

Consolidation, competition and renewed compliance

So the consolidation of corporate giants continues, with, as we go to press, the announcement by Volkswagen – which already has a controlling interest in Scania – that it has now increased its shareholding in MAN to 30.47%, thus triggering an offer to MAN shareholders for their remaining shares (page 4).

Whether Volkswagen will succeed in its ambition to create a European truck business that rivals Mercedes-Benz, when that desire has already clearly foundered, with Scania, on the rocks of antitrust regulations and corporate resistance, remains to be seen.

Either way, for fleet managers the writing may well be on the wall: if not quite consolidation, then at least collaboration, in terms of research, development and sales. And, in the end, that might mean less product choice and potentially less competition. As Prof Dr Martin Winterkorn, CEO of Volkswagen, puts it: “We ... want to pave the way for closer co-operation between MAN, Scania and Volkswagen and thereby lay the foundations for generating synergies for the benefit of all shareholders.”

We’ll see. Meanwhile, fleet managers may be just as interested in the new IRTE workshop accreditation scheme, due for launch in the UK within the next few months. The goals, according to the IRTE and senior managers representing about 10% of the road haulage industry (namely Wincanton, C Butt, DHL and Sainsbury), are to give operators peace of mind that their vehicles are being professionally maintained, while also driving up standards and improving hauliers’ OCRS (operator compliance risk score) statistics (page 33).

Workshop managers may not all be overjoyed, but, in this litigious era, the truth is it’s been a long time coming. Ian Chisholm, head of operations at SOE (the Society of Operations Engineers, the umbrella organisation for IRTE), explains that, since hauliers are the O licence holders, they cannot delegate responsibility for maintenance of their vehicles. Yet, in practice – commercial pressures notwithstanding – they increasingly have to rely on engineering competence that, in many cases, is not under their control and remains unaudited.

So the scheme is about defining what ‘good’ looks like, creating a level playing field and then accrediting against agreed standards. And for those in the driving seat, that can’t come a moment too soon. As Dave Rowlands, technical services director at Wincanton, puts it: “Our engineers already check suppliers, in terms of numbers of fitters, workshop facilities, first-time MOT pass rates, ADR coverage, accident rates, financial standing, safe systems of work, risk assessments etc, before we trust our vehicles to them. But that’s all duplicated effort around the haulage companies. A central accreditation register would work well for us.”

Almost everyone in the operator community is agreed: IRTE is a reputable name within the industry and already has experience of operating a good working register, through the irtec technician licensing scheme. Also, IRTE’s existing maintenance supplier assessment document provides a sound basis for the standards. It won’t be long before all operators, regardless of size, will be able to select maintenance facilities with a new confidence.



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