

Lightweights

Although LCVs and rigids over 3.5t gvw stray into truck territory, they offer benefits that make them worth their while. By Steve Banner

Struggling to get sufficient payload onto a 3.5-tonner, some van operators may feel they have no choice but to step up to a heavier weight category; even though by doing so they will face a far tighter regulatory environment. If you drive a goods vehicle grossing at above 3.5 tonnes, you need a driver CPC, and your employer should hold an O licence. If the vehicle concerned has a gross vehicle weight between 3.5-7.5t, you should hold a C1 driver's licence. And if you plan to use that vehicle to haul a trailer grossing above 750kg, then you need a C+E driver's licence.

All of the mainstream van manufacturers offer higher-gross-weight versions of their 3.5-tonne models. Light commercial market leader Ford, for example, markets a 4.7-tonne Transit van that can handle a 2,169kg gross payload. The maximum its 3.5-tonne stablemate can cope with is 1,446kg. Number two marketplace player Volkswagen sells a 3.5-tonne Crafter van with a top gross payload capacity of up to 1,654kg. But opt for the 5.0-tonne variant instead and the payload increases to 2,573kg.

Businesses that venture above 3.5 tonnes, however, may take the view that they want to reap the full benefit by opting for a light truck with the biggest possible payload capability without going above 7.5 tonnes and having



to recruit a driver with a category C licence.

ASIAN PROMISE

Opt for a traditionally engineered 7.5-tonner with a European pedigree, and its payload capacity may be somewhat disappointing. Choose one with a Far Eastern heritage, however, and payload prospects will brighten. "A bare Fuso Canter diesel chassis typically weighs 2.5 tonnes, which gives you a 5.0-tonne body and payload allowance to play with," says Ross Paterson, UK head of product and marketing at Mercedes-Benz Trucks. "That's around 500kg to 1,000kg more than a traditional 7.5-tonner can offer." Daimler-owned Fuso's products are distributed through the Mercedes commercial vehicle network in Britain.

Also with a Far Eastern pedigree, Isuzu Truck's N75 7.5-tonner delivers similar weight advantages. "We can

offer you a 6.5-tonner, but if you choose the 7.5-tonner you can carry another 800kg," says Richard Waterworth, head of sales at Isuzu Truck UK.

Nor is there a question mark over the durability of either of these products. Both Fuso and Isuzu sell their products in third world countries where they are expected to survive being heavily overloaded.

Fuso can also cater for the needs of businesses requiring 7.5-tonners which use alternative means of propulsion. Ten electric eCanter 7.5-tonners are currently on trial with fleets in London (pictured, above) and are achieving ranges of over 90 miles between recharges, says Paterson. The Canter 7.5-tonner is also sold as a hybrid, he adds, and both it and eCanter can achieve payloads in excess of 3.0 tonnes.

Hull bodybuilder Paneltex is building an electric version of the Isuzu

N75 powered by a 150kW (112bhp) Magtec P180 electric motor. It takes approximately four hours to completely recharge the 80kWh lithium-phosphate battery pack from zero using a three-phase supply, says Paneltex, and it can then deliver a range of up to 80 miles. In this context, mention should also be made of the electric vans grossing at up to 7.5 tonnes built by Oxfordshire manufacturer Arrival that are on trial with the Royal Mail and UPS.

And Chelmsford-based Tevva can supply a British-built electric 7.5-tonner with a 1.5-litre petrol or diesel engine fitted that acts as a range extender. It is used to drive a generator that can recharge the 74kWh batteries while the truck is in motion.

Finally, over in Spain, China's BYD has given a range of electric trucks, including a box-bodied T6 7.5-tonner, its European debut in conjunction with electric forklift truck dealer Tomi. There is as yet no indication as to if or when they will appear in the UK.

For conventional powertrains, rival Isuzu offers N75 customers the choice of either a 148bhp 3.0-litre diesel or a 187bhp 5.2-litre diesel. "The former offers a 200kg weight saving over the latter, so it tends to be favoured by tipper and fridge operators," adds Waterworth; both sectors are eager for every last kilo of payload.

Customers who specify dry freight or curtainsider bodies for parcels work, for example, tend to go for the 5.2-litre, he says. Although the 3.0-litre would be perfectly adequate if the cargo is light and being delivered locally, the bigger engine may be preferred if a lot of distance work is involved.

EUROPEAN OPTIONS

Aware that lighter rivals might be snapping at its heels, DAF introduced the LF City 7.5-tonner (pictured above) some 18 months ago. With a 3.8-litre PX-4 Cummins engine at either 154bhp



or 170bhp, it is equipped with a five-speed Eaton manual transmission. Smaller than the 4.5-litre and 6.7-litre diesels installed in other LF models, the 3.8-litre achieves Euro VI emissions compliance by relying solely on selective catalytic reduction (SCR). Exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) is not fitted, which helps save weight.

"If you fit a 20ft box body to City LF, you should be able to carry a 3.0-tonne payload," says DAF's UK marketing manager Phil Moon.

Relying solely on SCR means that City LF consumes more AdBlue. "We're only talking 5% to 6% of the diesel used, though, rather than 4% to 5% if you're relying on SCR and EGR," he says. On the other hand, not using EGR lessens the requirement for active regeneration – a useful benefit in an urban context.

Moving to 7.5 tonnes to achieve the healthiest possible payload is not always necessary, as IVECO is proving with its Daily 7.2-tonne chassis cab. It is also available as a 7.0-tonne integral van with a 19.6m³ load area. For example, a Daily E6 72C21 with a 5.1m wheelbase fitted with a 202bhp 3.0-litre diesel, an eight-speed Hi-Matic fully automatic gearbox and a 38m³ curtainsider body can transport approaching 3,600kg.

Fuel consumption should be an average 24mpg to 25mpg, says IVECO; a significant improvement on the 17mpg to 18mpg a 7.5-tonner is likely to return.

Versions of both of the big Daily vehicles are available that can run

on compressed natural gas (CNG). IVECO's eagerness to cover every niche in the market is reflected in the fact that it now offers 4x4 versions of the Daily van and chassis cab grossing at 7.0 tonnes.

Then there is the somewhat unusual-looking front-wheel-drive tri-axle Master 6.0-tonner from Renault Trucks to consider (see also www.is.gd/umicet). Powered by a 165hp 2.3-litre engine married to a six-speed gearbox, it features a 30m³ box body constructed by PD Stevens of Market Drayton in Shropshire. It is mounted on a chassis built by Nefra Vehicle Technology of the Netherlands, with either air or steel suspension. It can transport just shy of 3.0 tonnes, rising to 3.25 tonnes if you decide not to have a tail-lift installed, says Grahame Neagus, UK head of light commercial vehicles at Renault Trucks. (Given the low chassis height of 463mm, many operators will deem a tail-lift to be unnecessary.)

Both the Master and the Daily have the advantage that, with the engine in front of rather than beneath them, drivers sit much closer to the road than they do in a conventional 7.5-tonner. That eases drivers' exertions, and improves sight lines around vulnerable road users.

Like the Daily, the Renault brings fuel-efficiency benefits. Diesel consumption is over 30% less than that of a box-bodied 7.5-tonner, says Neagus. Not only does that spell good news so far as total cost of ownership is concerned, it's good news for the operator's carbon footprint, too. **TE**