



Raising *the* standard

As trucks get more sophisticated and operators spend more time worrying about compliance, workshop equipment is getting smarter and slicker. Steve Banner reports

No matter how clever your diagnostics, it is not a panacea for all a truck's ills. Indeed it may lead a technician who relies too heavily on it all the way up the garden path, wasting both time and money in the process. So says Scania aftersales director, Mark Grant. "Sometimes you can resort to your laptop and start hunting for things that just aren't there," he observes. "If a truck comes in with a water leak, you don't stick a computer on it. You take a good look at it and then fix the water leak."

Taking a look may involve peering underneath. That is likely to involve either climbing down into a pit or raising the truck into the air: something that has not changed for decades. What has changed, however, is the type of lift used. In recent years there has been a swing in favour of mobile column lifts that are increasingly radio co-ordinated, battery-powered and thus cable-free.

"In our case I'm talking about lifts with a 7.5-tonne-per-column capacity that we tend to supply in sets of four or six," observes James Radford, sales and

marketing director at Totalkare. "A set of four with cables will set you back around £12,000, compared with £15,500 for a cable-free set. But the cables cost £500 each to replace if they get damaged and there is always the risk that somebody will trip over one. As a result, our sales are split 60/40 in favour of cable-free."

MOBILE OR FIXED

There is no shortage of column lift suppliers, with JHM Butt offering Ravaglioli's range while Gemco offers products from Danish owner Stenhoj. Column lifts have the advantage that they are space-efficient, can be shunted into a corner when not in use and then taken to the vehicle. They do take time to set up though and, as a consequence, Radford is detecting plenty of interest in the heavy-duty fixed four-poster lift that Totalkare also offers.

"It will raise up to 33 tonnes; it can be delivered with jacking beams for wheel-free work; and we can arrange for it to be fully galvanised for use in a wash bay, with the power supply properly protected," he says. "It costs

£35,000-£40,000, depending on the exact specifications, and can be installed in half a day."

Aware that an MOT failure can detrimentally affect OCRS (Operator Compliance Risk Score), some transport operators with in-house workshops are now installing equipment normally found in an ATF (Authorised Testing Facility) or a DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency) test station.

"Operators want to pre-test their trucks prior to submitting them for MOT," explains James Furk, Gemco marketing and brand manager.

However, doing so is not cheap, given that a roller brake tester built to ATF standards costs up to £30,000. And to that can be added the cost of other equipment, including a headlamp beam alignment tester. "We can offer an electronic system, but you have to switch it to manual mode to replicate the MOT test because that is what the regulations stipulate," states Furk.

This requirement aside, workshop equipment is becoming increasingly easy to use, with the Sherpa brake-tester that Gemco markets capable of being



controlled from the truck's cab by a single technician armed with a tablet. You can also combine brake-testing with tachograph calibration, with Stoneridge offering an add-on that can be used in conjunction with its Optimo workshop tool for BM Autoteknik's brake tester. An electronic console wirelessly transmits signals from the brake tester to Optimo.

"These days you can inspect a truck using a PDA and electronic inspection sheets, rather than paper ones," comments Sam Whittaker, customer service director for Mercedes-Benz and Fuso Trucks. "Increasingly, trucks will be using telematics to tell workshops what they ought to be looking at before they get anywhere near them - which means they can be more proactive about ordering the parts they need."

Additionally, technicians who need to find their way around a truck once it arrives may end up doing so using a tablet equipped with 3D animated service literature - that's another way in which paper is being banished from the workshop. Fuso is going this way, says Whittaker - using a mix of high-resolution images and written instructions that are compatible with common operating systems including iOS and Android.

Technicians availing themselves of the system can also employ WiFi to contact Fuso's support team for advice and assistance. They can also support a request for help with photographs. And they will also be able to swap information with their opposite numbers elsewhere in the network, says Whittaker. "Once it has been rolled out across our dealers, technicians will be able to start talking among themselves, using the FaceTime function via Skype. They'll be able to share thoughts and create new ways of using the tool to save valuable time," he explains.

That said, WiFi is also increasingly being used to link diagnostics software

such as Volvo's VCADS to trucks in the workshop, reports Volvo Trucks retail development director Ian Wrench. However, WiFi's vagaries may make it advisable to use a hard-wired connection, he suggests, if a long programming session is in progress. He

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also agrees with Scania's Grant that slavish reliance on diagnostics is unwise. "The reason why a truck won't start may be as simple as a flat battery or an empty fuel tank," he observes. However, he concedes that diagnostics is now required so frequently that every technician needs access. "You can need it for everything from working on the EBS to controlling the regeneration of a Euro 6 truck's particulate filter," he remarks.

That also means technicians have to be trained to an increasingly high standard. "In the Scania network, all of them must be capable of using diagnostics equipment. However, a lot

of the diagnostics work is done by master technicians who have to be retrained and recertified every two years," says Grant.

Traditional workshop training is especially vital given that diagnostics equipment cannot tell you everything, agrees John Davies, MAN's head of service and support. "Our MAN CATS II is an aid," he points out. "It will guide you to where the problem is on a truck, but will not necessarily tell you which component is faulty."

So where does all this leave operators running their own workshops? They can still carry out many basic tasks; diagnostics products are available from independent suppliers, such as Texa, and most manufacturers are prepared to supply them with software and training. Nevertheless, there is a price to pay. Mercedes' Whittaker wonders whether such an investment makes sense for any operator other than those who adhere to a one-make policy and/or run large workshops with a high throughput.

Many Mercedes customers agree with him. "Sixty-three per cent of them have taken an R&M contract with an average duration of approximately four years," he observes. "That's three times as many as 10 years ago." **TE**