

“We will expand our development for autonomous applications to be ready for serial production in the next 18-24 months”

Andreas Renschler

VW GETS HEAVY

Volkswagen is well-known for its cars and vans the world over, but the recently established truck and bus division has brought together some disparate big hitters. Ian Norwell reports from Hamburg on the shape of it, two years in



The commercial vehicle industry's listing of 'who owns who' is a constantly shifting document, destined to be out of date as soon as it is published. The trend is one of consolidation, with purchases and acquisitions often following the cycles of economic downturn.

One of the more significant OEM events in the last few years has been the formation of Volkswagen Truck and Bus Group (VWT&BG) in 2015. Its CEO, Andreas Renschler – an ex-Daimler Trucks boss – headed up an October presentation in Hamburg to trumpet its stance on three key issues: automation, connectivity and clean transportation. He remarked: “By merging the competencies of our brands in these focus areas, we believe we can massively increase efficiency – not only for our customers, but also for the entire transportation system, society and the environment.”

With the building blocks of Scania AB of Södertälje in Sweden and MAN SE of Munich, it already has a powerful centre of gravity in the truck and bus industry. Add the broad product line of

Caminhões e Ônibus, a marque of MAN Latin America, and the VW Constellation heavy trucks series from Brazil, and the sum is a global player, no question.

To connect all these products, VWT&BG has begun developing Rio, a joint open digital platform (see also <https://is.gd/boyoso>). If its ambitions are achieved, it will dwarf the capabilities of even current telematics systems, with the aim of connecting vehicle tracking, driver communication, driving and efficiency analyses, digital maintenance management and tachograph data, as well as other advanced logistics services. MAN will be the first OEM partner to start equipping its vehicles, ex-works, with Rio connectivity. (TE understands the launch will be in 2020.) Renschler commented: “The biggest potential lies in the smart combination of hardware and software solutions.”

Another futuristic software-hardware fusion is launching now. Scania's driverless eight-wheelers (above) were tested in a Swedish quarry last year operating on a prescribed off-road route – <https://is.gd/ecufum>. The first order is about to be shipped to an unnamed customer that will use it for real-life

operations in Africa. Of this technology, Renschler commented: “We will expand our development for autonomous applications in industrial environments quickly in order to be ready for serial production within the next 18-24 months.”

Work to bring together Scania, MAN and the others under the corporate umbrella appears to have begun. On the contentious technology of platooning, Renschler said: “Joint development has started of a multi-brand standard for MAN and Scania mixed platoons, which we expect to be ready to run as early as 2018. We are also pretty sure that autopilots will be installed in trucks and coaches as of 2022 at the latest.”

However, an important job still to be done is streamlining group production of big-ticket items like drivetrains, and cutting duplication. Progress there will be interesting to watch. Will Scania's latest R730 V8 and MAN's D38 heavy-duty diesel form a union, giving birth to an uber-diesel for global application? It will be these kind of developments – as well as the cloud-based electronic wizardry – that will bring the real benefits of the new group's pulling power. **TE**