

**Will Dalrymple speaks with incoming DAF UK managing director Robin Easton**

Since taking over the DAF UK managing director role this spring, Robin Easton has visited all 33 of the company's sales and service dealers, ranging from Aberdeen to Newton Abbot, including a few of the 100 additional service-only dealers. And that's not all; he's planning to repeat the tour next year.

He says: "I think that they are one of our key strengths in this market: we have the largest and most comprehensive dealer network."

The trips were no holiday; he was there to personally apply the DAF glue. As most of its trucks are sold indirect (excepting a few key accounts such as Royal Mail), dealers are the company's front door. And its back door, too, in that the service dealers keep customers' DAF trucks on the road, far from home. This, then, is the opportunity and the challenge of a franchised dealer: although it may be formally independent, the service and quality that it provides are required to meet DAF's expectations. So in addition to the personal calls, DAF HQ also tracks and monitors them with what Easton calls 'very many' performance metrics, adding: "But we are transparent about what we are doing, and what their results are."

As far as service goes, technical support starts at the dealer level, and an example of its exacting technical standards was the pioneering work the company undertook to license the network's 1,800 technicians to Irtec Service Maintenance Technician standard in 2011.

A recent innovation in customer support is driver trainers. Earlier this year, it installed one at each of the



# Open architecture

20 dealer groups. Their purpose is to explain in more depth than the brief handover formerly carried out by salespeople. Marketing manager Phil Moon explains: "It's about having that relationship with the drivers, just as our sales guys are good at having relationships with the buyers."

By contrast, Easton's job is to relate to everyone, it would appear. Although British by birth, Easton has spent much of his career overseas, previously as managing director of corporate parent Paccar's business in India, and before that Paccar treasurer, based in the USA. He says it's "wonderful" to return to work in the UK.

Since he started, he has been keeping the 80-strong staff of the company's Thame, Oxfordshire offices on their toes by asking lots of questions, something that his predecessor Ray Ashworth, who retired earlier this year after 48 years in the truck industry, didn't need to do. He explains: "I have a thirst for knowledge. I don't wait for it to come; I go out there and ask for it." His personal touch extends to writing his own emails and managing his calendar.

His approach reminds me of the new telematics system that DAF is currently rolling out, DAF Connect. Although the company has worked with telematics

provider Microlise for years (and will continue to do so), this new system provides an open architecture so that fleets can manage data from multiple telematics systems.

Through his networking inside and outside the company, Easton practises a similar kind of open architecture. He flies on average twice a month to DAF's headquarters and Paccar's drivetrain centre of excellence in Eindhoven, in The Netherlands, for example, and also represents the OEM's interests to government, particularly with regard to emerging environmental legislation, directly and through manufacturer group SMMT.

He'll be able to host bigger office parties next year when the company finishes a £20 million head office in nearby Haddenham. The facility, offices and a training suite, is promised to have a much more modern look and feel than the current rented site that is to be developed by its owners. Among other mod cons, the new HQ will feature a 60-seat auditorium for dealer gatherings. These new digs will represent the brand in the right way, argues Easton, and the new technology planned for the building will enable people to better do their jobs, he states. Open architecture indeed. [IE](#)