

SSE gets green Mercedes-Benz Sprinters

One of the UK's largest energy producers has switched to a fleet of 400 environmentally friendly Mercedes-Benz Sprinter vans.

Scottish and Southern Energy's (SSE) new Sprinters are powered by low-emission 129hp Euro 5 engines and equipped with the BlueEfficiency package, which further reduces emissions, and makes them even greener and more economical.

Mike Lauriello, Lex Autolease corporate business development director, who was responsible for arranging the five-year contract hire deal, says that fuel efficiency and safety were top of the specification list for SSE's new vans.

Hence BlueEfficiency, which bundles in automatic ECO-Start engine cutting technology and the low rolling resistance tyres, as well as higher efficiency power steering, fuel pump and battery management.

Hence also SSE's choice of the current Sprinter model, with its active and passive safety equipment. In this case, additional safety measures include passenger airbags and handles for each access point, so that operatives entering and leaving the vehicle have three points of contact at all times.

Further, since these vans frequently tow trailers weighing up to 2.5 tonnes, SSE was particularly attracted to Mercedes' Trailer Stability Assist system, which works with the vehicle's adaptive ESP (electronic stability program) to detect and correct any trailer swaying motion, automatically



keeping the combination in line. Most of the 383 vehicles bought are 3.5-tonne Sprinter 313CDI panel vans, which are now serving as SSE's workhorses. However, 79 are 5.0-tonne Sprinter 513CDI panel vans, fitted with Versalift 14m access platforms and stabiliser legs, primarily for maintaining street lighting columns.

All SSE's Sprinters have been fitted with racking systems, roof-racks and rear steps, by Tevo. Most are also equipped to tow generators, compressors and trailers for use with plant items, such as mini-diggers.

"The Sprinters were chosen for this order after we worked through a detailed evaluation, along with our client," states Lauriello.

"The order was based on a long list of criteria: the vans had to be fit for purpose. We also looked at driver acceptance, cab comfort and practical user acceptance – taking in factors such as the height of the rear step – then compiled a detailed analysis of projected whole-life costs," he explains.

Representatives of both SSE and Lex attended last year's Mercedes-Benz Van Experience, a showcase event.

"Features such as the adaptive ESP stability program are impressive enough on paper, but when you see and feel how well the system works on a skid pan, you really appreciate what a vital contribution to safety it makes," comments Lauriello.

Currie European refreshes DAF CF truck fleet

One of the largest UK-based international transport operators, Currie European, has taken delivery of 35 new DAF XF105s.

The Scottish haulier has opted for 14 FTG 460bhp tractor units and 21 FTG 510bhp trucks as replacements for three-year old DAF CFs on the company's 115-strong fleet.

"We have always run DAF trucks and, over the years, they have proven to be reliable, fuel-efficient and popular vehicles," explains Alister Cook, group operations director at Currie European.

"Our fleet replacement policy means that vehicles are changed or upgraded every three years and, with several key contract wins, we've taken the decision this time to renew with the bigger XF."

Currie European specified a mix of Space Cabs and Super Space cabs on its

newcomers, in order to reduce road noise during transit. The 44-tonne FTG mid-lift axle trucks all come fitted with DAF's AS-Tronic automated manual transmission, which Cook believes is helping to deliver further fuel efficiency gains, in tandem with



both the 460bhp and 510bhp Euro 5 12.9-litre Paccar MX engines.

"Rising fuel costs are a major concern for most transport operators. However, DAFs have always been great at returning optimum revenue per mile," he states.

"For further gains in fuel efficiency we are using Masternaut vehicle telematics software for assessing fuel consumption, excessive idling, vehicle tracking and accurate ETAs," he adds.

One more point: Cook also reckons that XF trucks in his selected configuration and equipment spec are good for residual values.

All Currie European's new DAFs are expected to cover 160,000km per year. They were purchased through Paccar Financial, and supplied by Solway DAF on a full R&M contract.

Tomato Plant goes for specialist truck



Buckinghamshire's newest specialist haulage company has wasted no time in going large, with work at the Download Donington Park and Glastonbury festivals, since establishing itself in June.

At the centre of Tomato Plant's operation is an 8x4 Volvo FM 500 Globetrotter truck, mounted with a bespoke plant body and

hydraulic beavertail, from Andover Trailers. In addition to a Fassi crane, the truck has been fitted with a VBG ball-and-jaw coupling to enable it to operate with an Andover tri-axle centre balance drawbar trailer, which helps to maximise the vehicle's payload scope.

Keith Williams of Tomato Plant says he visited Andover Trailers in the early stages of

forming the company, having seen the quality of an Andover vehicle at a local service station. "We couldn't have achieved what we have already without a quality flagship vehicle and the Andover team has really delivered the goods," he states.

"They impressed us with their service from the initial design stages to handing over the vehicle," he adds.

The plant body, which measures 7.9m by 2.5m, has been fitted with a remote-control winch, hardwood floor, fuel-saving fold-forward ramps and five pairs of lashing points to secure any combination of loads.

It also features telescopic legs to provide a steady platform during loading and unloading of heavy equipment.

Tomato Plant's new truck will operate with the 6m x 2.5m tri-axle drawbar trailer, also equipped with a rear beavertail.

Andover has shaped the front of the drawbar to allow ramps leading onto the plant body to lock into place, enabling easy through-loading, without having to detach the trailer. It also features Granning axles and air suspension, together with powerful EBS brakes.

Ben branches out with first Mercedes-Benz Unimog

Forestry contractor Ben Nicholson, who has now been running his Unimog for three months, says the new truck started off well and is still growing on him. Key to the all-wheel drive off-roader's appeal for Nicholson Tree Services is its versatility – from the go-anywhere capability of a tractor to the on-road speed and comfort of a truck.

The Unimog U400 was supplied by North Yorkshire dealer AC Price and came fitted with a wood chipper, which channels chippings via a spout into a high-sided box body, both of which are demountable. Nicholson explains that this means he can also use the truck as a dropsider and to tow trailers as well.

He also points to the panoramic cab, which can seat three, the truck's 286hp engine and its automatic transmission. "Previously, whenever I took a tractor to a site, I'd have to send a van along as well to transport a second member of the team and carry my saws and other tools," he explains. "Now, everything goes on my Unimog."

AC Price built the sub-frame, chipbox and three-point linkage at its factory in Ingleton, adding hydraulics and a rear PTO, so that the chipper can be operated from the back of the vehicle, as well as the front.

The firm also designed, manufactured and fitted the hydraulic pick-up hitch, which has an integrated camera as well.

"My new Unimog is a fantastic all-rounder. It's a self-contained unit that combines excellent manoeuvrability with unbeatable all-terrain capability," states Nicholson. "It's already playing a key role within the business."



Wheel security course accredited

IRTE has confirmed that Bridgestone UK's commercial wheel security training course – developed by Phil Thirsk, Bridgestone UK's technical training manager – meets all criteria for CPD (continuing professional development).

"I am really pleased that the course has been accepted by the IRTE," states Thirsk. "This reinforces what we are trying to do with our training. The IRTE has a reliable and trustworthy name in the commercial vehicle sector."

The approval comes at a time when Bridgestone is showcasing its commitment to competence, training and excellence in engineering.

Thirsk makes the point that detached wheels from commercial vehicles are often described as bouncing bombs. And with good reason: around 10 people are either killed or seriously injured every year by them.

Bridgestone UK's commercial vehicle wheel security course is aimed at fleet users and tyre service providers. To date, the course has received excellent feedback from coach and haulage technicians alike, as well as tyre technicians from independent tyre service providers.