

Question: What is a commercial vehicle? Answer: It depends on who you're talking to.

One definition of a commercial vehicle is 'a type of motor vehicle that may be used for transporting goods or passengers'. However, dig a little deeper and subsequent meanings are found, such as this one from the National Safety Code: 'any commercial truck over 4,536kg gvw or any commercial bus capable of carrying more than 10 people'.

So which is the correct definition, if indeed there is one? Many readers may deem commercial vehicles just to include those above 3.5t gvw. But at a time when LCV sales are rising by an average of 8% throughout Europe (and 9.5% in the UK), it would surely be remiss to continue to exclude these panel vans, LCVs, cargo vans, or whatever term you want to adopt.

This year, Mercedes is already reporting an improvement in sales of more than 10% over 2009 with its Sprinter, Vito, Vario and Viano models. Quite an achievement, given that 2009 was described by the company as "a brutal year", when it experienced a reverse in LCV sales of 39%, compared with the preceding 12 months. The introduction of a Renault Kangoo-sized vehicle for Mercedes, under the company's joint venture with the Renault-Nissan alliance, is only set to make those figures increase even further.

At operator level, the dependence on light commercial vehicles is self-evident. Lancashire County Council's fleet has more than 1,000 vehicles – everything from leaf blowers, up to primarily one artic that runs at 50 tonnes and probably half a dozen of everything in between. Even a logistics company that runs 44t artic must also have maintenance plans for its range of smaller delivery and service vehicles.

LCVs are vital to the development of new technologies, too. Take, for example, the cover story on this issue of Transport Engineer. No-one knows the future of electric vehicles, but their fate in the transport environment will probably be decided by the vans they currently power.

Given the fact that some experts are predicting a rise in the LCV market of 20% in the next 10 years, there is no getting away from the fact that vehicle downsizing is underway.

The future is bright; and the future of
the commercial vehicle sector is light



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