

More than fuel savings from telematics trials

MiX Telematics reckons that, in the last year alone, its technology has saved bus and coach operators £8 million in fuel bills. That's impressive, but the firm is now looking at haulage.

Hence its trials over the last 18 months with three fleet operators, all of which indicate that similar savings are indeed available. Hemel-based Keystone Distribution was one and its fleet has notched up an average 10% saving, while Crayford, Kent-based Solstor reckons its trucks are coming in with 12% fuel savings.

The operators say that's due to MiX systems' focus on key driver performance indicators – namely over-revving, excessive idling, harsh braking, hard acceleration and speeding.

Drivers see the systems' judgement of their actions in real time on a dash-mounted display; fleet managers also see the data; and drivers know they do.



But marketing and operations director Steve Coffin insists it's not just about the telematics. Essential to the success of any such project is driver coaching and mentoring, he insists.

"Fleet operators can use the reports to see who needs further training and it's not always the younger drivers. Older drivers may not be as used to new

vehicle technology as some of their young colleagues," he says.

Either way, Coffin suggests that, where a consultative approach is taken with drivers, and incentives offered, the results are real, rapid – and go far beyond fuel savings.

ETS Distribution, which has also been trialling MiX systems, agrees. Operations director Paul

Wreaves cites reduced wear and tear, meaning less replacement components and maintenance costs, as well as improved truck residual values.

"We have seen fuel savings of 10–15%, which, on an annual fuel bill of £600,000, is a lot of money. And we've seen a similar saving on our insurance premium as well," says Wreaves.

"We've also been able to improve efficiency of pickups by getting guys closest to the job to divert – not just those that tend to say yes," he continues.

"We began by piloting the system on six vehicles [but] the benefits immediately became apparent and convinced us to roll out Fleet Manager across our fleet of 24 trucks," he adds.

Add to those the savings that come from reduced accidents and improved brand image, he says, and using telematics on any mid-to-large fleet is a total no brainer.

Dairy Crest improves loading bay safety

Chilled dairy foods firm Dairy Crest is giving the thumbs up to Castell's interlocking drive-away prevention system that protects loading bay personnel.

The company has now installed Salvo at two sites and Martin O'Brien, health & safety manager at Dairy Crest's Fenstanton dairy, says: "It's the best system we've found."

O'Brien explains that Fenstanton has 10 loading bays and a lot of eastern European workers. "My biggest concern, from a health and safety perspective, is language. We had initially tried a traffic light system, but that didn't work. There was still the danger of shunters pulling trailers off a bay with someone still inside."

He first came across Salvo through Sarah Mellor at Dairy Crest's Crudgington facility, where the system had been in operation for a couple of years.



Having spoken to staff at the site and seen Salvo in action, O'Brien decided it was also right for his Fenstanton depot.

Its biggest advantage, he says, is that the shunters retain control and that there is no room for assumptions that might lead to accidents. "No one can get in [the trailers] until the shunters are finished outside.

And they can't take a trailer away until they're all clear and the doors are down."

Fenstanton handles some 100 vehicle movements a day. Shunters reverse trailers up to the relevant bay, remove the Salvo Susie lock from its storage box and fit it to the trailer's exposed emergency airline coupling. This immobilises the

trailer and releases a coded key from the end of the lock, which the shunter then inserts into the Salvo control panel.

Internal beacons then alert loaders that the bay door can be opened, while yard-side traffic lights switch from green to red, to inform shunters that loading is taking place. Once the trailer is loaded, the process is reversed. The key remains trapped in the control panel until the door is fully closed.

Fenstanton's chief shunter Alan Crouch confirms that the system works well. He has been impressed by Salvo's simplicity, and also makes the point that it puts control of the loading procedure in the hands of his team.

"Shunters have been the driving force behind the adoption of this technology and they're the ones who are most pleased with it," says Crouch.

Tanker technology turns on tight design

SP Holding of Telford, the drainage services trucks and plant hire firm, is challenging UK fleet operators to buy 'best of British'. The firm's latest vehicle – a 12-tonne gvw vacuum tanker – has a 100% British pedigree.

As in the past, it specified Whale Tankers' bodywork, with a 1,200 gallon vacuum tank. However, this time it also went for a British DAF FA LF 45 4x2 sleeper cab chassis, assembled in the UK at Leyland Trucks.

Supplied by DAF dealership Greenhouse Commercials of Shrewsbury, the chassis cab even goes as far as sporting the Union Jack, together with the wording 'Assembled in Britain'.

Setting aside the worthy campaign, though, specifying and indeed operating and maintaining, tankers like this one are more specialised than many transport engineers may realise.

This tanker was specified for multi-purpose blockage removal,



so, for example, has a tank made from 304 stainless steel, designed for non-hazardous waste. Also, its vacuum system is powered by a Mistral 402 exhauster-compressor and it caters for jetting, delivering 12gpm of water at 3,500psi.

That sets its own challenges, in terms of onboard equipment type and location, but also variable axle loadings. As Mark Warrington, managing director of Whale Tankers, points out, vehicles start their rounds front-

end loaded with clean jetting water, but end them rear-loaded, with dirty water and sludge.

And that's not all: "With the part-load problem and fact that we're dealing with liquids, and that a lot of our tankers are tippers that may have to go off-road, you have to deal with surge, as well as variable load distribution," he explains.

That's all about designing for a low centre of gravity and ensuring adequate tank baffles, while also staying within the

chassis manufacturer's loading envelope – something that Whale manages using its 3D engineering software.

Equally, though, it's about the practicalities of air suspension versus parabolic springs on the rear, while bearing in mind the value of certain manufacturers' torsional rear axle systems.

Beyond that, Warrington says: "We also need power takeoffs and connections into the ECU. We need multiple equipment speeds, which we can then program via the J1939 interface, so that, for example, we can ramp the jetting pump down, if it hasn't been used, to improve efficiency. We tend to work with the manufacturers' applications engineers for that, so we can issue a chassis spec to the dealer."

Returning to SP Holding, the company has now ordered a further six Whale tankers, valued at around £500,000.

LBS trials electronic walk-around check

An ingenious electronic daily walk-around check system, launched by Truckfile at the CV Operator Show, has been proving itself at LBS Builders Merchants in Llandeilo, Wales.

Paul Clarke, managing director of Truckfile parent company Magic Internet Technologies, explains that, with the new system, truck drivers need no longer use paper.

Instead, they use a ruggedised handheld reader for mandatory checks. That unit automatically recognises small, weather-resistant RFID tags permanently attached to the vehicle exterior in the inspection zones, as per VOSA guidelines.

Most important, the unit automatically identifies the vehicle, the driver and the components to be checked – and won't allow the driver to proceed until he or she signs off each location as inspected.



Drivers pass or fail what they see against a checklist, noting problems as either non-urgent or unsafe. If it's the latter, the system automatically notifies the transport manager concerned that the vehicle is off the road and links the information into the Truckfile workshop management system database.

Neil Fearn, transport and health and safety manager at

LBS, explains that one of his 18 tonne rigid was equipped with the RFID tags a few weeks ago and the system has been working reliably ever since.

"With this system, we're going as far as we can to force drivers to walk around vehicles. I can't physically get all of them to look at their vehicles and report defects. I've got 10 branches."

The LBS man adds, however,

that, beyond this, the Truckfile walk-around check provides a much quicker way of keeping workshop staff informed of defects. "It's instantaneous," he says, adding: "The next stage is just to get a printout working in the cab so that, if our driver is stopped by VOSA, they can see that the walk-around has been done electronically."

Fearn is confident that this system will replace the existing paper-based defect system. "We're very close to getting VOSA acceptance. Once Magic Internet has got the print side completed, I've offered to get my VOSA contact to assess the system and then we'll put it in front of VOSA for full approval."

Asked about the cost, Fearn says that it's still a trial, so that hasn't been raised. But he adds: "Whatever the cost, it's far outweighed by the overall benefits of compliance."