



# RAISING THE STANDARD

The standard execution of fleet tractors continues to improve.

Ian Norwell buckles up in an R450 Scania to see what those sought-after C+E drivers can expect in 2015-16

The horsepower available to a 6x2 tractor passed into the realms of the unnecessary several years ago. That 700bhp+ sector is a niche, far removed from fleet operations and generally more suited to flag-waving. But Scania's range of 11- and 13-litre engines at Euro 6 covers the sensible outputs UK fleet managers do need. Mercedes-Benz might have been first to launch at Euro 6, but Scania was the first to bring upgrades – in May 2013.

Eleven revised engines were launched at that time, and Scania's G and R series trucks in the latest Streamline models enjoyed refinements that included re-mapped engine management and a revised intake system to handle necessarily high

exhaust temperatures. Gearboxes all got lower oil volumes, too, to reduce losses from churning, while a stronger, lighter rear axle arrived.

Further, among Scania's second-generation Euro 6 engines an SCR-only (selective catalytic reduction) 13-litre, 450bhp model was born. At the launch, Scania predicted it would be among the most economical of performers and now, 29 months on, the OEM claims it is hitting the sweet spot in the P, G and R series. Yes, it has a relatively high AdBlue consumption rate of 6% (3% for the other Euro 6 units), but my experience of fuel consumption on test (see panel p32) appears to support Scania's claim.

So much for the background: what about drivers? Well, onerous schedules and medieval overnight facilities aside,

when it comes to trucks, they've never had it so good, and my test R450 LA 6x2/2 mid-lift tractor with Streamline Highline cab proves that point.

This specimen had covered 55,028km. Scania's technical manager declined to call it a fleet spec tractor, but that's what it was. At one time, the term meant spartan, stripped out and basic. Not any more. The cabin reveals low dB levels (often underrated), avoiding the insidious stress that comes from a noisy interior. Seat adjustment, comfort and ergonomics are good, or better, benefiting from the R&D poured into design for driving over the last 20 years.

The trim levels on high-spec tractors have had an effect at fleet level, too, with colour choices and acres of black plastic now broken up into easy-on-the-eye contrasting panels. That kind of upgrade costs nothing. But it is the automated systems that have brought the biggest benefits to fleet operations.

## REDEFINED FLEET SPEC

Step back a minute. When the Mercedes-Benz Axor was launched in 2001, it bore witness to the start of an interesting change in fleet acquisition. Initially eagerly received as a no-nonsense machine with a traditional slap-across manual shift (allegedly hydraulically assisted), it drove up the sales charts with gusto, only to be met head-on by a demand for extra spec.

This puzzled designers at Mercedes who felt they had fulfilled their brief for a high-quality, solid fleet truck with no frills. They had, but the goal posts moved mid-match. The trend for up-specing to create a mini-Actros took them by surprise. But the fact is, when fleet managers realised the significant contribution that AMTs (automated manual transmissions) were making to fuel economy, they swiftly lost their 'molly-coddling' label. And subsequent driver assistance systems have created a

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truck that - very nearly - drives itself.

My test drive set the cruise control (CC) to a speed where commercial traffic on the motorway was moving away from me at one or two kph. The resulting drop in stress is always noticeable. The icing on this cake, though, is ACC (adaptive cruise control), which recognises vehicles moving into your lane (emerging from a service area, for example) and automatically applies a check to the speed.

The effect is marked. The driver no longer needs to hover over the CC button to switch it off or knock the setting down. Everything is taken care of, and 'resume' is now nice and soft. Naturally, drivers need to monitor what is going on, but the confidence and relaxation this inspires is palpable. ACC is not standard equipment at this level, but if you specify a retarder at £1,500 - and most do - ACC comes with it. For



Scania Streamline models include re-mapped engine management and a revised intake

these two devices, I'd say it's absolutely money well spent.

What about support? SDS (Scania Driver Support) is a well-known and liked driver coaching and evaluation aid. It measures anticipation, braking, use of gears and hill climbing. Drivers are rewarded by a simple five (or less) stars display on each element. My scores

were 91%, 92%, 100% and 61%, giving an average score of 86%.

Two of those scores catch the eye. The poor 61% on hill climbing was mostly due to my not using cruise control on most of the hilly A5 section. This was deliberate, as I wanted to see the effect of taking over one of the control elements. I was possibly a little too light-footed in an effort to get good figures. What is certain, however, is that the truck would have done better left to its own devices.

As for the 100% on use of gears, that's not an accolade for the driver, but for the truck. I left the transmission in auto for the entire journey, so a score of less than 100% would have been hard for Scania engineers to explain. I felt reasonably happy with the other two scores, which were more a measure of driving behaviour.

*Transport Engineer's* report from the US on autonomous trucks (July 2015, page 24) looked futuristic, but this test of a modest fleet truck shows it is but a step or two away. Eco Roll and Active Prediction are there, too, and AEBS (advanced emergency braking system) will be a mandatory factory fit from November.

So this is how far the humble 'gaffer's motor' has come. Scania, and the rest of the industry should be proud of what it has achieved for the fleet driver. **TE**

### Testing, testing

*Transport Engineer* does not conduct conventional truck road tests, so it follows that we do not have a test route. The vagaries of testing to provide meaningful fuel figures are legion. Getting absolutes that are reliably representative is hard enough; achieving accurate comparability is a black art.

Previously accrued mileage, axle alignment, tyre brand and specification, tread depths and pressures, fuel temperature, engine preparation, oils, aerodynamics and weather conditions can all be eclipsed by driving style. Little wonder, then, that a fuel testing request sends a ripple through the bowels of sales and marketing folks at truck manufacturers.

Our test was simple and the fuel results are to be taken as what was achieved on the day. From

Scania's Milton Keynes headquarters, I joined the M1 at junction 14, heading north to the M69 at junction 21, and then south west to the M69's junction with the A5. From there I took the A5 south, back to Milton Keynes.

The distance covered was 172km and fuel consumption - as per the vehicle telematics - was 9.11 mpg. I also conducted a fill-to-fill check at the pump with a fuel level measure. Over the length of a 500-litre tank, this is notoriously unreliable, but it gave a figure of over 9.5 mpg. In this case, I'd rely on the telematics. In any event, running at 43,950kg over the entire route, I felt this was a very creditable figure.

