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President
Michael Sweetmore EngTech MSOE MIRTE LCGI
Chief Executive
Bruce McGill

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Registered Office
22 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PR
Tel: 020 7630 1111
Fax: 020 7630 6677
Email: soe@soe.org.uk
www.soe.org.uk

Editor
Will Dalrymple
Email: will.dalrymple@markallengroup.com

Contributing Editors
Steve Banner, John Challen,
Toby Clark, Laura Cork, Dan Gilkes,
Peter Shakespeare, Richard Simpson,
Chris Tindall, Lucy Radley, Brian Wall

Art Editor
Chris Charles

Production Manager
Nicki McKenna
Email: nicki.mckenna@markallengroup.com

Advertisement Manager
Craig Molloy
Email: craig.molloy@markallengroup.com
Tel: 01322 221144

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Jon Benson
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Fuel's errand

Every January, we publish an overview of the big business issues facing CV operators and provide estimates of running costs for benchmarking (p16). Below is an example of how to use them.

Last year, I learned how many vehicle OEMs have expanded their driver training provision. This in-depth training aims to help drivers get the best out of the vehicle in terms of fuel efficiency and safety. Despite the familiar cabin environment and controls, modern trucks are complicated, particularly at the heavy end. Driving style and strategy plays a massive role in their overall performance.

These one-day courses are not very expensive; some are free. And yet, OEMs tell me that they either struggle to sign up customers in the first place, or arrange training only to have the drivers cancel at the last minute, as they are bidden to cover another job on the day.

This is a conflict between short-term and long-term problems. Our tables allow us to estimate the significance of the latter, at least. And at first glance, fuel costs are a huge expense across the vehicle parc. At 38t and above (and very nearly 33t), annual fuel costs exceed the driver's entire salary. At these large scales, it stands to reason that even a small improvement can have a big effect on the bottom line. Based on the data, the value, in pounds, of a 1%, 3% and 5% improvement in fuel economy was estimated for each class of vehicle (from 7.5t up). And the average value for each of those percentiles was £314, £941 and £1,568, respectively.

How significant is that? Let's assume the average UK driver, Earl, works five days a week and receives the legal minimum of 28 days holiday (including bank holidays), earning £35,631, which is the average driver salary from 7.5t up. That's a day rate of £154.

So, in crude terms, a 1% improvement over the average fuel economy is worth two days of Earl's time. And that's just the average. At the heaviest end, where miles have increased and fuel efficiencies decreased, the benefit of 1% is nearly three times the driver day rate.

Fleet managers: can you afford for your drivers not to be trained?

Will Dalrymple
Editor

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