

One size fits all?

As more operators face up to the new reality of short-lived contract business, bodybuilders are increasingly being asked to deliver relatively standard, but technically advanced, fare. Steve Banner reports

Hauliers commissioning box and curtainsider bodies for rigid chassis now want them built to one-size-fits-all specifications. So says West Midlands bodybuilder Bevan Group's Anthony Bevan, who presides over a 60–70 bodies per week factory (pictured above).

"They want them to be as versatile as possible," he explains. Quite simply, this approach makes it less likely that operators will need new trucks if they lose one contract and then gain another involving different cargo.

And it's not just hauliers. "Local authorities used to run specific vehicles for particular jobs, but these days they want them to be multi-purpose," confirms Ashley Morris, sales and marketing manager at Eastleigh, Hants-based light CV specialist VFS (offshoot of Italian bodybuilder Scattolini). "So, for example, a vehicle will be ordered with a crane as well as a tail-lift." Councils short of cash need to get the maximum work out of everything they acquire.

How about aerodynamics? Bevan believes adoption is limited. "Operators

want radiused cappings, a collar on the cab and a deflector on the roof," he says. "However, they're not so keen on side skirts." That is because skirts on rigids are vulnerable to damage if a driver clips a kerb or - in the case of a curtainsider - if a forklift driver gets careless. And repairs cost money.

What operators do want, though (especially at 3.5 and 7.5 tonnes), is weight saving - particularly given that chassis are getting heavier, in part due to Euro 6. As a result, Bevan is moving away from fastenings, for instance, in favour of bonding bodies. "Fastenings to hold together a 6m box body weigh around 40kg," explains Bevan. "That's half the weight of a driver."

WEIGHT SAVING

Bevan's choice of bonding agent is sourced from Kommerling, which specialises in automotive adhesives. "It's durable, but if you subsequently need to dismantle the body, all you need is a hot air gun to melt the glue," he says. "The panels can then be slid apart."

Meanwhile, Wiltshire-based Wessex Vehicle Services is an advocate of



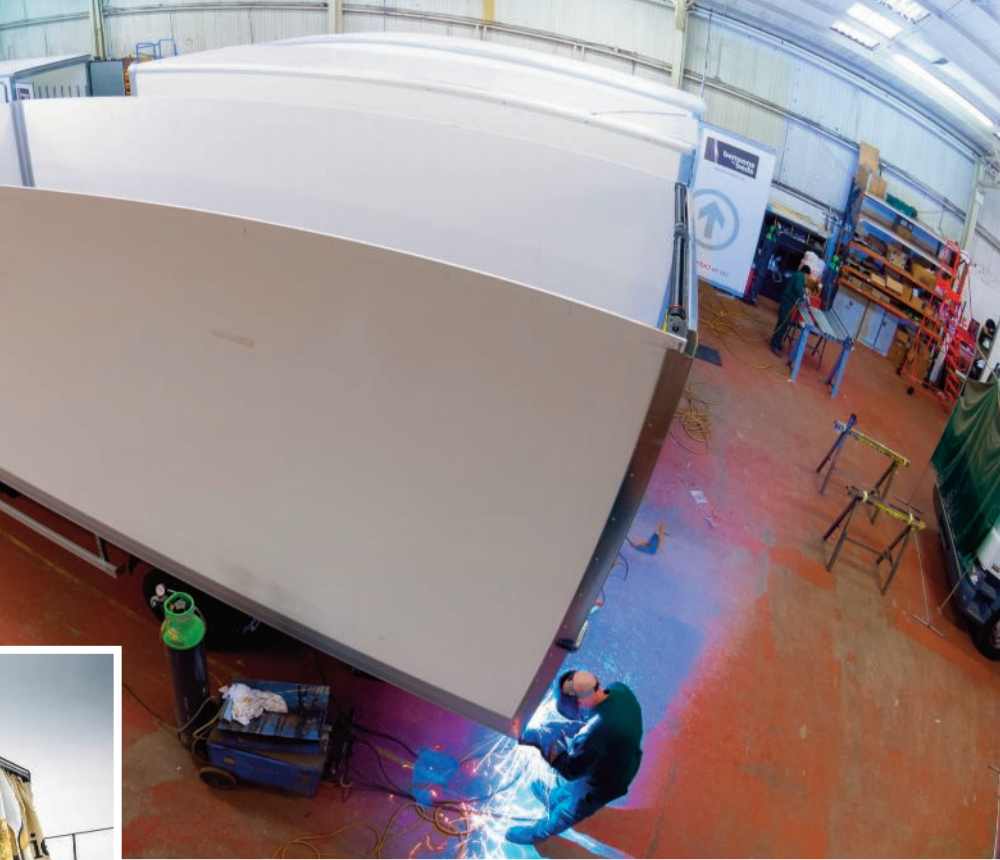
"If you work hard, you can typically take 90–100kg out of a body for a 3.5-tonner"

Alex Watson

alternative materials, especially at the lighter end of rigids. The business lists temperature-controlled bodies, complete with tracking and security systems for fine art removal, as among its specialities. It also builds bodies for builders' merchants and constructed some 300 last year.

"Weight saving involves using alloy sections and composite panels wherever you can," explains sales director Alex Watson. "If you work hard, you can typically take 90–100kg out of a body for a 3.5-tonner."

Wessex recommends fused reinforced thermoplastic composite sandwich panels from Omnia. Each comprises a polypropylene honeycomb with glass fibre reinforced face sheets fixed by a lamination melting process without adhesives. Standard 25mm panels tip the scales at a modest 4.5kg per square metre and can be welded



using a polypropylene welding rod.

"Such panels are enormously strong - in fact they're rock-hard - but they don't come cheap," says Watson. "Specify them for a 20ft box body on a 7.5-tonner and you'll add about £1,000 to the bill. But the weight saving is so significant that some operators are happy to pay the extra."

"About 18 months ago we took 100kg out of the One Stop tipper bodies we build for Ford," comments VFS's Morris. "If you want this sort of saving, you're typically looking at high-strength steel instead of mild steel, making more use of plastics and using alloy rather than steel posts... Our next step will be reducing the weight of dropsides by, for instance, fitting 12mm rather than 15mm flooring."

What about curtainsiders? Bevan observes that operators are increasingly

asking for bodies compliant with EN 12642-XL. That doesn't cost much, he says, although they don't necessarily understand the significance.

EN 12642-XL

Bodies built to this standard are deemed to be capable of withstanding a sideways force equivalent to half their maximum payload capacity without the need to tie down the cargo. They also have to withstand a 100% frontal force and a 50% rearwards force. However, the cargo has to be uniform, sit no more than 80mm from the curtains, be butted up against the headboard and positioned almost up against the rear doors. If part of the load is removed during a delivery run, the rest has to be repositioned and restrained.

All that said, no matter which body type you specify, the odds are you will

have to wait for it. At the time of writing, Bevan is quoting delivery times of five to six months. Morris agrees. "We're quoting lead times of 22-23 weeks for anything on a Ford chassis because of the sheer volume of orders," he says.

Meanwhile, Wessex is talking about somewhat less daunting lead times of two to three months. "That's chassis-dependent though, with some manufacturers taking longer to deliver than others," observes Watson.

Bevan is considering boosting productivity by embarking on an investment programme but is wary of doing so in light of the 2008 financial crisis. "It's made us a lot more cautious," he admits. "Prior to 2008 we might have been willing to take a chance, but these days any investment decision has to tick all the boxes."

Nevertheless, Bevan Group has made significant investments in its aftercare and graphics divisions, and bought relevant companies. For operators that don't want standardised bodies, recent acquisitions have included Stag Bodies (tippers and traffic management vehicles), PG Reeves (bodies for the drinks industry) and Supertrucks (glass-carrying systems). It has also set up a specialist products division and assembles refrigerated bodies under contract to Schmitz Cargobull.

Before closing, one aspect gaining prominence for rigids concerns noise. Given the numbers on out-of-hours urban deliveries, bodybuilders are regularly being asked to make their trucks as quiet as possible.

The CNG (compressed natural gas) concept Scania P-280 twin-axle Euro 6 rigid (above right), unveiled at the inaugural Quiet Cities summit in London last year, was fitted with a Don-Bur aerodynamic Teardrop body. It also featured a low-noise roller shutter door, NAS/PIEK-certified tail-lift and a directed, tonal reversing alarm. [TE](#)