

# RUBBER & FUEL

**Texaco's Truck Research Report reveals subtle changes in transport managers' preferences where tyres meet fuel efficiency. Steve Banner reports**

Changes are afoot in truck tyres, according to a study commissioned by Texaco, and sponsored by Chevron Lubricants and Continental Tyres. Chief among these are: a growing but gradual swing away from 295/80 R22.5 tyres to 315/80s; and a similarly slow move towards tyre pressure monitoring. However, while mileage, reliability and tyre lifecycle value are seen as increasingly important, when it comes to choosing replacements, purchase price remains king – certainly for smaller operators with from five to 25 trucks.

The increasing uptake of 315/80 R22.5 tyres (already preferred on the continent) is because they are better able to support the extra weight imposed by Euro 6. However, according to Continental commercial sales and marketing director Arthur Gregg: "It could be at least 2020 before the bulk of the British truck market moves in this direction."

## Pressure point

Moving on to TPMS (tyre pressure monitoring systems), Gregg suggests that growing numbers of fleets are showing interest in the firm's onboard ContiPressureCheck, as transport managers

buy into the idea that 90% of premature tyre failures are preceded by slow leaks, causing pressure to fall without anyone noticing. He cites Lomas Distribution and coach operator Parks of Hamilton, both of which have the system – which uses a sensor mounted inside the tyre – on trial.

Nevertheless, Gregg concedes that there is still plenty of work to do to persuade operators to install TPMS. Its survey shows that, while 98% of the 500 operators questioned know tyre pressures have an impact on fuel consumption, just 42% even monitor pressures with fuel economy in mind.

That's not to say transport companies aren't working to improve fuel efficiency – it's just that tyre systems aren't top of the bill. Interventions that operators believe lead to reduced fuel bills include driver training (favoured by 72% of those quizzed), telematics (52%) and aerodynamic aids (28%).

Back to basics, though, and worryingly for Continental, Bridgestone, Michelin, Goodyear, etc, is the survey's finding that brand is only a key purchasing decider for 10% of fleets. Clearly, premium tyre manufacturers need to work harder at their messaging – especially now that Chinese competition is gaining prominence. **TE**

## Generation 3 launched

Continental Tyres launched its all-new Generation 3 line-up at last month's CV Show, under the Conti EcoPlus banner. Initially offered in the most popular steer, drive and trailer sizes, units are available for long-distance hauliers.

The EcoPlus trailer tyre's label shows a top-of-the class 'A' designation for fuel efficiency, with a rolling resistance of less than 4kg per tonne. Other EcoPlus tyres offer similarly low figures, according to Continental, which contends that their sipes are also designed to deliver enhanced wet performance.

"We've gone for a cap-and-base approach to construction that employs two compounds, both with a silica content," explains general manager, technical services, Steve Howat. "The cap is tuned in favour of grip, while the base is tuned to rolling resistance. And we've used silane to stop the silica clumping."

Improved retreadability is another characteristic, says the manufacturer. Further, all steer tyres boast a visual alignment indicator to help identify uneven wear.

Hauliers on local and regional distribution will have to wait until the second half of this year, when the first examples of Generation 3 Conti Hybrid arrive. Then, in 2015, the Conti CrossTrac for on- and off-road applications and the Conti TerraPlus for off-road work are set to appear – followed by Continental Scandinavia winter tyres in 2016.

