front-end price.”

At present, Lambert sees no reason why the Sprinter will not continue to be Kwik Fit Mobile’s first choice of van. Lambert says: “Lifecycle costs tell much more of the story than the front-end price and the Sprinter is safe, reliable and cost-effective. “Playing the three-pointed star on the front of our vans helps to reinforce our brand values of quality, reliability, value for money and, above all, outstanding customer service.”

Aftersales is hugely important as we want to run vans for longer each day”

Peter Lambert, fleet director, Kwik Fit

Case study: Kwik Fit

For more best practice case studies of van fleets, visit www.mbvans.co.uk/fn

Peter Lambert, fleet director, Kwik Fit

To download the full case study, please visit www.mbvans.co.uk/fn.
Portraying a strong brand image is vital for Stannah
Van choice helps stairlift company get the right message across to customers

Stannah is a family-owned business which has a long history of delivering quality products and services. Consequently, the company takes its place in the industry very seriously, which means that reliability is a core value, one that permeates every fibre of the business including its vehicle fleet.

“Stannah has a very strong brand image, it’s the reason customers choose us over our competitors. Our fleet of vans are a very visible part of this,” says Jean Olding, fleet controller of Stannah Management Services.

Lift and stairlift manufacturer Stannah was recognised as having the UK’s leading mid-sized fleet at the 2014 Fleet News Awards. Mercedes-Benz’s Sprinter and Vito models make up 20% of its van fleet, with the Sprinter being the preferred choice for its installation division.

The Vito vans are also used by service engineers and have racking fitted in the load bay to carry tools, equipment and spare parts safely. The Vitos also come with roof rails supplied by Mercedes-Benz.

Olding acknowledges wholelife costs are the primary deciding factor in choosing a van for the Stannah fleet. She says: “The total cost of ownership data we have and that provided by ARI, our fleet management company, gives the basis for our purchasing decisions.”

As well as the size and weight capability to meet Stannah’s requirements, Olding says driver comfort is taken into account when choosing the standard spec of a vehicle.

“Our drivers are doing a lot of miles,” she says. “Typically, our vans cover 120,000 miles during a five-year life as part of our fleet. This means driver behaviour is also an important area to look at.”

The company has introduced tracking. Olding adds: “Having trackers fitted to the Stannah fleet has seen an improvement in performance and efficiency of our large fleet of service vehicles, along with a reduction in fleet costs and fuel savings, and an improvement in driver behaviour.

“It has also helped deliver a quick response time and improved service to our customers.”

Operating across the UK from 18 locations means Stannah can work anywhere in the country.

Olding adds: “Our customers can rely on us to meet their needs seven days a week and 365 days a year. It gives us peace of mind knowing that most of the Mercedes-Benz commercial sites can provide 24/7 service support.”

Again, Olding is happy with the relationship Stannah has built up with Mercedes-Benz.

She says: “We’ve seen an improvement with lower accident rates and fuel consumption”.

Jean Olding, Stannah

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