Halfords first with next-gen Bevan21 body

Halfords has become the first on the road with Bevan's newly adapted truck body design that promises new standards for aerodynamic efficiency.

The box body vehicle combines the curved roof profile, specially moulded air deflector and cab collar of its established streamlined Bevan21 design, but with additional new features to the rear quarter.

Halfords logistics controller Mark Shirley explains that these include tapered body sides and a rear air diffuser, said to smooth airflow over and around the back of the truck, so reducing its drag.

He says that its capacity to carry cages is unimpaired and expects to achieve "valuable fuel cost savings and a reduction in carbon emissions" from the truck, which is making multi-drop deliveries to Halfords' stores with access too restricted to accommodate its larger vehicles.

This first, next-generation Bevan21 body has been mounted on an 18-tonne Mercedes-Benz Axor 1824 chassis with day cab. Halfords has also taken two more 18-tonne Axors from dealer Gerard Mann Commercials, one of which has a sleeper cab.

Both of these vehicles are fitted with Bevan's earlier design of Bevan21 bodies, fitted only with curved roof profiles and cab fairings, and Halfords and its distribution partner DHL say they will compare the two designs in operation to assess the value of the extra features.

As for the rest of the trucks' equipment, they include the range of Axor safety features, embracing handbrake-off alarms and obstacle sensors for safe manoeuvring. They also have 1.5-tonne Dhollandia column tail-lifts, fitted with side ramps and safety gates, while the undersides of Bevan's rear headers and load compartments incorporate recessed LED lights to aid working in dark areas.

"Cutting fuel consumption is another way in which we can make savings to pass on to our customers," comments Shirley.

"The vehicles promise fuel cost savings of around five per cent, so we will be monitoring the performance of these trucks closely over the next three months… The results of this exercise will determine our vehicle commissioning decisions."

The three Axors were all bought on a five-year contract hire deal with Mercedes-Benz CharterWay finance company, configured for 125,000km each per year. They will be maintained in Gerard Mann's Coventry workshops.

Euro 5 Fuso Canter Luton for Purdie & Sons

Removals firm Matt Purdie & Sons has taken delivery of a 7.5-tonne Mitsubishi Fuso Canter 7C15D, which, it says, has plugged a gap in the fleet.

The company needed a new truck to supplement its 18-strong fleet and chose the Canter for its 'Double' crewcab, capable of carrying a driver and six passengers in comfort.

Says managing director Matt Purdie: "The Canter has several key attributes that made it ideally suited to plugging a gap in our fleet. The Double cab means it can carry enough staff to handle large, heavy items, such as grand pianos.

"The fact that the cab was a factory option, rather than an aftermarket conversion, also means we have no concerns about build quality or warranty."

Purdie also cites the vehicle's relatively compact dimensions. "It has a footprint more akin to a 3.5-tonne van than a 7.5-tonne truck. That allows it to get into locations with poor parking or restricted access, with relative ease," he says.

And he adds: "Because the chassis is much lighter than most vehicles in the same weight class, it can accommodate a heavy removals body, while retaining a useful payload. Our new Canter's body design means it can carry two standard furniture containers."

Additionally, Purdie refers to the fact that the Canter's cab does not tilt – which meant he was able to specify a Luton-style body, providing useful extra storage over the cab.

Bodywork for the truck was handled by Unique Van Bodies of Warrington, which also fitted its 1.0-tonne tail-lift. Livery was from Forrest Hepburn & McDonald of Edinburgh.

Like all new Fuso Canters, Purdie's 7.5-tonner exceeds Euro 5 emissions standards, also meeting the stringent EEV (enhanced environmentally-friendly vehicle) mark.

"We keep our trucks for a long time and always have one eye on the future," says Purdie. "Our work takes us into Europe, as well as all over Britain, and Euro 4 vehicles are likely to be banned from low emission zones long before our Canter reaches the end of the road."

Scania spoiler claims two per cent fuel save

Scania has begun tests of a rear air deflector, known as a boat-tail, said to reduce fuel consumption by up to two percent.

The truck giant suggests that, if proven, that corresponds to an annual saving of 1,200 litres of fuel and three tonnes of CO_2 emissions for a truck running 200,000km a year.

Its trials are being conducted on Scania's Transport Laboratory trucks – the wholly owned subsidiary of Scania that tests and evaluates vehicle characteristics and performance in commercial road haulage.

"For Transport Laboratory trucks, which run 360,000km per year and consume an average of 26 litres of fuel per 100km, this represents an

annual saving of almost 1,900 litres of diesel and five tonnes of CO_2 per truck," comments Anders Gustavsson, managing director of Scania Transport Laboratory.

And he adds: "This kind of aerodynamic improvement is positive for industry profitability, as well as the environment – and is equivalent to the results of several years of engine and chassis development work."

The boat-tail is mounted on a normal three-axle semitrailer for European long-haulage. The length of the vehicle combination increases by 30 cm – equivalent to the extra length permitted for a tail-lift or other loading equipment, according to European Union Directive 97/27 EC.

"The tests are limited to Sweden and Denmark, while we await final word on how road and traffic authorities in the Netherlands and Germany view our interpretation and application of the EU directive," explains Gustavsson – referring to a recently introduced EU proposal that would amend the current Directive 97/27 EC to allow trailers to be equipped with a rear air deflector of this length.

"This is a solution that does not encroach on cargo space and can also be retrofitted on existing trailers. In light of this, I hope that European trailer manufacturers will find it of interest to begin developing an integrated boat-tail. It involves a very simple technical solution that could quickly help reduce transport costs and environmental impact," asserts Gustavsson.

Best Electrical gets tracking revenue boost

Electrical contractor Best Electrical reports increasing productivity – to the tune of €60,000 worth of additional business – since installing FleetMatics' GPS vehicle tracking system.

Robert Ranson, director of operations for Best Electrical, says that the firm is now completing an additional job per day per engineer. "We know our engineers are doing their jobs and not sitting on the side of the road, taking a two-hour break," he states.

Ranson says he uses the Live Fleet feature to monitor the location and status of all eight vehicles in his fleet. "We have significantly reduced personal use of our vehicles since the drivers know I monitor usage," he says. "And for my own sanity, I now know that my engineers are where they are supposed to be, when they are supposed to be there."

He also comments on FleetMatics' nearest vehicle locator function, which pinpoints the vehicle closest to any job site. With this feature, he says, Best Electrical can respond faster to emergency calls and despatch an engineer likely to get there first. "Our fuel costs have gone down dramatically," adds Ranson, "and we now have a much better response time than our competitors."

And he concludes: "With the Google mapping, I can see right where my engineer is and help him, if he gets lost. I'll tell them, 'You see that white building right in front of you? That's where you need to be!'"