

# Pass first time

Truck and LCV initial MOT test failure rates are steadily falling, according to DVSA figures, but could still be better. Steve Banner offers advice on how to make sure vehicles make it through the first time round

The latest figures for truck MOT initial failure rates, for the 2015/16 fiscal year ended 30 March, continue a clear trend: at 17.2%, it was lower than the 19.9% recorded for 2014/15, and lower still than the 21.6% returned in 2013/14. Final failure rates were 10.3%, 11.3% and 12.7% respectively, which again shows that the industry is moving in the right direction, but a lot more progress needs to be made.

No transport company wishes to countenance failure, bearing in mind the possible impact on their OCRS - operator compliance risk score - and any involvement they may wish to have in the Earned Recognition programme.

Volvo Group customer service director John Conway advises: "You have to employ a number of technicians who specialise in preparing trucks for their test and are aware of the sort of things that testers look for," he says. (The Volvo network achieved a 97.1% success rate in 2016.)

Anything revealed by the periodic



statutory safety inspection should be addressed promptly. So should anything highlighted by the driver's daily walk-around check - and operators should of course ensure that such checks are carried out.

Traffic commissioners also recommend that at least four brake tests are undertaken annually, including the one that features in the MOT. A prudent operator will follow these recommendations to the letter. Of this practice, Road Haulage Association technical director Steve Biddle says: "It's not compulsory, but it is best practice."

The condition of a truck's brakes and its headlamp aim remain two of the key reasons why trucks fail their MOT. One way of dealing with both challenges is to ensure that the kit used to test these functions in workshops is the same as that approved by the DVSA for use in test lanes. Equipment suppliers such as Gemco, VL Test Systems and Tecalemit may be able to offer advice.

"What you don't get these days are failures which occur as the

consequence of major problems such as broken springs," says Robert Baxter, managing director of East Anglian DAF dealership Chassis Cab. Its Isleham, Cambridgeshire depot has achieved a 100% pass rate for the past five years.

## A FINE-TOOTH COMB

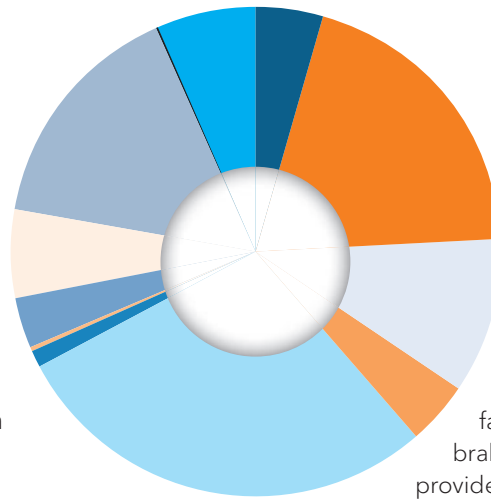
A similar judgement comes from Iveco UK's technical and alternative fuels director Martin Flach. He says: "They're not finding rust or broken springs these days, so testers are looking for things with a finer-tooth comb."

Tyres appear to be a target at present, with load indexes and speed ratings under the spotlight, says Paul Frost, Scania's general manager, aftersales support services, and Baxter from Chassis Cab.

Some say that the ideal situation for a workshop is to have an Authorised Testing Facility that can pre-test the trucks due for inspection before the DVSA tester appears. Doing so would make them far more likely to pass when that person arrives.

## Percentage of Class 7 MOTs with the specified defect type, 2015/16

- Body and structure
- Brakes
- Driver's view of the road
- Fuel and exhaust
- Lighting and signalling
- Reg plates and VIN
- Road wheels
- Seat belts
- Steering
- Suspension
- Towbars
- Tyres



That is the approach pursued by haulage and warehousing business Welch Group. As well as running 70 trucks, it operates Renault Trucks outlets in Cambridge and Peterborough. "The examiner uses the same kit as we do," says Welch's transport managing director, Jim Welch.

### WHO SHOULD TEST TRUCKS?

As things stand, truck tests are conducted by examiners employed by the DVSA. Should suitably authorised workshop technicians employed by the private sector be permitted to conduct tests in the same way that cars and light commercials are tested?

Biddle from the RHA believes that this would be a step in the right direction, subject to appropriate safeguards - "random audits by the agency for example" - because it would, among other things, mean that the existing examiners could be switched to roadside enforcement instead. "The DVSA needs to up its game so far as enforcement is concerned," he observes.

It would also give dealers with ATF lanes greater scope to conduct tests outside normal working hours. Adds Frost: "We'd be keen to be involved in any pilot scheme that involved our network's technicians carrying out tests."

### LCVS: ROOM TO IMPROVE

Turning to lighter vehicles, the figure for first-time failures of their so-called Class 7 MOT registered by 3.0- to 3.5 tonners is also reducing (see table, right, for details). However, at 46.8% for 2015/16,

the percentage remains worryingly high. And note, the biggest vehicle that can be driven by anyone with a car driver's licence, the 3.5-tonner, has become an increasingly important workhorse over the past two decades.

Why do so many commercial vehicles in this category fall at the first hurdle?

"They're not subject to annual testing from their date of first registration and they're not subject to statutory safety inspections either," Flach points out. So the Class 7 test may be the first time anybody has looked at them in three years. "Not many 3.5-tonners are sent to dealers for a pre-MOT test," he continues.

"It's also worth noting that while the percentage of trucks looked after by dealers under repair and maintenance contracts is high, the percentage of 3.5-tonners is comparatively low," he observes. That disparity could help explain the difference in MOT failure rates, he suggests.

Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles points out that Class 7 MOT failures are often the consequence of relatively minor defects such as spent bulbs, damaged mirrors, faulty windscreen wipers, too little tyre tread and illegal number plates (see pie chart above for breakdown of MOT test defects, based

on DVSA data). These should all be picked up during routine maintenance, as should other common points of failure, such as excessive brake and suspension wear - provided that such maintenance actually takes place.

"Van operators are risking increased operating bills, extended downtime and potentially a decrease in residual values by not looking after their vehicles properly," contends Trevor Hodgson-Phillips, head of service and parts for Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles. (VW offers a variety of aftersales programmes designed to address these risks.)

Getting the percentage failure rate down more rapidly would be in the transport industry's best interest. Failure to do so could prompt regulators to introduce annual testing for Class 7 vehicles or go for the nuclear option: dropping the O licence threshold to 3.0 tonnes.

Businesses that already hold O licences because they operate heavy trucks should be able to take such a development in their stride, but it would come as a monumental shock to those that do not. [ITE](#)

### FURTHER INFORMATION

*Roadworthiness: Industry Best Practice by the IRTE (<https://is.gd/ivohor>)*

*Roadworthiness: Industry Best Practice for PCVs, by the IRTE (<https://is.gd/uzakef>)*

*Government testing data for CVs (<https://is.gd/oyocuz>) and LCVs and other vehicles (<https://is.gd/xusoro>)*

CLASS 7 MOT TEST RESULTS BY YEAR (SOURCE: DVSA)	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Initial fail rate	50.3%	49%	46.8%
Final fail rate	40.9%	39.2%	37.3%
Number of initial tests (excluding retests)	601,942	616,216	642,269