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Shock of the new

The industry, it appears, is waking up to the consequences of electrification of commercial vehicles, and the CV Show featured some interesting concept trucks on display. Conventional-looking conversions included the DAF/VDL CF Electric tractor or the Whale/E Moss rigid suction tanker, as well as LCVs such as pre-production launches of the Peugeot Boxer/Citroen Relay. MAN's more radical design, CitE, a 4x2 urban delivery rigid, boasts low-entry cab and high-tech lighting and dashboard.

Accompanying the show vehicles were lots of unanswered questions about how a large-scale rollout of full-electrics might work. Will there be enough electricity? How can the grid transmit the required power to depots, particularly those in city centres? How will the government make up the hundreds of millions in annual revenue it currently receives from duty on diesel fuel? Does the world have sufficient raw materials to produce all of the batteries needed?

These are good questions, and what they share is a common concern about the bigger picture. Each alternative fuel requires its own kind of supply infrastructure to feed vehicles. (And standards are part of that; for example, the irtec technician accreditation scheme is focusing more on electric vehicles to reflect this technological shift.)

At the other end of the scale, the CV Show also revealed that suppliers have also started to think about solving a much simpler operational issue - remembering to plug in the vehicle to charge the battery. It's no trivial matter. On a diesel truck, forgetting to check the tank gauge only requires 10 minutes' wait at the depot's pumps, or in an emergency, a trip to a local public filling station. But not charging an electric vehicle could result in losing an entire shift's worth of duty, or, even worse, having to recover a stopped vehicle en route. Not only do most full-electrics require at least a few hours to recharge, but also rely on cheaper off-peak electricity to keep costs down.

So plugging in needs to be a vital part of the parking-up routine at the end of a shift. No wonder that an agile supplier would want to capitalise on that. Based on anecdotal evidence, the award for first-to-market goes to telematics firm Geotab, which used the CV Show partly to promote that new service (see p32). It won't be the last.

Will Dalrymple
Editor