



Crash course

With the PAS 125 damage repair standard now covering commercial vehicles up to 5 tonnes, Brian Tingham talks to Marc Watts, owner of the first accredited CV bodyshop, on what it means for the industry

Behind the scenes, something has been happening around vehicle repair that could have a significant impact on fleet managers and owner operators, when they have an accident. That something is PAS 125, the damage repair kitemark launched in 2007, which, until a few months ago, only applied to cars and vans up to 3.5 tonnes. The standard was updated last summer and, unbeknown to most of the transport industry, PAS 125:2011 now applies right up to 5 tonnes – so covering the vast majority of LCVs, including home delivery vehicles.

This matters more than some may realise. BSI chief exec Howard Kerr describes the new PAS 125 as addressing technological innovations in the industry – such as increasingly adopted ultra high strength boron steel – as well as bodyshop best practice. “The newly revised PAS ... provides assurance to both motor vehicle insurers and owners that repairs are undertaken to a robustly managed process,” he states.

Safe repairs

And Peter Shaw, CEO of Thatcham, the insurer-funded research centre, adds: “Thatcham witnesses the continual advancement in vehicle design and materials that challenge insurers’ engineering and repair networks. The Kitemark provides an ability to identify those bodyshops that are investing in equipment and skills training to ensure a safe, high quality repair.”

‘Safe’ and ‘high quality’ are the watchwords here – to which you might add ‘legal’. As Marc Watts, who owns Spectrum, the first commercial vehicle accident repair shop to be PAS 125 2011 certified, puts it: “It’s your choice where you have your vehicles repaired. However, if you select a bodyshop you’ve been using for years, but if it’s not PAS 125 accredited, there is no traceability. Bear in mind that with new materials, for example, PAS 125 demands the right equipment, processes, training and methods. For boron steel, that’s MIG brazing. If the bodyshop doesn’t have PAS, you don’t know what they’re doing.”

His point is that repairs won’t cost you any more either way, but there’s a world of difference, if something goes wrong. “If

your vehicle comes out of the repairer, causes an accident and faulty repairs are suspected, you have the protection of complete traceability,” he explains. “So, when the barrister asks what due diligence and what duty of care you performed in checking that the bodyshop was capable of repairing your vehicle properly, you can say that they’re independently accredited to PAS 125:2011.”

And make no mistake: achieving PAS 125:2011 is no pushover. Spectrum’s bodyshops at Thurrock (Dartford crossing) and Sidcup, Kent, went through the process late last year. Watts reports that it took four months of assiduous work with management consultancy David Kite Associates to obtain PAS 125:2007 certification, for insurance jobs on cars and vans, and further effort to move up to PAS 125:2011. What’s more, re-verification will happen again soon, with BSI mandating unannounced visits twice yearly to defend the British kitemark.

Why four months? David Kite explains that the tighter audit controls required by the 2011 regulations cover areas ranging from subcontractors (for example, tyre, air conditioning and windscreens services) to components, with fluids, parts and structural materials (including sealers) requiring rigorous date and type management, as well as certification to OEM specification.

And it’s a similar story with documentation of repair methodologies and building the people skills. Watts makes the point that one in four technicians now needs either NVQ Level 3 or ATA (automotive technician accreditation) certification, while all estimators must also be ATA trained. “CPD [continuous professional development] is a huge part of PAS 125. Everybody with relevant certification needs an annual skills test to keep up to date with changing equipment and materials. Also, qualifications only last for three years.”

Like it or not, the PAS kitemark is here and, if you didn’t know about it before, you do now. Note that all major vehicle insurers in the automotive sector made their choice a long time ago: if bodyshops weren’t PAS 125 certified, they were off the approved network. For home shopping fleets that are self insured or managed by fleet engineers, with huge excesses, insurance companies may not be in the frame. But you could be. 