



# Spendy buses

**Bus and coach manufacturers and operators have not been immune to the recession, so what can suppliers offer to help them keep costs as low as possible? John Challen finds out**

**T**he bus and coach market may be buoyant, compared with that for trucks and LCVs, but times are still tough. While operators such as Stagecoach are replenishing fleets, as well as investing in hybrid technology, they are also looking to reduce overheads to save passing any extra costs on to the paying public. Fortunately, there are a number of products and services now available to help them in this goal.

One bus operator that has experienced cost and safety benefits by switching from pits to lifts, for example, in the workshop is Go-Ahead. The transport company was reliant on pits at its

Camberwell workshop, but felt they were outdated and even potentially dangerous. Go-Ahead turned to Stertil Koni, which recommended a mix of wireless mobile column lifts, recessed half-scissor lifts and twin-ram lifts fitted under the floor.

Nine sets of Stertil's 8.2-tonne ST1082FWF mobile lifts were chosen, because of the flexibility they would provide within the Go-Ahead workspace – allowing bays to be moved around, according to workload. Stertil Koni's wireless system was another benefit, removing the trip hazards caused by cables running across the floor.

Go-Ahead ordered two 30-tonne inground lifts for the running-shift bays. Again, there is minimal intrusion into the workshop space, as only the heads of the lifting rams are visible, with the rams and motors concealed underground. Vehicle wheels are instantly accessible, as these lifts pick vehicles up on their axles or chassis, removing the need for axle stands or jacking beams and speeding up wheel work.

Then for the main work bays, Stertil Koni installed four recessed 20-tonne Skylifts. "The use of recessed Skylifts at Camberwell allowed the architects to create more usable workspace," explains Tony Edge, general manager, Stertil Koni.



“With traditional four-post lifts, the usable space between bays is reduced by the presence of the posts.” He claims this is not the case with the Skylift, because the platforms are self-supported by the hydraulic legs and are the width of the vehicle, thus allowing them to be spaced closer together.

Edge says that wireless mobile column lifts, like those deployed in Camberley, offer numerous cost and space saving opportunities. “The lifts only use the main battery power while raising the vehicle up in the air. The controlled descent is purely down to gravity and some clever electronic synchronisation, while the lack of cables and plugs cuts costs and reduces the risk of unplanned downtime,” he says.

**Outside the workshop**

Go-Ahead also points to savings from using MiX Telematics fleet management equipment. Last year, the operator placed an order for 3,500 onboard telematics systems, with a value of £2m – the UK bus industry’s largest investment in the technology. The package it selected includes MiX’s RIBAS (revving, idling, braking, acceleration, speeding) detection technology on its FM3306 equipment, which includes on-board computer and reporting software.

At the other end of the fleet spectrum, MiX Telematics also recently supplied Anglian Bus and Coach, which operates 60 vehicles. Anglian wanted to improve the fleet’s performance, but also to reduce its carbon footprint. In addition to investing in new vehicles, the firm decided to investigate telematics systems and eventually settled for MiX Telematics’ Fleet Manager.

The equipment was then fitted to 25 buses in the fleet, from mid-weight Optare Solos and Tempos to Scania Omni single- and double-deck heavy buses. “As a progressive company, we look to continuously improve every aspect of our performance: hence our decision to fit the system to a range of buses,” says Anglian Bus and Coach director Andrew Pursey.

He reveals that the positive results have led to the system being incorporated within the SAFED (Safe and Fuel Efficient Driving) training that Anglian

**Bus and coach operators have access to many new engineering solutions that help their fleets run more efficiently**



provides as the first module of its Driver CPC course. “This involves using MiX Telematics-equipped vehicles to evaluate driver performance around a route before and after training, which clearly demonstrates the improvements that can be achieved. In this way, all our drivers are now benefiting from Fleet Manager.”

**Nobody’s fuel**

Back in the workshop, fuel injection specialist Delphi has recently launched diagnostic and analysis tools to help technicians solve problems specifically with coach and bus powertrains. “We try to help in the initial stage when the vehicle comes into the workshop with a fault,” explains Julian Golding, Delphi’s marketing manager in the UK.

“Diagnostics is key to this and we have a two-fold approach. One part is an electronic diagnostic tool, based on our existing car and LCV system, the DS 150. It is a PC-based tool that communicates with the vehicle’s ECU to identify fault codes.” Golding says Delphi is using its fuel injection background to develop a tool that covers all diagnostic systems, ultimately catering for all vehicles in the bus and coach parc.

The other part of the company’s product offensive in the bus and coach sector is a fuel analyser. Launched in August, the first shipments are being made as Transport Engineer goes to press. “Our analysis has shown that 80% of the problems with fuel injection systems are caused by fuel quality,” explains Golding. “The new tool allows technicians to undertake the test themselves; identify impurities in the fuel; and get a percentage biodiesel.” This latter point is important, not least due to manufacturer warranties, some of which become invalid should biofuel content go beyond a specific level.

Clearly, cutting the cost of any bus and coach operation is never going to be about one project or another: it’s more dealing with as many factors as possible, as quickly as possible. Equally clearly, though, there is a lot to look at here – and covering all sorts of aspects. Telematics, workshop hardware and diagnostics tools are just three of many. **TE**