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In the vanguard

Vans were at the centre of the ACEA's 'Powertrain options for commercial vehicles' conference in Brussels a couple of months ago. And not just the eight vehicles on show outside (three electric, three diesel, two CNG); they were a key part of the event indoors, too.

Vans were also caught up in the second European mobility package published late last year. Those proposals suggested that, by 2030, car and light commercial vehicle emissions should be cut to 30% of 2021 levels. (By the way, Europe's first-ever CO₂ emission limits for trucks are coming, too; to be published probably by May 2018, I was told.) At the conference, ACEA secretary-general Erik Jonnaert told press that it is pushing for reducing those cuts in vans, because the EC should have distinguished better between cars and vans.

He has a point. Cars and vans do different things. Unlike cars, most vans don't just provide 'personal mobility' that local governments are so keen to replace with greener options (for example, taking the bus). Decarbonising haulage is a different kettle of fish.

Second, vans are only for work. But for what job? While trucks are specialised - tippers tip, tractors pull and RCVs take out the trash - vans do all of that, and more. What that means is huge variability in duty cycle: whether travel distances, loading, or operating hours, vans are the most adaptable, and accessible, commercial vehicle of all.

ACEA's position that vans need a break also seems to rest on the assumption that, as trucks, their commercial function provides a social benefit that justifies their carbon use, compared to cars. That's as may be.

But if vans are to be protected from restricted environmental regulation by sheltering under a truck-like umbrella, maybe their operators should treat them less like cars, and more like trucks. That could mean, for example, maintaining them better. Vans' final MOT failure rates for 2015/6 were 27.9%, far closer to cars' 37.3% than trucks' 10.3%. Proper maintenance affects all sorts of aspects of operations, from social to safety - and emissions is absolutely part of that.

For advice and information on how to go about doing that, next month's article on the FTA Van Excellence scheme might be a good place to start. Another useful tool could be the irte light scheme for accrediting LCV technicians; for more information, see <https://is.gd/omosok>.

Will Dalrymple
Editor