

Shop solutions

Workshops may be caught between a company's need to economise, its needs for vehicle reliability and the requirement for safety. A number of industry schemes can help, reports Peter Shakespeare

Today's commercial vehicle operator must maintain a low Operator Compliance Risk Score (OCRS), so levels of roadworthiness must be 100% all the time; planned maintenance inspections must be carried out as agreed and MOT failure rates (see also <https://is.gd/defopo>) need to stay low.

Keeping commercial vehicles on the road and fully compliant is largely the operator's job, with responsibility for daily checks being delegated to the drivers. Good fleet management systems, planning and internal checks will go a long way to ensuring everything is being done that can be. But vehicle workshops play a significant role in the process.

Around 80% of UK commercial vehicle operators are classed as SME businesses with average fleet sizes of

only 10 vehicles. Fully equipping an in-house workshop for a small fleet is a costly exercise. Often, outsourcing some procedures or full maintenance is more cost effective. But there are ways where a small operator can operate a larger workshop facility.

Cartwright Fleet Services (CFS) offers a complete range of fleet management services for commercial vehicle operators. It says it sees a shift toward outsourced vehicle maintenance unit (VMU)-type models. A CFS spokesperson explains: "Vehicle maintenance is rarely a core objective for the business, which can make it difficult to justify investment against other internal priorities."

There are many alternative business models, he adds: "Although they can operate these as a purely in-house service, providers such as CFS can also



supplement or subsidise the VMU by putting third party work through the workshop, assuming the customer sees no conflict of interest with their own business.

"There are also scenarios where operators have little or no workshop capability on-site. In such situations, the service provider can introduce key equipment such as rolling-road brake testers and basic maintenance capabilities so that more issues can be dealt with locally.

"Another approach is to share the VMU with the operator, whereby the service provider operates some lanes or bays while the host manages the others. These lanes could be rented or leased from the customer to provide them with a revenue stream, return on investment or reduction in their overall service costs."

Ensuring that the firms that supply workshop equipment meet industry standards, and equipment is installed correctly by qualified engineers, is the aim of The Garage Equipment Association (GEA), the administrator of UK MOT equipment approval and accreditation body of garage equipment engineers (<https://is.gd/usacaj>).



EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT

TACHOGRAPH PROGRAMMING

For approved tachograph centres, Stoneridge Electronics offers a wireless tablet programming tool, Optimo2 (left), that programs and calibrates all makes of digital tachograph. It allows the facilities to program the second source of motion or use the in-built configuration system to work with both Stoneridge SE5000 and VDO1381 generic tachographs. Analogue models can be configured with existing MKII cables, or Stoneridge can supply cables or wireless dongles for the job. The tool enables old tachograph data to be read and automatically configures the new unit with the correct parameters, saving time and reducing errors.

LIFTING JACKS

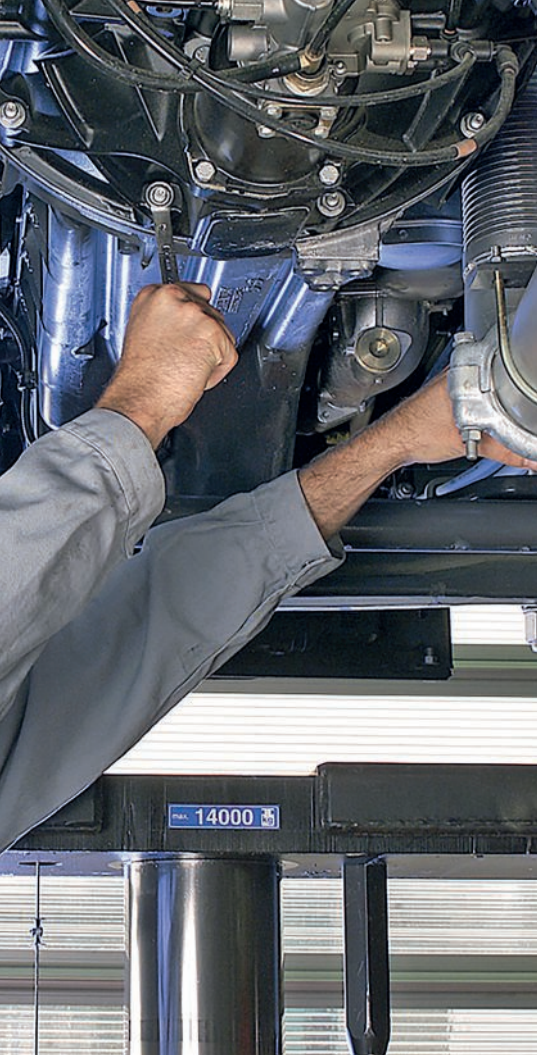
"It is generally accepted that pit and lift jacks are the safest and easiest methods of lifting a vehicle for routine servicing or for repairs," says Mike Selby, marketing manager of equipment manufacturer Majorlift. He also advises: "Safety is paramount when lifting heavy vehicles and many safety features such as threaded rams with locking collars, pressure relief valves, hose burst valves, and precise control operation valves should be incorporated as standard."

Totalkare Heavy Duty Workshop Solutions states that replacing old vehicle lifts is not as expensive as people might think. It argues that making do with an old, slow and breakdown-prone lift might not always be the best option, as the cost of downtime caused by breakdowns can mount up significantly. New lifts are now considerably safer than their predecessors, as they are required to be electronically controlled. Also, modern lifts are easier to manoeuvre and have greater lifting capacity (up to 7.5t/column), it concludes.

FURTHER INFORMATION

GEA accredited lift engineers – <https://is.gd/ukexih>

The Safe Operation of Vehicle Lifts booklet, £6+VAT – <https://is.gd/oquyiy>



years and is then reviewed.

The Bath tipper tragedy highlighted the need for proper, audited maintenance and inspection processes, as well as competent and answerable managers and technicians. To that end, Eastman states: "irtec-licensed technicians must sign a code of conduct document which means they are culpable and will stand by their decisions."

According to Eastman, many operators fall into the trap of relying on MOT pass rates. But he reminds operators that the MOT is only a once-a-year snapshot of the vehicle's roadworthiness – the MOT pass standard must be maintained throughout the year. The only way to achieve this is to have competent technicians working on the vehicles, and sound management practices in place.

In terms of equipment for the small workshop, a covered inspection pit, good lighting and the right tools are all that is required on site, says Eastman. For small operators, the cost of installing a brake roller tester could prove prohibitive; having access to one nearby, instead, may suffice.

But above all, he concludes, employing good, licensed technicians is the best investment any well managed commercial vehicle workshop can make to ensure high levels of service, vehicle reliability, availability and compliance. **TE**

FURTHER INFORMATION

GEA member code of practice – <https://is.gd/ajohup>

irtec technicians directory – <https://is.gd/bamimo>

IRTE Workshop Accreditation register – <https://is.gd/yuquza>

Government-approved roller brake testers – <https://is.gd/analif>

Another industry authority is the IRTE. John Eastman, chair of the IRTE Professional Sector Council, argues that the workshop's systems and procedures must be reviewed regularly to ensure that processes are safe, streamlined and can be backed up by a solid audit trail.

IRTE's irtec scheme verifies the competence of technicians on both vehicle inspection and vehicle maintenance and repair. The irtec exam involves online tests and a practical assessment, and is carried out by colleges and industry bodies including the FTA, Manchester College, Bristol's S&B Commercials (see also pp 18-19) and Stevenson College (Coalville and Nottingham). The irtec accreditation, which covers four technician grades, lasts for five years and on review considers whether the individual has been receiving CPD and regular training.

Second, IRTE's Workshop Accreditation process audits garage systems and procedures, service level agreements and performance in areas such as MOT pass rates and whether qualified technicians are employed there. The accreditation lasts for three