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Good for you

Another month, another report published based on an investigation launched after a tragic accident. This time it is light trailers (750kg-3.5t, category O2), and a campaign following the death of toddler Freddie Hussey, killed after being hit by a small trailer that had detached from the back of a car (see p7). We last covered light trailer safety in January: www.is.gd/uquhoj.

Lack of data was an interesting similarity between this report, www.is.gd/gucomu, and the one covered in last month's issue about commercial vehicle tyres ('Known unknowns'). The authors struggle to understand what is going on, simply because few have studied light trailer accidents. That's not necessarily a bad thing; the whole point of new research is to increase the extent of human knowledge.

Anyway, what little systematic information there was didn't paint a pretty picture of light trailers. A DVSA survey is cited that found that 50% of light trailers stopped were non-compliant: top faults included tyres and hitches. Of those, more than half were taken off of the roads immediately because of serious safety risks. And, like tyres, older trailers were generally in worse shape than newer ones. (Workshops wishing to raise standards might consider the irtec light accreditation for technicians.)

As far as accidents go, however, the authors pointed the finger of blame not at the trailers' condition but at the poor behaviour of their drivers. That's not surprising. Towing light trailers, just like driving a light van, can be done with only a standard car licence. The point is, while they may be doing commercial work by carrying the driver's equipment, vans and light trailers fall outside of the regulatory universe of commercial vehicles. They do not need to bear the additional responsibilities of licensed HGV and PSV operators.

So what? In condemning the poor practice of an unregulated industry, it gives the O licence system a big pat on the back. All of that expensive training and laborious certification required of hauliers actually works. In particular, the operators of 250,000 O3 trailers (3.5t-10t) and O4 (10t+) trailers and semi-trailers used for goods haulage are far more compliant than the O2 ones without it. And this report publishes the data to prove it.

Will Dalrymple
Editor