

Systems to improve driver behaviour are now common in the marketplace both from OEMs and the aftermarket; as a result, insurers are starting to expect them, writes Toby Clark



DRIVING CHANGE

While autonomous or remotely-driven vehicles are approaching fast – the *Financial Times* recently devoted a major feature to driverless heavy trucks in the USA, <https://is.gd/ajevuj> – the behaviour and skills of human drivers in conventional trucks and vans can still be examined and improved. As insurance broker Chris France of PIB Insurance says: “With any type of business or industry you have to have regular monitoring on performance.” Driver feedback is vital to this process, and some firms are even introducing a competitive element.

So many third party telematics and driver assistance systems are available that it is tempting to settle for the OEM offerings, with the limitations that can present.

However, some companies are taking a ‘systems integration’ approach – for example, the ‘Get Connected’ offering from telematics and driver behaviour management supplier CMS SupaTrak, Vehicle Weighing Solutions (VWS) and camera specialist

Vision Techniques. Fleets can mix and match different elements of the firms’ product ranges, while ensuring that the installation process is straightforward and the data produced is accessible from a single point. The pricing is transparent, with each element of the system having an installation cost and monthly subscription.

Kate Lloyd, marketing director at VWS, says the system has the potential to reduce insurance premiums or even improve a fleet’s ability to get insured: “Insurers might be looking into a solution that’s more integrated... By bringing all three of these solutions together, the operator can tick a few boxes to provide a safer and more compliant fleet, all sharing data into one central portal.”

The final element is the optional compliance monitoring service, and a crash investigation and near-miss monitoring service provided by Broadspire. “Live data is vital to fleet managers,” says CMS SupaTrak managing director Jason Airey. “Operators are liable for the behaviour of their drivers and can

be held accountable if, following an accident, it is shown that they haven’t proactively managed such things as how drivers are behaving behind the wheel or whether they have tacho infringements. Now that the technology to manage such things in real time is commonplace and affordable, operators are expected to manage their compliance using available technology.”

The VWS element of Get Connected is predominantly its VOPS 2 [Vehicle Overload Protection System], which makes the driver aware of what they are carrying with simple overload alerts, rather than being a fully managed weighing solution. Lloyd says this sort of system is becoming much more common in van operations, because costs are coming down.

Chris France, of PIB Insurance, supports the Get Connected scheme, and firmly believes in the value of driver management systems: “I always recommend for any client that they have some sort of system in place.” However, having driver behaviour data is not enough: “I believe it’s the after-service

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that counts,” he adds, and the best providers “help the operator to utilise that data to best effect. There’s plenty of telematics providers who have a great product but leave the operator to use the system as they see fit.”

DRIVING FEEDBACK

Much of the focus on driver assistance has been on recording and analysing the driver’s actions for benchmarking. Instead, Lightfoot aims to give instant, continuous feedback to the driver to improve his or her habits. Marketing director Tony Harbron explains: “The way people drive is so ingrained you’re not going to change it by talking to them retrospectively... Lightfoot delivers an instant nudge. Driver training is great, but we all know it works very well at the start but then tapers off.”

The hardware includes GPS and an accelerometer, and plugs into the OBD port of the vehicle (it is designed for cars and light commercials) to monitor engine load and accelerator demand. Audible and visual cues include a traffic light arrangement. “It starts at green,” says Harbron. “If you try to accelerate more aggressively it goes up through the amber and eventually to red. The driver doesn’t have to look directly at it – it’s in their peripheral vision.” However, he adds, “the breakthrough is the real human voice” which gives instructions and warnings, again instantly.

The system has recording and driver management functions, but these are carefully chosen. “We have a three strikes system – a first or second warning is not recorded; the third is recorded and sent to the fleet manager. Clients are busy and drowning in data, so our server transmits a weekly report: it is very much about how your drivers have improved, and [which] drivers are still struggling.

“We also provide some telematics functionality,” adds Harbron, “and people were very excited about getting lots of data back. Now a lot of fleets have been through that, and realised that having a lot of data doesn’t really solve your problems.

“The most interesting development is ‘gamification’ – making drivers want to be better drivers by building up rewards if they drive well.” This involves league tables within and across fleets (there is a fleet driver of the week across all fleets) while every driver who hits their company KPIs enters a prize draw. He goes further: “We’ve been running a pilot project here in Exeter with 100 private motorists running Lightfoot, and we’ve introduced prizes.”

The changes are impressive: after the unit is fitted, it operates passively for a week or two, to establish a baseline, then it starts to give feedback. The baseline typically sees 3% of private drivers achieve ‘elite driver’ level; after just a week, that figure rises to 50%. “It’s now settled down to 60%,” says Harbron.

“Something we hadn’t expected was the impact on accident rates,” says Harbron.

Last year, insurers Allianz worked with butchers Birtwhistles, which runs a fleet of Mercedes-Benz Sprinter vans, on a Lightfoot pilot implementation. Over the trial it found a 14.1% increase in fuel economy (mpg), a 40% reduction in accident frequency and a 60% fall in the cost of claims. (The insurer now offers its commercial motor customers a 15% discount on Lightfoot costs and monthly subscription.) **TE**



CONTINENTAL MODULAR COCKPIT

Drivers can potentially be swamped by information, and many solutions have proprietary displays. With a driver having to keep an eye on three or four displays in addition to the vehicle’s own dashboard, the resulting variety of visual and audible input is a recipe for driver fatigue.

One solution might be something like the modular cockpit space developed by Continental for bus and coach applications. This combines a 12.3in central high-resolution display with flat, customisable switch panels and more displays. It has won the prestigious iF Product Design Award.



ENTRY-LEVEL DRIVER MANAGEMENT

VDO has long had a premium telematics and driver management offering called FleetVisor, primarily aimed at larger fleets. At the Munich logistics show in April it unveiled TIS-Web Motion (left), a web-based ‘simple and inexpensive entry-level solution’ aimed at small and medium-sized fleets. This combines fleet and driver data management functions – including tyre management – with ‘track and trace’ telematics.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

As many long-haul HGV drivers and local delivery drivers regularly work on their own, they could be at risk if something were to go wrong (see also BSIA guidance on lone workers - <https://is.gd/fugati>). ANT Telecom recommends that fleet managers should look at measures to alert them if something happens to a driver, and ask what processes are in place in the event of an emergency.