

“Has there been a better time for organisations in the transport industry to embrace innovation?”

Despite the ever-present risk of recession that hung over many during 2011 and the uncertainty over the UK's economic performance that still dominates thinking for the coming 12 months, there is an increasingly popular view that attack is the best form of defence.

To put it another way, investment and, in turn, engineering innovation, could be an important answer to improving performance and ensuring expansion, not contraction, of your transport-related business.

History indicates that many of the greatest innovations stem from relatively simple ideas. Taking this thinking to the transport sector, look no further than Wabco, which was recently shortlisted in the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders' (SMMT) 2011 Award for Automotive Innovation.

The commercial vehicle safety and control system specialist's entry was TailGuard, a blind spot detection solution for trailers. According to Wabco, the system was “developed to help drivers and fleet operators running trucks and trailers to reverse their vehicles with increased safety in the work environment”.

Sounds fairly straightforward, but, beyond the advantages of a rear-facing camera, TailGuard can also sense objects at the back of trailer, and be tailored to match different installations and configurations of trailer and tractor unit.

Although the field of six finalists in the SMMT's competition leaned towards passenger car technology, Ashwoods Automotive, with its hybrid drive system developed for LCVs, also joined Wabco in highlighting that innovation was just as impressive in the commercial market.

Saving between 15 and 20% on fuel for a number of major operators around the UK, such as Royal Mail, Environment Agency and Transport for London, Ashwood's technology exemplifies the notion of having an idea and running with it.

For some, the innovation approach may seem too big a risk to take. But for others, it might just yield major dividends.

Transport Engineer's regular 'IRTE to IRTE' members' column: focusing on the issues, challenges and concerns that matter to transport engineers and fleet managers

