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The 'foreign scourge'

A few months ago, Gareth Llewellyn told me that DVSA is more worried about foreign vehicles' roadworthiness than UK ones. Historical data released this month does, for the most part, support this point: foreign truck and trailers perform worse in UK compliance checks than GB vehicles.

Until now. This year, though, for the first time, foreign HGVs actually performed better than British HGVs in one metric (see p7). That follows a several-year trend.

And that's not all. This year, GB trailer compliance performance was worse for the second year in a row, while foreign trailer performance - though significantly worse than GB trailers - improved for the fourth year running. If neither trend changes, I estimate that the two will switch places in four years.

What this means is that UK fleets may not have as much of an edge over foreign ones - either now, or in the future - as their operators might think.

It may also be time for UK hauliers to pay a bit more attention to their trailer fleet; if not, they might end up being fined on the continent, just as foreign trailers are here. (A good way to improve maintenance operations is irtec technician and Workshop Accreditation: see <https://is.gd/idepud>.)

Here's a question: is British truck engineering better or worse than the rest of the world? The DVSA data suggests that the world is catching up.

A tantalising glimpse inside Europe's truck world comes from another data set published last month. 'Vehicles In Use' from truck manufacturers' trade organisation ACEA (<https://is.gd/mafova>) reports big disparities in how old European truck fleets are. For example, the average age of the 1.09 million medium and heavy commercial vehicles operating in Poland (16.7 years) is nearly twice that of the 670,000 operating in Great Britain.

So which country has the better engineering practice? Perhaps Polish engineers are worse, but they are able to get away with it because regulations are laxer there. Or it might be the other way round: Polish engineers' maintenance practices are so good that they can keep older trucks running to the same level as much newer ones in Great Britain. (And there are lots of other possibilities, too.) Without more information, it's hard to know. But what seems certain to me is that with such a varied truck parc, engineering practice in Europe must vary hugely by country.

Will Dalrymple
Editor