

Welcome to an era of rapid engineering change

If transport is a bellwether for the health of this country's wider economy, and if last month's CV Show was anything to go by, then the Chancellor might want to follow one of two courses. Either he could relax fiscal policy or conclude that the austerity mantra is working and stick with Plan 'A'.

Because the CV Show painted a picture of an industry a long way from recession. It was huge (three packed halls, as well as external displays); it was glitzy; and it was busy (18,000 visitors, according to the organisers). What's more, it was clear that people weren't just there to kick tyres. They were looking at developments with all sorts of vehicles and equipment, and making comparisons, with a view to informing purchase decisions. And exhibitors, rushed off their feet, were only too happy to oblige (page 18).

Why now? In part, our leaner, fitter industry is responding to growing demand. So even operators and workshops hitherto forced to delay investments are putting their heads above the parapet. However, Euro 6 also has something to do with it. All of the major heavy-duty truck manufacturers present delivered on the promises by displaying – in many cases, unveiling – their new Euro 6 engine ranges. And, in every case, these were plainly big deals, with new and/or massively redesigned, restyled and re-equipped chassis, cabs, dashboards and interiors.

Finally, it has become clear to all: Euro 6 won't go away. It's a few short months off, and visitors could see they have a stark choice and a short window of opportunity in which to make it. Either they can get in quick, while cheaper Euro 5 is still available, or they will shortly have to bite the expensive Euro 6 bullet. Either way, but especially if it's the latter, they could also see the urgent need to revisit their specifications – not only to ensure that their vehicles are properly fit for purpose, nor just to get the best out of potential operational cost savings, but also because this new generation of vehicles is markedly different.

And that includes in terms of the new options: more advanced telematics, new steering systems, new suspension, better aerodynamics, intelligent transmissions etc. Just as important, it also includes new services, such as Volvo's Gold R&M contract, which harnesses its trucks' telematics to help remote workshops predict and proactively manage mechanical, electronic and electrical problems before they lead to downtime. See pages 18, 24, 28, 37 and 39 for analysis.

From transport engineers' and technicians' perspectives, we are clearly entering a period of even more rapid change. And it won't stop with Euro 6. Already, there is loose talk of Euro 7, with a new emphasis on reducing carbon emissions and hence also fuel consumption. Watch out for further developments with hybrids, dual-fuel vehicles, and even electric heavy-duty trucks and buses (page 12). Beyond that, the European Commission has also now proposed changes to allow radically more aerodynamic tractor units and semi-trailers – the former with rounded noses and the latter with 'boat tails' (page 6), each requiring an overall length extension.

IRTE's launch of the Master Technician grade for irtec (page 4) appears very well timed. Our industry already needs a new breed of multi-skilled, multi-talented engineers with management capabilities. And that requirement is set to grow very quickly.



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