



In addition to extending the hours of dealer workshops, a recent trend in maintenance is to bring the garage to the van, in the form of mobile servicing set up on a convenient forecourt or car park. Doing so can reduce fleet downtime, reports Dan Gilkes

Minimising the time that vans are off the road is a major focus for any fleet manager. Whether that van is central to your business, or simply a means of transporting your workforce from home to site, fitting in time for regular preventative maintenance can be critical.

Manufacturer main dealers have been extending the opening hours of their workshops into the evenings and over the weekend, while those that work with heavy trucks as well as vans usually offer up to 24-hour workshop access. This allows companies to put their vehicles in for service after the day's work has been completed, or even overnight.

To make it even easier for customers to have vehicles serviced, several manufacturers and dealers, along with specialist fleet management companies like BT Fleet, are offering to bring the workshop to the customer's premises.

Mobile service vans can now carry

out regular service work and handle minor warranty claims. This should cut operating costs and reduce downtime for the customer, as there is no longer a requirement to take the van off the road to visit the dealership.

For example, leasing giant Ryder runs a fleet of 70 fully equipped mobile maintenance vans that can be utilised to carry out repair and service work at the customer's premises.

Mercedes-Benz Vans is also developing a mobile service offering, though most of its van dealers are also truck outlets, so currently offer extended service hours in their workshops. "There are pilots for this happening right now," says head of fleet Ricky McFarland.

The Ford Mobile Service programme was introduced in 2015, initially through a pilot project within the M25, working from Ford's own Trust Ford dealerships. Since that time, the service has been extended across the UK, and Ford expects around 90 of its 105 Ford Transit Centres to operate mobile service vans

by the middle of this year; this fleet is expected to be expanded in future.

The service is primarily being offered to fleet customers, but is not restricted to Ford vans. Technicians can handle the full range of cars as well as LCVs, plus, with Ford's recently-launched Omnicraft parts and service offer, they can work on non-Ford products, too, for mixed fleets.

Ford's mobile technicians have been provided with specialist training and their Transit vans carry 2.5-tonne jacks and axle stands. They are also equipped with on-board diagnostic equipment and all of the necessary tools to carry out service work. "Clearly there is work that you wouldn't do at a customer's site, but we don't limit warranty work," says Chris Newton, Ford's field aftermarket manager.

It's a similar story at Volkswagen. The company launched a small fleet of Mobile Service Clinic vans in November 2016, capable of carrying out service work, inspections, air-con servicing, MOT repairs and minor warranty work at

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a customer’s premises. Initially operating from VW Van Centres in Maidenhead, Heathrow and Oxford, a further 10 vans are due by mid-summer with nationwide coverage, from around 20 vans in total, planned for the end of the year.

“We’ve found the main concern for fleet customers is downtime and how long their vehicles are off the road. The van is an extension of the dealership and the Mobile Service Clinic is a way of delivering an excellent customer service,” says service development manager David Bodily.

Of course there have been companies offering mobile servicing and maintenance for many years, typically smaller business working on a local basis. This is certainly the case for specialist equipment such as truck loading cranes and tail-lifts.

SITE SAFETY

For companies considering mobile servicing, the IRTE’s mobile off-site working good practice guide (<https://is.gd/xamesi>) and the SOE’s Maintenance Supplier Assessment (<https://is.gd/ewevij>) document are well worth a read. They make it clear that any company performing regular maintenance on a goods vehicle outside of a workshop should undertake an assessment of the

site prior to commencement of any works. This will include working in varying weather, and could include working at height, for vans with body conversions. Customers should always ensure that technicians are fully trained and conversant with relevant health and safety regulations. Technician accreditations to look out for include irtec tyre (<https://is.gd/axujow>) and irtec light (<https://is.gd/osazaf>).

Bodily adds: “The technician will visit with the dealer manager to carry out an initial site inspection, ensuring that they have a flat area for the vehicles that is then coned off for safety.

“The service vans have a power take-off that provides compressed air and electrical power in the van, so the technician has everything that they need for regular maintenance.”

The VW technicians are not just providing service work; warranty jobs can also be taken care of when necessary. The Service Clinic vans can also be sent to bodybuilder premises to carry out pre-delivery inspections (PDI) on new vehicles. This can save time when new vans are being racked-out or equipped with specialist bodies, as

the van doesn’t then have to travel to the chassis manufacturer’s dealer for PDI before heading out to work for the customer.

“With larger fleets, we can also go out once a month and do free health checks on any vehicle on site,” Bodily continues. “The fleet manager then knows that their vehicles are safe. They also get a video showing any points of concern, shot by the technician, as there is Wi-Fi in the van.”

An alternative is BT Fleet’s network of 64 workshops across the UK handling cars, vans and trucks from any manufacturer for its broad spread of fleet customers. By acquiring SEV in February this year, the company has taken on 40 mobile engineers to provide fixed and mobile SMR services to clients.

“This is an important acquisition for BT Fleet, as it allows us to deliver an even better customer experience, by offering greater flexibility and convenience around how and where their vehicles are maintained and serviced,” said Gerry McQuade, CEO of BT Wholesale and Ventures.

He adds: “SEV’s position in the marketplace makes it a natural choice of partner, as we look to combine the strength of our fixed garage network with a fully mobile team of technicians.”

Mobile maintenance looks set to grow as more companies realise the potential time and cost savings involved, and other manufacturers, dealers and suppliers respond to this growing demand. Volkswagen claims that specialist van downtime can cost a fleet customer up to £600 per day. Anything that can be done to reduce that sort of bill has to be good news. [TE](#)