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Ray Ashworth on platooning

EMISSIONS TEST

RDE (real driving emissions) testing - due to come into force under EU type approval from 2017, and affecting vans and cars - could limit choices. “It may restrict the number of engines, transmissions and body shapes manufacturers can offer,” stated Dr George Gillespie, chief executive of transport R&D specialist Horiba MIRA, speaking at last month’s SMMT (Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders) International Automotive Summit.

Why? RDE will require emissions to be measured for each vehicle type on the public highway following a set route. That won’t be cheap. So, in a bid to contain costs, manufacturers may opt to narrow their ranges. However, the dust has not settled on this yet: at the London summit, light

Although largely focused on the automotive sector, this year’s SMMT Summit also debated van and truck technologies.

Steve Banner reports

commercial makers were seeking clarity about how these tests will be conducted. Will, for example, vans be driven unladen, part laden, or fully laden, with the obvious impacts on emissions and fuel consumption?

That said, urban authorities eager to cut emissions of NOx and particulates from CVs are being encouraged to consider alternative technologies - and, in particular, electric vans. Iveco UK managing director Stuart Webster suggested one way forward might be

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“to raise the O licence threshold from 3.5 to 4.25 tonnes for electric vehicles”. That way, such vans could compete on a level playing field against conventional vehicles, with operators able to achieve economically-viable payloads.

But it’s not just about vans. LNG (liquefied natural gas) could be an option for long-haul trucks, he added,

pointing to Iveco’s recently launched 400bhp dedicated gas version of the Stralis - the so-called NP (page 16).

Another way to cut fuel and emissions, and make more efficient use of road space might be platooning. While not disputing that the technology works, DAF UK managing director Ray Ashworth wondered about its applicability, given that motorway junctions are on average just 4.5 miles apart. That being the case, the requisite narrow gap between trucks would have to keep widening to give other vehicles space to leave and join. “It’s probably a more viable solution for the USA and Australia where intervals between junctions are much longer,” he said.

Meanwhile, on that other critical subject, the safety of vulnerable road users, Ashworth revealed that DAF is developing an active safety system that not only alerts drivers to cyclists and pedestrians getting perilously close, but also automatically brings trucks to a halt. He believes this approach is preferable to adding yet more passive safety systems - such as extra cab nearside door windows.

Windows and sensors are being installed at the behest of politicians and city councillors, he asserted. Ashworth would prefer them to tell truck makers such as DAF what they see as the problem and leave them to solve it, rather than imposing solutions. **TE**

