

Spoilt for choice

Truck makers now have all their Euro 6 ducks in a row, and if DAF's rigids and multi-wheelers are anything to go by, fleet managers have never had it so good. Ian Norwell reports from Verviers

No truck is all things to all men these days, but the variety among rigids makes the tractor-trailer combination look distinctly plain. While pallets by the million fly up and down motorways behind curtains pulled by relatively standard tractors, the staple fare feeding the construction, urban distribution and agricultural sectors comprises an array of two-, three- and four-axle trucks.

Across Europe this sector is growing, putting on 3.7% in 2013 alone, with rigids accounting for 35% of all trucks registered. Indeed, 6-tonne-plus registrations in European Union countries topped 142,000 chassis last year – which many see as a return to pre-recession business.

However, at the light end, there are moves both up and down away from 7.5 tonnes, which now suffer from the highest legislative burden for their payload. Some fleets have gone for simplicity and taken the sub-3.5-tonne route, while others have climbed the ladder to 18- or even 26-tonners in the search for better productivity.

Either way, in the UK, where DAF is responsible for a quarter of all registrations above 3.51 tonnes, the truck maker leads every rigid class above 7.4 tonnes – with the sole exception of eight-wheelers, where Scania dominates. So how is the market

**Right: DAF's LF 280
Construction looks
the part with its
solid build**



leader coping with the variety of chassis and applications?

Light freight

DAF's rigid chassis start with the LF at 7.5 tonnes, and run through to the biggest two-axle rigid at 18 tonnes. Paccar's PX5 and PX7 engines have a heavy reliance on SCR (selective catalytic reduction) with a DPF (diesel particulate filter), and only lean very lightly on EGR (exhaust gas recirculation) cleansing. These are good, simple trucks. Indeed, an urban route through the town of Verviers with an 19-tonne LF

**Below right: Euro 6
LF with box body**

WVTA and rigid bodies: warning

The Whole Vehicle Type Approval (WVTA) regulations come into force on 29 October 2014, and DAF's Phil Moon believes that this will impact rigid registrations. "October will see another blip as rigid chassis are pulled forward," he says.

As for how prepared the industry is, Moon is more circumspect. "There's still a way to go. Some bodybuilders are only just getting 'conformity of production' decertified, which is a relatively early stage in the process." Will there be a rush to register chassis cabs? "Probably," he says, adding that plenty of operators are also in the dark.

Meanwhile DAF's LF Aerobody production at its Leyland factory is doing reasonable business at around 1,000 units a year. As an ex-factory product, designed at Leyland and built there by DAF on a separate line, it's not subcontracted to a 'live-in-lodger' bodybuilder, so should be free of any glitches or compromises that a 'two-party' product can throw up.





its production engineers have been busy – now offering fleets a wide range of factory options, depending on their space requirements.

As Raoul Wijnands, project manager for CF trucks testing, puts it: “The SCR equipment, DPF, batteries and the tanks for fuel, air and AdBlue can all be moved around and inside the chassis, according to axle and fuel needs.” And he adds: “We don’t want

DAF FAN CF 400 at Euro 6: a 6x2 with rear lift for manoeuvrability and plenty of grunt

would have come easily to a driver from the 1970s.

DAF’s new four-over-four range-change, eight-speed (plus crawler) brings back memories of that old ‘standard’ shift pattern. Not standard back then, however, were the low noise levels, maximum torque from 1,100 rpm, and the light clutch and steering effort. Nor did fleet managers see them for service at intervals out to 60,000 km.

Despite its familiarity, only 8% of buyers go for this gearbox, with 65% still taking the six-speed manual ZF and 24% the AS Tronic AMT (automated manual transmission). The latter, having all but swept manual gearboxes aside in tractors, still has three quarters of the light end to go for – at least with the LF, although marketing manager Phil Moon says geography and attitude are key. “The north of England and Scotland are keener than elsewhere on manuals and owner-operators still tend to prefer manuals over autos.”

Meanwhile, with its 60° steering angle, the LF is now claimed as best in class for the urban



The Euro 6 FAD CF 460 Construction eight-wheeler

bodybuilders taking components off: it isn’t do-able anymore.” Incidentally, these configuration options are worth due consideration before you buy. Fleet engineers could easily miss a trick.

What about the weight penalty resulting from this extra paraphernalia? That, says DAF, has been mitigated by a lighter front axle (-32kg) and lighter stabilink rear suspension, with anti-roll bars and reaction rods combined (-60kg). A new 13-tonne rear axle saves another 40kg, partly due to reduced oil capacity (which also cuts churning losses) and better quality lubricants. Front suspensions also have new three-leaf (9-tonne), two-leaf (8-tonne) and single leaf (7.5-tonne) designs with a new option of air suspension allowing two drive heights.

As for telematics, the last time I saw DAF’s LF and CF was October 2013 and the truck maker was still not connected. Since April this year, however, it has joined the club and provides a Microlise-based system – similar to that on MAN and Iveco trucks. This now comes as standard on all vehicles sold under R&M. The entry-level capability can also be upgraded. This may well be preferable to a take-it-or-leave-it package that tells you all you want to know plus a lot more you probably don’t. It also squares well with Paccar’s no-frills approach. However, in 2014, with Euro 6, solid telematics is not frippery.

Before closing, however, DAF’s rigid range includes the XF heavyweight, too. I drove an 18.75m 6x2 drawbar with a tandem axle trailer – which was surprisingly happy in town. It had all the comforts and technology from the top end spec, and walking down the length of the truck, the 120m³ of volume looks a lot more than a 15% increase on the standard artic. With this kind of productivity, the market share for rigid truck chassis looks more than safe. **TE**

DAF’s Euro 6 LF rigid Aerobody comes with full ECWVTA



workplace. Drivers on multi-drop operations, tasked with constantly getting in and out of the cab, will also like the extra grunt of the heater. So, too, the engine brake, which is a simple on/off switch—exactly what’s needed for this hectic environment.

Factory-fit diversity

Moving up the range, DAF’s CF spans the widest possible range. Three engines take it from 223bhp to the range-topping 510bhp, while the axle configurations cover just about everything. But it is accommodating the Euro 6 after-treatment boxes that has led DAF to a wholesale chassis review. And