

# How the tide is turning for dual-fuel heavy-duty trucks

**W**hen residuals rise on trucks equipped with a certain type of fuel-reducing aid, you can be fairly certain that it must work. You can also deduce that the number of fleet engineers in the industry who have cottoned on has reached critical mass. Supply and demand control pricing, so enough transport professionals must be prepared to pay over the odds in expectation of real savings to come over the ensuing years.

So it appears to be with tractor units sporting dual-fuel engines – even where that alternative fuel is CNG (compressed natural gas), LNG (liquefied natural gas) or their biomethane equivalents, despite the paucity to date of an adequate gas-fuelling infrastructure (page 10). LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) dual-fuel engined trucks are also faring well, although that's less surprising, given the relatively low cost of the conversion and the easy availability of LPG.

What a turnaround. Just a year or so ago, such interventions were widely regarded as expensive, risky and a fringe activity for the enthusiastic few, prepared to put environmental concerns ahead of profit. Well not any more. How much of this is due to the high-profile work of dual-fuel converters, such as Hardstaff, and/or green-aware but savvy operators, like Howard Tenens, is unclear. And, doubtless, the Technology Strategy Board's £23 million 50–50 funded trial projects, announced earlier this year, have accelerated awareness – with some 40 companies and 360 dual-fuel truck conversions being built and tested in real, day-to-day operations.

Whatever the causes, dual-fuel is on its way to the top table of cost-cutting opportunities, with big household names, but also small, far less well-known, operators purchasing trucks, new and used, with what amount to factory-fitted dual-fuel conversions. Or they're paying upfront for conversions to be carried out by the likes of Hardstaff, Prins, G-Volution or Clean Air Power, on their behalf. Yes, there may be caveats over which alternative fuel to plump for; yes, fuel management may take some getting used to; and yes, you need to be sure of the business case (and that includes knowing that your chosen trucks have enough life left in them to merit the conversion). But note that not one of the operators that has gone dual-fuel is voicing any regret.

Which brings us to the next big idea. Rather than waiting for emissions standards to be agreed for the new breed of Euro 6 engine conversions and then buying new dual-fuel trucks – or indeed purchasing youngish, previously enjoyed Euro 5 trucks and converting those – why not embrace dual-fuel as a mechanism of cleaning up Euro 3 and Euro 4 trucks? Sure, there are far cheaper alternatives. Bus and truck operators concerned with entering the London LEZ (low emission zone) have been installing exhaust catalysts from, for example, Eminox. But, if there's life enough left in the old dogs and the duty cycle makes sense, then dual-fuel might be a mechanism for cutting emissions – by burning less diesel and more gas – and saving money in the process.

It's easy, and indeed sometimes wise, to be cynical about new ideas and the pioneers who promulgate them. We must all be wary of charm offensives. But when opinion starts turning and manufacturers sign partnership deals, it's as well to be as much ahead of the curve as possible. Otherwise the risk is a loss of competitiveness to the more fleet-footed next man.



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