

Every manufacturer would like to describe their latest vehicle as the most important new arrival for years. However, with the launch of the E-Transit, Ford could justifiably lay claim to that title. The company may have come relatively late to the electric van sector, but the E-Transit moves the game on in many ways.

It is powered by a 68kWh battery pack, positioned beneath a load floor that is just a few mm above that of the diesel rear-driven model. The van has a rear axle-mounted drive motor, that is offered with a choice of 135kW (179bhp) or 198kW (261bhp) of power. While both of those numbers are higher than any of the company's diesel offerings, the two motor outputs both come with 430Nm of torque, which is more in line with the diesel vans.

Given the instant full-torque delivery of an electric motor, though, it is also the more important number when it comes to driving the E-Transit, which accelerates effortlessly, from almost any speed.

Ford quotes a WLTP driving range of up to 196 miles. That will be influenced by payload, ambient temperature, speed and driving behaviour, but will probably correspond to a realistic urban mileage for many customers of at least 150 miles. With many manufacturers stating that at least 70% of European van operators seldom travel more than 60-70 miles in a day, that should solve any range worries.

The E-Transit has both AC and rapid DC charging inputs behind a flap that sits just below the Ford badge on the grille. That is perfect if you pull in front end first to a public charger, but companies that want to charge while backed into a loading dock may have to think exactly how they configure their recharging infrastructure within a depot.

The AC charger can handle inputs of up to 11kW, providing a full charge from zero in around eight hours, or overnight. The DC rapid charger can cope with up



Ford's entry into the large electric van sector signals a much bigger shift in the market, argues Dan Gilkes

Electric vans go mainstream

to 115kW, offering a 15-80% top-up in just 30 minutes, which could in effect almost double the available range with a well-planned, rapid-charge lunch stop.

The big Ford is being launched in 25 different variants with gross weights from 3.5 to 4.25 tonnes, which can all be driven on a car licence with no requirement for an operator's licence, providing up to 1,758kg of payload. There are three panel van lengths with two roof heights on offer, delivering load volumes of 9.5 to 15.1m³. Chassis cabs are also available, in L3 and L4 lengths, for a host of bodybuilder options, while Ford dealers can supply a range of pre-bodied One-Stop-Shop conversions.

The E-Transit has what Ford calls ProPower Onboard. This is an electrical outlet delivering up to 2.3kW of

electrical power, through 240V or 12V plugs, that can be positioned in the cab or in the load area. This will allow trades to run power tools directly from the E-Transit's drive batteries while on site, or to charge them between jobs. It also offers a power source for converters, to operate fridges and other electrical systems on the vans.

FORD PRO

Ford Pro will offer buyers, or those signing the lease agreement, not just the vehicles, but also software, service, charging and finance, if needed. Speaking at the launch of the E-Transit in Spain last year, Ted Cannis, CEO of Ford Pro, said: "It's not just the vehicle, it's the whole ecosystem. Customers who have taken up this complete



solution in the US are already saving around 10% in operating costs.”

Ford Pro Charging has consultants that can help identify the best charging solutions for individual customers. This includes hardware installations and management software to make recharging easier and to help with scheduling for larger vehicle fleets. It can also simplify home wallbox installation, for those drivers who take their van home, and can provide access to public charging stations, with a centralised billing infrastructure.

Ford Pro Service brings together the 800 European Transit Centres and more than 1,500 EV-certified dealers, with a growing number of FordLiive connected uptime centres. These currently exist in Essex, Cologne and

Valencia and will be coming online in Budapest and Gothenburg later this year. All Ford commercial vehicles have an internal modem that, when activated in agreement with the customer, can be used to monitor vehicle performance.

In the event of a breakdown or a visit to a dealer, the vehicle is highlighted at the FordLiive Centre, which then keeps in contact with the dealer to see if any additional parts or service expertise are required to get it back on the road. The company claims that subscribing to FordLiive can potentially cut fleet downtime by up to 60%.

Ford Pro Financing offers vehicles, products and services through Ford Pro FinSimple, a finance plan for small to medium fleets. Products include purchase and leasing, online account management and the option of a finance expert to help with consultation. This also includes conversion work and fleet electrification, such as Ford Pro Charging solutions.

Ford Fleet Management, delivered by Ford in partnership with ALD Automotive, has announced a flexible leasing solution for those wanting to trial an E-Transit. The van can be leased for up to three years, without being tied into a long-term lease contract and avoiding early termination fees. It also applies to converted vans, either through the One-Stop-Shop scheme, or built by any of Ford's QVM (Qualified Vehicle Modifier) approved bodybuilders.

Lastly, Ford makes use of that on-board modem through two telematics offerings. Customers with up to five vans can use FordPass Pro, a smartphone-based app that allows managers to see vehicle location and health, remotely lock and unlock doors and manage recharging schedules.

For customers with more than five vans, there is Ford E-Telematics, which uses live data to help maximise fleet productivity. The system provides charge status, vehicle-specific state of charge

ANALYSIS

Could the E-Transit provide a test ground for a later move to electric trucks? In some ways, yes it could, as it lets fleet managers get used to working with EV operating ranges and maximising recharging opportunities. The vans have certainly been designed to fit easily into an existing fleet operation.

Perhaps more importantly though, the vehicle itself is almost secondary to the infrastructure, or 'ecosystem' as Ford would describe it, that is required to help customers to transition to battery-electric drive. The E-Transit is an e-LCV that will evolve and improve further as battery technology moves forwards. The Ford Pro services that support the van are what will make it a popular choice with users. -Dan Gilkes

and remaining range information, with adjustable low-range alerts possible. Data from Ford telematic products can also be integrated into third-party fleet management software if preferred.

ON THE ROAD

Even with a 500kg load in the back, the E-Transit offers instant acceleration with either motor. The van is incredibly quiet and refined, even on the UK's broken road surfaces. There are Normal, Eco and Slippery driving modes, the van starting in Normal or Eco after being turned off.

There is also an L button in the middle of the rotary gear selector, which brings regenerative braking into play. A tap on the brake pedal can also be used to activate half regeneration, with two taps equating to the full L setting, but only until you accelerate again. Other than that, there are few surprises for existing Transit drivers in the cab. That said, it will be worth training drivers in the use of regeneration and the various drive modes to achieve the most productive use of the vehicle. **TE**