

Grocontinental confirms role of telematics

Storage and distribution firm Grocontinental reckons it has seen a rise from 20% to 65% in its drivers achieving a 'B' rating on MAN's EcoStyle driver and vehicle performance tool, since its introduction this year.

That matters because, as transport manager Chris Humphries says, the increase has also led to a significant improvement in efficiency and, importantly, a stabilisation of fuel economy across the fleet.

MAN EcoStyle went live at the Shropshire-based company in January with Grocontinental's fleet of 54 MAN TGX tractor units. The company's transport division comprises 56 tractor units and 120 temperature-controlled trailers, which operate throughout Europe.

The web-based system monitors driving parameters, such as harsh braking and acceleration, maintaining sweet-spot engine revs and minimising



Grocontinental's driver performance helps fuel economy

idle time. Drivers are then trained to optimise their performance, irrespective of the terrain or the load they are carrying on their vehicles.

Says Humphries: "[MAN's course] really opened my eyes

on how much a driver can actually influence the fuel economy of the vehicle. We were driving the training vehicle, which was fitted with a permanent fuel meter, and we saw how our driving could

go from the worst case of 0.8mpg to using no fuel at all!"

Incidentally, Grocontinental has also created a text-based system (accessible only when the vehicle is stationary) to provide drivers with on-the-road instructions.

That addition was driven through by joint managing director David Grocott. Mobile phones have since been removed from the fleet and replaced by written instructions from the planning office.

"This is the first time that we feel that we are able to influence the way our drivers handle their vehicles in a more safe and efficient way," comments Grocott.

"We have made a huge investment in the new trucks, and this new technology ensures that we stay at the forefront of the industry and continue to expand and develop our business."

The Traffic Commissioner for Scotland, who suspended Aberdeen-based haulage operator W&H Leslie's licence for 10 days in April following a truck wheel detachment, has released useful details of the issues behind her decision.

Joan Aitken's public inquiry heard evidence from a VOSA vehicle examiner that, on 14 August 2009, one of the company's vehicles, carrying 23 tonnes of timber from Elgin to England, lost its nearside third axle wheel.

The inquiry was told that the driver had been on the road for about one hour when, at the bends on the A90 near Finavon, Forfar, he "noticed the nearside third axle wheel had come off the hub and was passing the tractor unit".

That wheel travelled across the carriageway, crossing the central reservation, and bouncing into the northbound carriageway, before coming to rest 50m into a field.

But the maintenance

investigation last September showed several revealing issues. In evidence, the VOSA examiner cited observing two suspended vehicles, parked up as a result of a curtailment imposed back in July.

He also reported that, on examining the operator's inspection records, the vehicle had been in its workshop "on 8 August 2009, when wheels had been removed and refitted". The wheels had been torqued after fitment "and a sheet put in the cab to advise drivers which wheels had been removed and of the requirement for a re-torque to be carried out".

That cab sheet was supposed to be signed off, confirming the re-torque, but it

could not be found. However, other similar records for vehicles and trailers could not be found either, and, importantly, re-torqueing was carried out by drivers using a wheel key and bar, rather than a torque wrench.

Additionally, the vehicle had been fitted with chrome wheel trims and, although the trim holes were large enough to take a wheel key and bar, visual inspection of the nuts was only possible if a driver looked closely through the trim.

Subsequent requirements put on the operator included: putting mileages on defect reports; detailing repairs; improvements to be made in recording wheel torque procedures; identifying the

vehicle or trailer ID on wheel torque tickets; and showing that wheels are re-torqued using a torque wrench, rather than a bar and key. Some means of brake testing was also recommended.

As for the case, Aitken said: "I am now placed in the dire position where I must wonder if I can allow this operator to remain in business with only the prospect of serious injury or worse to person or persons, before I can take the step of revocation."

She cited case law of the Transport Tribunal, which, she said, held her back from revocation. "However, serious action is required here, as I must bring it home to the directors and all drivers that the licence undertakings must be adhered to and that this must become a totally safe operation.

"I consider the case to be so serious that only a suspension can be an appropriate regulatory response," she insisted.

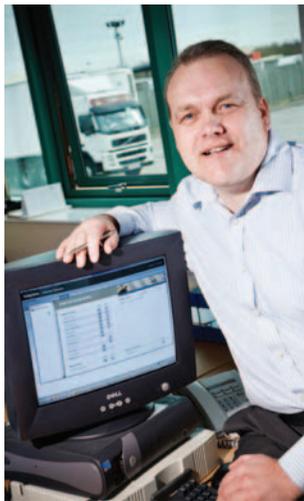
Wheel maintenance key to suspension

Dairy Crest maintains its OCRS online

The Nuneaton depot of chilled dairy foods firm Dairy Crest claims it has saved time and money, improved financial reporting and transformed its workshop scheduling with Volvo Service Point Online.

Operating a fleet of 54 Volvo FM artics and 76 Chereau lightweight trailers, the depot was already a big user of Volvo's Dynafleet telematics. Now transport manager Dave Wilson (right) says Service Point Online has added even further to his fleet's efficiency on the maintenance and repair side.

"[It] is an invaluable tool for us in service schedule planning and



control. We can book our own servicing online without calling the dealer and my service schedules are booked in a year in advance," he explains.

"The days of waiting a week for the paperwork to arrive are history. Any queries are resolved before an invoice is generated. It saves us so much time. As soon as a technician completes a job, he can scan the paperwork into the system and it is available to the customer," he adds.

Wilson says that using Dynafleet was a big step forward for Dairy Crest, as the previous system was not real-time and data came from sometimes

unreliable sensors at the depot gate. "We've saved an enormous amount of fuel by changing driver behaviour – 10,000 litres at one site alone. It's like having a driver trainer in the cab all day," he asserts.

Now, all vehicle records are also on Volvo Service Point Online, ensuring high rankings for Dairy Crest's OCSR (Operator Compliance Risk Score) on its service documentation.

"Our local VOSA inspector is happy with the records that we can now provide and we are completely compliant, and with less work to achieve that status," says Wilson.

Trailer engineering trails changing market

Asda recently took delivery of 68 Cheetah aerodynamic moving deck, double-deck trailers from Cartwright, adding to the 173 trailers the retailer bought late last year and bringing its total from Cartwright to over 1,000.

Chris Hall, Asda's network transport manager, explains that his new double-deckers were built to a different specification that will allow the firm to improve the efficiency of delivering ambient direct food to its stores.

"We chose Cartwright because they offered key options for this project," says Hall. "Most previous double-deck purchases have been for depot-to-depot trucking, whereas this was our first significant step into store operations."

Asda's new specification includes a simple, direct drive hydraulic deck with the ability to load pallets and roll-cages on either deck area. "It allows us the flexibility to either unload from the rear or through the side, giving us more options to fully utilise this fleet," says Hall. "And we have included the Cheetah air-kit to maximise fuel efficiency," he adds.

He also indicates that



installing aerodynamics is very much part of maintaining Asda's carbon cutting initiative, which has already delivered on its target of 40% across the fleet. "[Aerodynamics] were a significant enabler to this and the introduction of a double-deck fleet into store deliveries will further reduce our fleet footprint," comments Hall.

Cartwright director Steven Cartwright has another take on this. He believes that Asda's recent choices are indicative of what's happening in much of the transport industry. "The days of

high [production] volume vehicles are passing and being replaced by highly specified high-cube trailers, aimed at getting as much in the vehicles as possible for particular operations," he explains.

And, likewise, he adds that aerodynamic units are fast moving into fleet managers' mainstream thinking. "We recently enhanced the Cheetah system – tidied up the underside of the trailer chassis and tapered the body side, as per Asda's package," says Cartwright.

"This year, we'll be

introducing another product, which we're calling Cheetah Fastback, with enhancements to the side skirts and half the chassis and roof line sloping towards the back," he adds.

That won't compromise capacity, because of the wedge-shaped chassis, and Cartwright says the company will be using its new technology on double decks as well, while also offering high lift adjustable air suspension. "That's being tested at MIRA," he says.

But it doesn't stop there: many manufacturers are looking at lighter weight and recyclable construction materials to further improve overall carbon footprint. And Cartwright also indicates that his firm is increasingly being asked for flexible rigidids. He cites units based on DAF 45 7.5 tonners, but also 15 tonne flatbeds with full length tail lifts for Calor Gas and 5.5 tonne mobile showrooms for Snap-on.

All of which means that only bodybuilders with significant flexibility in their production are likely to survive. And not only production: given the economic situation, fleet managers want all the options around rental, R&M contracts and finance, too.