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First Brexit, now that £2.5bn fine: hard times

Two subjects dominate the news at press time, and both are likely to continue doing so for many months yet. On the one hand, the industry is reeling at the truck manufacturers' record £2.5 billion fine by the European Commission for price fixing. And, on the other, there's Brexit, and the ongoing political and commercial upheaval.

DAF, Daimler, Iveco, MAN and Volvo/Renault - all found guilty of EU antitrust violations for the 14 years to 2011 - now face compensation claims in UK courts for what the RHA describes as "inflated prices [that] cost haulage operators millions" (page 4). Note that Scania is subject to a separate EC investigation.

This is the culmination of a story that went very quiet back in 2011 when MAN blew the whistle. It seems almost incredible that senior managers had been using trade shows for clandestine meetings since 1997, before moving on to email for their cartel in 2004. But, with the VW emissions scandal still raw, we shouldn't be surprised.

For the companies concerned, what no doubt seemed like a good idea back then has come back to bite them big time. It may yet turn out that hauliers' compensation claims across Europe come to dwarf the EC fines, massive though they are.

Meanwhile, the Brexit result met predictable ripostes, with the FTA, RHA and others urging Theresa May's new ministerial team to prioritise rules for freight movement in negotiations with Brussels. That said, RHA is warning members to expect short-term turbulence, but remains optimistic over cutting red tape and getting a new deal. Meanwhile, FTA believes UK hauliers should brace themselves for increased costs, restrictions and bureaucracy.

For fleet engineers and managers, the future looks opaque. Technology is changing quickly enough. Without a solid handle on regulations, cabotage, etc, optimising your fleet just got much harder.

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