

Conducting fuel trials with a clutch of vehicles from the major truck makers, and measuring the increasingly subtle differences between brand A, B and C, looks like good fleet acquisition planning. Indeed, one of the high street supermarkets' pre-order season testing regime is famed throughout the industry for being the one to win. But if you don't follow up that buying decision with a structured approach to driver training and management, you're throwing at least some of the gains out of the window.

The telematics story has been one of under- and then over-supply. Before the turn-of-the-century, when early telematics systems came on the scene, fuel consumption data was the readout from the pump in the yard. If you were running a mixed fleet with different drivers using a variety of trucks – and many of the biggest supermarket fleets did – tracking down the leaks was nigh on impossible. Today, there is no hiding place for poor driving technique, and the data available will satisfy the most pedantic traffic office.

Daimler's FleetBoard was an early bird in 2000 and, although it suffered a couple of false starts, it is now probably the most competent and informative, with amazing levels of detail for those seriously hunting down top fuel figures. Truck manufacturers either choose to develop their own systems (for instance, Volvo's Dynafleet and Mercedes FleetBoard), or they contract the job out. Examples of the latter include DAF and MAN, both of which run with Microlise systems, while Iveco took a bespoke package from Qualcomm for its blue&me fleet package.

In 2002, when a common fleet management system (FMS) interface was agreed by major truck makers, the road was cleared for aftermarket systems. There is now probably too

YOUR GREATEST ASSETS

The march of technology continues to iron out performance variations between drivers, but which systems should you use? And which approaches work best? Ian Norwell reports

much data at hand, so a tailored system is almost certainly required if the average fleet is to make sense of it. 'Less is more' rings true here.

Any visitor looking for a driver monitoring system at April's CV show, in Birmingham, would soon have suffered data overload. The choice is vast. Of the third party providers, MiX Telematics has expanded its offering more than many, and it says what matters now is as much about consultancy as the technology.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

"Our team will work alongside a fleet manager to develop solutions attuned to the needs of its business," asserts Steve Coffin, marketing and operations director at MiX Telematics. "And it doesn't stop there: we appreciate that those needs will change over time."

Product marketing manager Jonathan Bates says it has also added significant new modules to the basic MiX fleet manager system. "MiX Vision [camera], MiX 3D [remote tachograph downloads], and My MiX Driver Portal



Steering success: telematics can boost driver performance, if implemented correctly

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(access to MiX’s performance data) provide answers to safety, compliance and efficiency-related issues.”

It’s a good example of third party provision overtaking some OEM offerings. The MiX Vision dual road-facing and driver-facing video image recording system may sound like the ultimate spy in the cab, but it depends how it is introduced. It will also defend drivers against wrongful accusations and provide a useful dimension to driver performance traces, giving driver trainers synchronised information on event and style analysis. It also has a positive impact on insurance premiums, as the bus industry has discovered.

That said, one system I’ve always liked is Scania’s driver support system (SDS), which is now standard fit. I was intrigued by the facility at first, eventually finding

myself competing with it. Why? It measures four simple elements of hills, braking, anticipation and gear use. The last has been largely sidelined by AMTs (automated manual transmissions), but the others remain crucial to fuel efficiency and safety.

Matthew Watson, Scania’s general manager for Optimise Services, warns that increased automation is a double-edged sword: driver trainers need to be sure they are looking at the driver, not the system. “On long haul in particular, a truck can be rolling for hours on automated systems, where the driver has no intervention, except steering. It’s important to concentrate on the periods when the driver’s influence is high.”



(revs, idling, braking, acceleration, speeding).

Getting this right is key. As Bibby Distribution’s senior fleet manager Adam Purshall puts it: “The level of information we receive on every single vehicle and driver in our fleet is helping us transform our

operations. We can identify our very best drivers, and those who have room for improvement.” And he adds, “We use this information to create tailored driver training on an individual basis, which helps eliminate inefficient practices, such as harsh braking or excessive idling.” Bibby uses systems from both MAN and Mercedes-Benz.

Well and good, but might there be a step too far? Most drivers understand the need for training and monitoring, but I do feel that inward-facing cameras, like MiX Vision’s, will take time to gain acceptance. Get this wrong and you’ll generate a negative approach. However, Scania’s Watson says drivers like the firm’s associated coaching service.

“An [office-based] instructor provides a professional analysis of the driver’s performance, and sends a brief personal report to the driver, scheduling a telephone discussion. The coach then goes through problem areas step by step, based on vehicle reports, to improve the driving style.” It’s a winning formula, he says. Since the beginning of 2014, Scania’s driver trainers have delivered more than 2,500 coaching sessions. A co-operative approach like this feels more like a tutorial than a going-over by the boss.

And technology is being added all the time. Drivers who move across Scania trucks, for example, can download a free app to keep track of their performance. Don’t forget, though, that the gold lies in getting a common goal established – between drivers and fleet managers. It’s a team effort. [IE](#)



Either way, all systems include driver performance tools, and the data that flows from them. A Microlise system on a DAF XF, for example, is now so competent, it will give you all you need and more. But it’s important to remember that it’s usually the basics that are useful. Don’t get lured by the ‘nice to have’ data you won’t use. Time and again I hear of fleet managers who’ve been buried in minutiae, when all they really needed to measure was five simple parameters, such as MiX’s RIBAS