

Vision *express*

Do tomorrow's trucks need even more mirrors and, if so, could they have prevented some recent high-profile accidents? John Challen looks for answers

Arclid Transport was thrust into the spotlight in March after footage of one of its trucks emerged on the Internet. On the face of it, there's nothing unusual about that but, in this case, the operator's DAF XF tanker was charging down the M1 with a Renault Clio glued sideways to its front.

The incident, which took place in January, is not in isolation. The week after the Arclid video was posted, there was another accident, this time involving a Volvo truck from B&Q's fleet, which, while travelling the M25, collected a Vauxhall Astra and shunted it for one mile at speeds up to 60mph.

Peter Conway, transport manager at Arclid Transport, says his company has been quick to respond. "The investigation is still ongoing, but being a proactive company we made the decision to act as soon as we could," he confirms. "When each of the 28 vehicles on the fleet comes up for servicing, they are automatically being fitted with a downward facing [front] mirror."

Few retrofits

While it is a legal requirement for all vehicles registered after 21 January 2007 to be fitted with the Class VI (or downward facing) mirrors, examples of pre-existing trucks being retrofitted with the mirrors are few and very far between. Arclid's internal investigation is set to reach a conclusion by the middle of June and Conway declines to comment on whether the fitment of such a mirror would have prevented the accident.

VOSA's Andy Cattell, head of large vehicle policy, sheds more light on the subject: "A Class VI mirror would have mitigated [the accident]. The driver would have been afforded the view, in compliance with the legal framework, in front of his truck. Because the mirror was in that square, he would have identified there was a car there."



So how much does an extra mirror reduce the risk? Cattell contends that there is only a certain amount of time available to drivers for checking mirrors. "On their left-hand side, drivers have a normal mirror, wide angle mirror and a close proximity mirror," he says. "They have the same on the right, but without the close proximity mirror. Then there is the speedo, illumination devices and front mirror. Ergonomics will dictate the amount of time he'd spend on those items."

Cattell agrees he rarely sees older vehicles retrofitted with Class VI mirrors, despite those items being mandatory on all new trucks. Maybe it takes high profile incidents such as those above to make fleet managers follow the spirit, rather than merely the letter, of the law? **TE**

"It's been this way for years..."

Retired accident investigator Derek Smith spent nearly 20 years investigating 400 fatal accidents in the Greater Manchester area – many involving pedestrians coming into contact with trucks. While he welcomes the introduction of the 2007 Class VI mirror legislation, he feels it could have come much sooner.

"I was particularly heartened to note the recent additional mirrors that are now appearing on commercial vehicles. However, the Department of Transport was warned nearly two decades ago that a problem had been identified," says Smith.

He also has a view on the Arclid Transport incident: "That event clearly demonstrates the danger triangle from the bottom of the windscreen. But, with the emphasis on constant use of mirrors while driving, the car must have been in some sort of view [of the driver] at some point," he observes. "Other types of accidents I have dealt with, particularly on motorways, involve a simple clip of a lorry front with the rear of a car, which is enough to spin the vehicle sideways."

"The ratio of 38 tonnes to one gives little hope of a constructive momentum exchange assessment," he continues. "If a proper look-out is not being kept, the only clue for the lorry driver would be a slight sharp tremor that could have been anything. It would, however, show up on the tachograph, which we used to find extremely useful."