AUTOMOTIVEINDUSTRYDIGEST

Issue no. 452 December 15 , 2011

Latest Motor Industry News

This Week's Briefing

ACFO calls for Government AMAP rate review

93% of firms 'would fail' HMRC mileage record audit

AA DriveTech acquires 4x4 specialist driver trainer

Toyota and Lexus unveil new strategy to boost fleet business

Fleets to reap the financial benefit of 'quality' used cars

DVLA plans could save fleets and Government millions

Fines fail to stop drivers using mobile phones

Model update: Audi, Mazda, Suzuki, Volvo

The Editor's View

JUST how environmentally-friendly are public and private sector fleets, company car drivers and private motorists prepared to be? The question is valid in the wake of Volvo revealing that the price of the world's first diesel plug-in hybrid will be £45,000-50,000 when it goes on sale in 2012. Admittedly there is likely to be a £5,000 saving to buyers as a result of benefiting from the Government's Plug-In Car Grant scheme, but the list price is still around £20,000 more than the cheapest V60 2.4 diesel estate. Manufacturers have been widely criticised for the high list price of electric vehicles leading to miniscule sales this year, despite the availability of Plug-In Grants. It has been suggested that in buying such vehicles businesses and motorists need to take into account the fact that they are 'buying fuel up front'. Effectively, running costs on an electric or electric hybrid vehicle are much lower when compared with a petrol or diesel model. However, how many people are prepared to take a dip into the unknown to test out the theory?

Fleet file

Arval sells AllStar fuel card business for £194m

ARVAL has sold its fuel card business, AllStar, to FleetCor Technologies, a leading independent global fleet card provider, for £194 million.

Although Arval, a wholly owned subsidiary of BNP Paribas, has sold AllStar it will continue to provide fuel management products and services as part of the bundle of services that it offers, making use of the AllStar fuel payment services.

In announcing the deal, Arval and US-headquartered FleetCor, said they were committed to a strategic partnership for at least the next five years which will allow Arval to support all customer fleet needs, including fuel management.

At present, AllStar has approximately 40,000 customers and about one million cardholders, a large portion of whom are small and medium sized enterprises.

Inherited from a 2000 acquisition, the UK fuel card business was a unique activity within Arval benefiting from a multi-branded network and a full UK coverage.

Arval is known to have been reviewing its UK card business, which was unique within the company, for some time and following analysis said that it could not be leveraged outside of the UK.

In a statement Arval said: ‘The Group business model allows companies of all sizes to outsource their fleet management and company fleet related risks through a comprehensive bundle of funding and fleet solutions, whilst the business model for AllStar is to deliver transactional services.

‘With this fundamental difference, AllStar IT platforms require a specific approach and further third party growth will be enabled by removing the link to Arval as some potential third party partners view Arval as a direct competitor.

‘As a result, Arval favours a long-term partnership with a global card expert that can enhance the value chain while maintaining the possibility for Arval to continue to deliver fuel management solutions to its customers. We expect this sale to support future growth and ensure that both businesses achieve their long-term potential.’

Bart Beckers, general manager of Arval UK, said: ‘We believe that this sale is a very positive move for AllStar employees, partners and customers. FleetCor provides global expertise, scale, best practises and experience in the fuel card market. By working with them over the coming years, we expect our fuel management products and services to be enhanced further which will benefit our customers.’

Ron Clarke, chairman and chief executive officer of FleetCor Technologies, which is based in Atlanta, said: ‘The acquisition of AllStar is consistent with our global acquisition strategy of identifying attractive assets with performance upside. We believe that we can help AllStar realise its full potential, as we have in previous acquisitions, by bringing our best practices, technology and commitment to this portfolio.’

Arval says there will not be any redundancies as a direct result of the sale of AllStar. FleetCor is not planning for any redundancies amongst AllStar staff being transferred as a result of this transaction. They will remain in a new area of the existing Arval premises in Swindon.

Arval’s customers will continue to receive the full range of fleet and fuel management products and services. The strategic partnership means that they continue to benefit from the expertise and account support within each business.

AllStar and Arval have been operating as two separate business lines for some time so customers will see very little change to the service that they receive, said a company spokesman. Over time the fuel management proposition and billing will be further integrated into the bundle of services offered.

FleetCor’s payment programmes enable businesses to better manage and control employee spending and provide card-accepting merchants with a high volume customer base that can increase their sales and customer loyalty. FleetCor serves commercial accounts in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

ACFO renews call for Government AMAP rate review

ACFO has repeated its call for Government officials to complete a robust analysis, including financial modelling, of the Approved Mileage Allowance Payments (AMAP) system as part of a comprehensive review.

The system sets the structure and rates which can be paid tax-free to employees who drive their own cars on company business.

ACFO first called for a shake-up in AMAP rates eight years ago and repeated its request during a recent face-to-face meeting with officials from HM Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

The renewed call comes at a time when HMRC is considering the figure that should be set for the tax-free mileage rate for privately-owned electric cars that are driven on business trips.

It also comes in the wake of ACFO's success earlier this year to have Advisory Fuel Rates reviewed quarterly instead of half-yearly by HMRC, which also agreed to change the mechanism used for calculating rates. It was a fight won after a five-year campaign.

The AMAP rate for employees who use their own cars or vans for business mileage increased to 45p from 40p for the first 10,000 miles driven on April 6 this year. The rate for mileage beyond 10,000 miles remained unchanged at 25p per mile.

It was the first rate change since the system was introduced in 2002, although a lower 4,000-mile threshold was in place until that date.

When the 40p/10,000-mile regime was launched average pump prices were 75.8p a litre (unleaded petrol) and 77.3p a litre (diesel). They have since climbed to an average of 133.7 for a litre of unleaded petrol and 140.95p for a litre of diesel, according to the AA.

ACFO has consistently argued that the current 45p (and previous 40p) per mile reimbursement for the first 10,000 miles and 25p a mile thereafter is over-generous for higher-mileage cases, and actually works against the Government's environmental approach to discourage unnecessary mileage.

The generosity has also helped to fuel the decision by some employees to opt out of company car schemes over the years.

ACFO says it seeks, as a specific objective, a review of the AMAP system that is less 'broad brush' and significantly more refined than the current one with its single mileage threshold and two reimbursement rates.

That change could, for example, see the introduction of a number of mileage breakpoints starting from as low as 2,000 or 4,000 miles. An initial higher reimbursement rate than the current one would then be set with rates reducing on a sliding scale linked to increasing mileage thresholds.

ACFO chairman Julie Jenner said: 'The current AMAP structure was established almost a decade ago and since then the only change has been the 5p a mile increase in reimbursement rate to 45p.

'ACFO has always held the view that the 10,000 mile threshold provides a significant incentive for many employees to drive completely unnecessary distances, because they can generate significant expense claims tax-free. That is even more likely to be the case given today's economic climate with personal and household budgets being squeezed.

'We would like Government officials to carry out a robust computer modelling exercise that delivers a more subtle approach to mileage reimbursement instead of the current two-band, single mileage threshold system.

'Feedback from the ACFO membership clearly indicates that the 'broad brush' approach taken by Government is not working. We therefore took the opportunity at our meeting to request that an analysis is undertaken and we will continue to put forward the case for consistent and fairer treatment of AMAP rates.'

- HMRC has set AMAP rates for electric vehicles at the same level as petrol and diesel cars - 45p per mile up to 10,000 miles.

93% of firms 'would fail' HMRC mileage record audit

NINE out of 10 companies would risk penalties if a tax inspection looked at their business mileage records, according to TMC.

The mileage audit specialist says that more than half of drivers regularly over-claim on fuel and mileage expenses. That makes them liable to pay benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax because their employer effectively pays for some of their private mileage.

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is zeroing-in on mileage records during tax inspections, says TMC managing director Paul Jackson.

A number of firms have consequently been hit by six- or even seven-figure claims for fines and back tax. The cases follow detailed HMRC investigations into fuel expense payments and mileage logs.

Jackson said: '93% of the companies that we've looked at rely on unaudited mileage reports and are therefore at risk of being caught by a tax investigation. Around 60% of drivers claim for more business fuel than they actually use. We know from experience that HMRC is going to extraordinary lengths to find evidence of this in mileage records.

'Unaudited mileage puts fleets in double jeopardy. They overpay for business journeys and risk tax penalties going back six years.'

TMC's proactively audited mileage capture system is now used by companies employing over 100,000 business drivers.

Most of the current customers are large enterprises but TMC has now launched a version of its system tailored specifically for small and medium sized businesses.

Called TMC2, it literally delivers 'Mileage Audit in a box' to organisations with from one to 100 drivers.

TMC2 includes everything a company needs to use the TMC system to log and audit business journeys, deter over-claiming by drivers and automate the payment of mileage expenses:

- Step by step instructions
- Data collection templates
- Information for drivers
- Resource library on CD-ROM

The new product costs from £48 per year.

AA DriveTech acquires corporate 4x4 specialist driver trainer

AA DriveTech has purchased Powys-based Nationwide 4x4 Limited, a leading provider of driver training and events for drivers of off-road vehicles and machinery for an undisclosed sum.

Nationwide 4x4, formed in 1995, operates in the 4x4, 6x6 and 8x8 vehicle sector which has even more stringent legislation and health and safety requirements than the traditional corporate fleet market.

Driven by escalating maintenance costs and the demands of insurance companies, the company offers expert training in a range of heavy duty vehicles and machinery used by a variety of different organisations such as governmental, 'blue light' and utilities as well as many commercial organisations.

Courses offered include: 4x4 professional off road driving, 4x4 instructional techniques,
4x4 off road instructor and 4x4 off-road health and safety. In addition, Nationwide 4x4 is a major organiser of off road motor sporting activities within the UK.

The company, which is a LANTRA-approved and RoSPA-accredited training provider, will continue to trade as a separate legal entity while becoming a trading operation within the AA DriveTech business, part of the AA Group.

Selwyn Kendrick, Nationwide 4x4's owner, will join AA DriveTech and be active in the integration and expansion of the business.

AA DriveTech managing director Jim Kirkwood said: 'This deal is all about great strategic fit and a significant expansion of our specialist driver training portfolio. The introduction of the Corporate Manslaughter Act, and recent bad winters, has highlighted for many organisations that they need to have 4x4 vehicles available, and drivers properly trained to operate them safely, to ensure business and reputational continuity.

'Nationwide 4x4 therefore enables us to expand the breadth of our portfolio and offer an even more comprehensive 'one-stop-shop' to our customers.'

Kendrick said: 'We're keen to grow the business significantly in the next few years and access to the resources that the AA can provide will help us expand on our leadership position in this developing marketplace.'

Inchcape wins 2,100-vehicle fleet management outsource contract

INCHCAPE Fleet Solutions has won a fleet management outsource contract with Scotia Gas Networks (SGN).

The contract will see Inchcape Fleet Solutions provide SGN with a combined fleet of 2,100 cars and light commercial vehicles.

In addition to the fleet, SGN has enlisted Inchcape Fleet Solutions to supply a range of ancillary products and services including: accident management, motor insurance database management, vehicle management (service, maintenance and repair) and foreign travel arrangements.

From a technological perspective, SGN will also make use of a number of Inchcape Fleet Solutions' online systems: FleetVision, a system designed to facilitate smoother communication between Inchcape Fleet Solutions and its clients; Downtime Management, an online tool developed to reduce vehicle downtime; and a specifically tailored fleet portal, which will allow SGN to keep a tight rein on all fleet activity

The deal with SGN, the UK's second largest gas distribution company, was won following a competitive tender.

Investment key for fleets and vehicle suppliers to boost efficiency

FLEETS, leasing and rental organisations must not shy away from investing to boost business and vehicle operating efficiency despite budgetary constraints and the challenging economic climate.

That's the New Year message from Jason Francis, managing director of leading fleet management software specialist Jaama, who says public and private sector organisations should take a leaf out of the Government's book and invest in infrastructure and capital projects.

He said: 'Managing directors, financial directors and fleet operators must continue to plan for the long term. Although finances maybe tight with pressure on budgets, cancelling capital expenditure will ultimately prove short-sighted.'

He highlighted a number of Jaama customers that have invested heavily in new technology to improve business and fleet operating efficiency. Among contract hire, vehicle rental and fleet services companies they include Fleet Hire, Ogilvie Fleet, Riverside Truck Rental and Run Your Fleet and among fleet operators ADT Fire and Security, Cape Plc, DHL Supply Chain, British Military Fitness, piling and foundation engineers Roger Bullivant and Oxfordshire County Council.

'Jaama attracted a host of new customers in 2011 that are now benefiting from investing in our Key2 Vehicle Management software, while existing users such as MITIE and SIG have continued to work in partnership with us to further develop additional modules,' said Francis.

'All of our customers are cutting fleet operating costs through the effective use of software to manage vehicles. They have realised the importance of investing in technology fit for the 21st century which will deliver significantly enhanced benefits across the business including lower operating costs and improvements in fleet administration.'

Meanwhile, leasing and rental companies are investing in sophisticated online technology to drive their businesses forward in 2012 and beyond.

'Jaama continues to work with a number of organisations that are introducing Key2 to improve vehicle management efficiency and boost driver management. The portals we have developed with the likes of Ogilvie Fleet deliver enhancements to the service they are able to offer their clients,' said Francis.

He continued: 'The Government announced in its recent Autumn Statement that it was continuing to invest billions in Britain's transport infrastructure because, despite the tough economic situation, the country cannot afford to standstill. It is the same with public and private sector organisations. Investing in technology will deliver immediate improvements to business efficiency and deliver growth opportunities now and in the future as the economy recovers.'

Jaama says new customer wins are up this year on 2010. Mr Francis said: 'Growth has been fuelled by a combination of the capability of our software, the service we offer and recognition by many organisations that they cannot rely on outdated methods to manage their vehicles and run their business.

'Most of our new business is the result of referrals from existing customers and as those customers look to increase the depth of functionality so we further develop modules and launch new solutions to the point where Jaama is leading a technology revolution..'

Nissan Leaf is first electric vehicle on Siemens' UK fleet

SIEMENS, the global engineering and technology giant, has chosen Nissan Leafs to become the first electric vehicles on its UK fleet.

Three Nissan Leafs are now in use as employee pool vehicles at the engineering company's Industrial Turbo Machinery business in Lincolnshire. Siemens has ordered a further seven vehicles to be used at other UK locations, including its new Renewable Engineering Centre in Manchester.

Siemens is placing the Nissan Leaf at the centre of its electric vehicle fleet plans, based on its high profile industry role in developing sustainable technology.

Mark Bonnor-Morris, business development manager of Siemens Mobility and Logistics, Traffic Solutions, said: 'We're moving people between our sites in Lincoln and using the Nissan Leaf means we can travel through the city with zero emissions.'

Siemens has installed its own high power advanced charging point and is now working with Lincoln City Council to roll out electric vehicle charge points in the city.

Bonnor-Morris said: ‘The decision to select the vehicles was based on the quality of driver experience. Our staff can sit in the Nissan Leaf and recognise immediately that it has the comfort and feel of a standard road car; there’s simply no fear of the electric vehicle technology or ‘culture shock’ in driving it.

‘With our position in the renewable energy market it’s a given that we would be investing in products adopting complementary technology. Our advanced designs for electric vehicle charge points mean we can charge these cars on our own premises as an integral part of our overall energy management strategy.’

The company is leasing the vehicles over 24 months through Lex Autolease, with a comprehensive, combined support package involving Lex and Nissan.

Fleets told to promote zero tolerance to drink-driving in festive season

FLEETS should be underlining the need to have a zero tolerance approach to drink-driving in the festive season - with special attention paid to the morning after a drinking session, says CFC Solutions.

The fleet software company points out that same evening, drink-related accidents have been falling for many years but that morning after incidents have increased in the last decade, possibly as a result of longer licensing hours.

Neville Briggs, managing director, said: ‘Over the years, we have made great strides forward in drink-driving - for example, the number of drink-drive deaths has fallen by around 75% since 1979.

‘However, it is an area where there is always more that can be done and fleets have a major role to play. Firstly, managers need to make it clear that a drink-driving conviction for a company driver will mean a loss of their job without question.

‘Secondly, the dangers of morning after drinking need to be underlined. There are widespread misconceptions about the amount of time that it takes for alcohol to leave the body and drivers need to know the facts.’

Briggs added that every year, among the tens of thousands of company car and van drivers who are recorded on its Licence Link licence checking software, a handful lost their licences and jobs due to drink-driving offences.

He continued: ‘It is such an unnecessary risk to run for fleet drivers. Not only do they create a massively increased possibility of being involved in a serious accident but they also could lose their job and find it extremely difficult to get another.’

GreenRoad enhances service with new reports for busy fleet managers

NEW reports that enhance the service of GreenRoad, which claims to be the leader in driver performance and safety management, have been launched.

The two reports are based on customer requests and deliver new insights for busy managers who are challenged by the varied demands of managing vehicle fleets. The reports are available to all GreenRoad subscribers.

The Monthly Performance Scorecard provides current, historical, and rolling period comparisons of driver and fleet location performance. The Collision Suspect Report spotlights driving events in which forces on the vehicle are indicative of a collision, enabling managers to proactively identify possible vehicle collisions across the fleet.

‘Our customers tell us that the insights provided by GreenRoad are the most valuable part of the service. By capturing millions of data points, analysing them in real-time and turning that data into actionable insights, delivered online, GreenRoad provides tremendous value to our customers,’ said Karen White, vice president of product marketing for GreenRoad. 'Now these new reports extend that concept even further by packaging insightful, time-sensitive data into easy-to-read, actionable reports.'

The GreenRoad Monthly Performance Scorecard rank orders all drivers in a fleet based on their GreenRoad measured performance for the current week and shows their historical performance as well as rolling performance trends: month-over-month, quarter-over-quarter, and year-over-year.

The Scorecard uses the simple red-yellow-green GreenRoad colour scheme to allow quick assessment of performance, allowing managers to easily identify drivers who need attention. The Monthly Performance Scorecard can be set-up for auto-delivery via email to fleet managers.

The Collision Suspect Report also responds to a key customer request: daily 'headline news' that requires immediate corrective action. The report alerts fleet managers to suspected collisions - situations where GreenRoad detects extreme forces that likely indicate a collision - across an entire GreenRoad-equipped fleet.

The Collision Suspect Report helps fleet managers by giving them a small set of critical events that require a timely intervention and can result in improved driver performance and potential avoidance of future collisions.

White added: 'As we move forward, we will continue to deepen the insights provided by GreenRoad, further empowering fleet and safety managers to maximise fleet safety and driver performance and deliver even greater return on investment and business benefits to their organisations.'

Safety Forum urges fleets to prioritise driver safety this winter

THE Fleet Safety Forum has published new guidance for fleet managers on 'Driver Safety in Bad Weather'.

While winter makes for heightened awareness of the issue, the guidance highlights that bad weather is increasingly a road safety issue throughout the year.

In the UK in 2010, 33% of all fatal road crashes occurred when roads were wet, flooded, icy or snowy.

Fleet managers must plan ahead to account for the disruption caused by adverse weather, with the safest option always being to ensure drivers do not have to go out on the roads in dangerous conditions, says the Forum, which is run by road safety charity Brake.

Drivers need to be educated and reminded about the importance of avoiding risky situations on the roads, as well as what to do if they do get caught in a sudden snowfall, fog or high winds for instance.

The Fleet Safety Forum guidance provides practical advice for fleet managers on how to approach driver safety in bad weather in terms of journey planning, communication with drivers, and equipping fleet vehicles appropriately. There is an 'advice for drivers' section that can be provided as a separate document to circulate to staff or post on intranet sites.

The guidance is available free to Fleet Safety Forum subscribers, or can be purchased for £5 by non-subscribers. The first 50 non-subscribers to request the guidance will get a free copy. Email forum@brake.org.uk or call 01484 559909 to order.

Roz Cumming, development manager at Brake, said: 'The Fleet Safety Forum wants to highlight the risks associated with driving in bad weather at any time. Our guidance gives accessible, practical advice and information that managers can use to manage this risk and keep their drivers and other road users safe, during the holiday season and beyond.'

Hygiene firm saves £90,000 a year with TomTom fleet management

CLEANING and hygiene specialist Zenith Hygiene Group expects to reduce fuel costs by £90,000 a year as a result of using TomTom's fleet management technology WORKsmart.

Michael Rayner, Zenith's operations director, said: 'We always strive to maximise business efficiencies. Those delivered by TomTom's system have been a revelation.

'Average vehicle MPG has soared from 26 to 43 in just four months. Fuel usage reduced by up to 5,000 litres per month, resulting in significant savings in distribution costs. The carbon footprint has declined by 33lbs per day to 24lbs per day, a significant boost to our green credentials.'

Zenith installed TomTom's tracking, navigation and EcoPlus devices across its fleet of 56 company cars and 63 trucks.

As a result, Zenith has improved vehicle routing and the deployment of its mobile workforce to customers - leading to an increase in its delivery performance and an upsurge in new business.

In addition, the monitoring of driver performance has dramatically reduced incidents of speeding, idling, harsh braking and other efficiency failings.

Giles Margerison, TomTom Business Solutions' director, UK & Ireland, said: 'Zenith's return on investment illustrates the considerable benefits that advanced fleet management technology can deliver.'

- THE number of full time jobs is being reduced by 457 at vehicle technology company TomTom, which accounts for approximately 10% of the total workforce. The move comes at a time when it is reported that demand for in-vehicle satellite navigation systems is falling as drivers increasingly resort to free navigation apps that can be installed on smartphones. The company says its long-term future lies in pre-installed navigation devices in cars and in fleet management applications. A total of 255 roles will be made redundant, half of which are in The Netherlands, where the company is headquartered. The remainder will be achieved through attrition. The company says that it is reorganising its research and development activities in a drive to increase development efficiency and reduce time to market. CEO Harold Goddijn said: 'The new structure brings more transparency and accountability; makes it easier to make innovation choices and will reduce our time to market. I am confident that our customers will start to see the benefits and a higher pace of product introductions as soon as 2012.'

Drive software wins ITM Award

THE Institute of Transport Management has named Drive Software Solutions as UK Fleet Management and Leasing Solutions Company 2012.

Making the award, the Institute observed: 'Fleet operators of all levels are faced with an ongoing battle to suppress costs and improve efficiency. Managers must find the optimum means of minimising off-road time, maintaining contracts and building new business relationships, and thus maintain financial wellbeing.

'A good fleet management solution that can streamline operations and ultimately improve the bottom line is a must and this is exactly what Drive does.'

ITM award winners are chosen based on entries voluntarily submitted by members of the Institute and by readers of the Institute's official publication the Transport Journal.

Model update

Revolutionary Volvo Plug-in Hybrid carries £50,000 price tag

THE Volvo V60 Plug-in Hybrid - the most technically-advanced model ever from the manufacturer and the world's first diesel plug-in hybrid - will go on UK sale next year.

The indicative price of the car is starting at between £45,000 and £50,000 in the UK, minus any Government subsidy for electric cars (Plug-in Car Grant).

Volvo Car Corporation expects that 80% of total sales will be in the form of company cars.

Sales get under way at the start of 2012 with a limited model year production run of 1,000 cars. They will be offered with Pure Limited specification, which includes the highest SE Lux trim level.

The production version of the V60 Plug-in Hybrid will be launched in one colour - Electric Silver. The car is also distinguished by aero-designed 17-inch wheels, integrated exhaust tailpipes and a number of bodywork features in glossy black, such as the grille and the aerodynamic front spoiler. The chromed 'Plug-in Hybrid' emblem is found both on the lower part of the tailgate and in a smaller version on the front wings.
Nordic region the biggest market

After the initial batch of 1,000 cars for model year 2013, production of the V60 Plug-in Hybrid will increase to 4,000-6,000 cars as of model year 2014.

About 30% of total volume will go to Sweden and the other Nordic countries. Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the UK will have a share of between five and 15% each.

The interior of the V60 Plug-in Hybrid has black leather upholstery with contrasting stitching and inlays of blue-grey wood. Other interior details include a leather-covered steering wheel, specially designed floor mats and a gear lever knob with integrated indicator.

The list of standard equipment includes features such as speed-dependent power steering, electrically adjustable driver's seat, parking sensors front and rear, Bluetooth phone link and Volvo on Call and high performance multimedia DVD audio system with 4x40W amplifier, eight loudspeakers and seven-inch screen.

The front wheels of the V60 Plug-in Hybrid are powered by a five-cylinder 2.4 litre turbo diesel producing 215 bhp and maximum torque is 440 Nm. The car has a six-speed automatic transmission.

The rear axle is powered by an electric motor producing 70 horsepower. The electric motor is supplied with power from an 11.2 kWh lithium-ion battery pack installed under the floor of the load compartment.

The combined performance of the five-cylinder turbo diesel and electric motor puts the car firmly within the same horsepower range as the petrol powered Volvo T6.

Three driving modes are available - Pure, Hybrid or Power - via three buttons that give the car three entirely different temperaments.

In Pure mode the car is powered solely by its electric motor as much as possible. If the battery pack has been recharged with electricity from renewable sources, its range is up to 32 miles with no carbon dioxide emissions from the tailpipe. The electric range varies with terrain, climate and driving style.

Hybrid is the standard setting whenever the car is started. The diesel engine and electric motor co-operate to deliver emissions of 49 g/km and a range of up to 621 miles.

In Power mode the technology is optimised to give the car the maximum possible power. The diesel engine and electric motor have a total power output of 215+70 horsepower and maximum torque of 440+200Nm. The electric motor's torque delivery contributes to the car's acceleration from 0 to 62 mph in 6.2 seconds.

The V60 Plug-in Hybrid can be recharged from a regular power outlet at home or in a car park. Recharging time varies with amperage. A full charge with 10 amps takes 4.5 hours.

The V60 Plug-in Hybrid is also the first Volvo to be launched with an entirely digital Driver Information Monitor (DIM). The conventional analogue gauges have been replaced by a one-piece LED screen offering a large number of display options. Drivers can choose which information to show via the car's menu set-up.

Audi adds new engine and specification to Q7 range

AUDI has launched a new lead-in version of its seven-seat Q7 range powered by its 204 PS V6 TDI as well as a new S line Plus specification.

The new 3.0 TDI quattro 204 PS models complement existing 3.0 TDI quattro 245 PS versions and are available in conjunction with Standard, SE, S line and new S line Plus specification levels with on-the-road prices ranging from £39,995 to £49,120.

The engine develops peak power at 3,200-4,400 rpm, 450 Nm of torque is available at 1,250-2,750 rpm, the 0-62 mph sprint is completed in 9.1 seconds, top speed is 127 mph, MPG on the combined fuel cycle is 39.2 and emissions are189 g/km.

The new S line Plus specification includes metallic paint, 21-inch alloy wheels, Verano leather upholstery, privacy glass, hard disc-based navigation with Google Earth mapping, in-car Wi-Fi hotspot, Audi Music Interface iPod connection, powered tailgate operation, Audi Parking System Advanced with reversing camera and running boards.

S line Plus specification carries a premium of £4,500 over the existing S line option, and is available in conjunction with five of the six available engines, which include the supercharged 3.0 litre V6 petrols in 272 PS and 333 PS forms, the 204 PS and 245 PS V6 diesels and the 340 PS 4.2 litre V8 TDI.

Emission cuts on Mazda6 and Mazda2 deliver cash savings

FLEETS and company car drivers will save money by choosing to drive Mazda6 diesel or Mazda2 petrol models following reductions to carbon dioxide emission figures for some cars in the ranges.

The improvements deliver lower Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) and, for company car drivers, reduced benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax on some models.

For the Mazda6, the improvements bring an emissions reduction on all Mazda6 2.2 litre five-door diesel 163 PS and 180 PS models - dropping from 142 to 140 g/km, which means a £15 a year VED saving as models drop from Band F (£130) to Band E (£115).

Meanwhile, a 5g/km reduction (138 g/km to 133 g/km) on all 2.2 litre five-door Diesel 129 PS models, including the recently launched fleet-focused Mazda6 Business Line, drops them into the 19% benefit-in-kind tax bracket (previously 20%) in 2011/12.

On the Mazda6 2.2 litre five-door diesel 129ps TS model the emissions cut delivers a tax bill saving of £3.31 per month (£39.66 per year) for basic rate taxpayers and £6.61 per month (£79.32 per year) for higher rate taxpayers. The Mazda6 2.2 litre five-door Diesel 129 PS Business Line model delivers cash savings of £3.02 per month (£36.26 per year) for basic rate taxpayers and £6.04 per month (£72.52 per year) for higher rate taxpayers. The new ratings also translate into National Insurance savings for employers.

Benefits on the Mazda2 include an emissions reduction on manual 1.5 litre petrol engine models from 135 g/km to 132 g/km, placing them in the 16% company car benefit-in-kind tax bracket (previously 17%) in 2011/12.

That means that Mazda2 1.5 litre three-door Sport petrol drivers save £2.13 per month (£25.55 per year) for a basic rate taxpayer and £4.26 per month (£51.10 per year) for a higher rate taxpayer. Tax bill savings on the Mazda2 1.5 litre five-door Sport petrol are £2.19 per month (£26.25 per year), while for the higher rate taxpayer the tax bill saving will be £4.38 per month (£52.50 per year). Again, the new ratings translate into National Insurance savings for employers.

In addition, emissions have reduced from 119 g/km to 115 g/km on all 1.3 litre models, whilst the 1.5 litre automatic drops from 146 g/km to 145 g/km.

Steve Jelliss, Mazda fleet and remarketing director, said: 'At a time when corporate and personal budgets are being squeezed, Mazda customers are able to benefit from cash savings through these emission cuts.

'The Mazda range is already well-known for its style, specification and reliability, and this development further enhances our value for money credentials.'

Suzuki launches all-new compact supermini

SUZUKI'S all-new Swift Sport model will go on UK sale in January next year carrying a £13,500 price tag.

The model is powered by a new Euro5 emission compliant 1.6 litre 136 bhp VVT engine. It offers improved torque together with a 10% lower combined fuel consumption figure of 44.1 mpg and emissions of 147g/km - 10% lower than the previous Swift Sport model.

Standard specification includes auto air conditioning, fog lamps, push button start, cruise control, Bluetooth connectivity, HID Projector headlamps with headlamp wash, rear privacy glass, ESP and seven airbags.

The Swift Sport is the performance flagship of the Swift model range. The model comes with a three-year/60,000-mile warranty. Service intervals are every 9,000 miles.

- SUZUKI will enter the upper medium sector in January next year with the launch of the Kizashi. Costing £21,995 on-the-road, the car is fitted as standard with switchable 2/4WD and CVT/six-speed manual mode operated via steering wheel switches or gear shift lever. Powered by a 2.4 litre 178 PS engine, it has a combined cycle fuel consumption of 34 mpg and emissions of 191 g/km. Standard specification includes: ESP, seven airbags, leather upholstery, electric front seats with drivers seat three position memory function, heated front seats, electric glass sunroof, cruise control, eight speaker radio/CD system with Bluetooth and USB port. Exterior dimensions are length-width-height of 4,650mm x 1,820mm x 1,470mm making it one of the most compact D segment saloon cars. The model comes with a three-year/60,000-mile warranty. Service intervals are every 9,000 miles.

Manufacturer news

Toyota and Lexus unveil new strategy to boost fleet business

TOYOTA and Lexus are aiming to raise their profile within the fleet industry and strengthen relationships with current customers, capitalise on 'global leadership' in hybrid technology and deliver better customer communications.

The new strategy was unveiled at the annual Toyota and Lexus Fleet Services conference attended by 500 business customers at the NEC Birmingham this month.

The aim for Toyota and Lexus Fleet Services is to build on its strengths, backed up by achieving top positions in the 2011 Sewells Fleet Survey of exceptional cost of ownership, taxation benefits, and service delivery alongside new products that met the needs of the fleet market.

Investment in a new fleet charter, which starts from January 2012, outlines a series of commitments to improve customer relationships, making it easier and simpler to deal with Toyota and Lexus Fleet services for both sales and after sales.

Looking ahead to a busy year for new models, the conference highlighted the further advances in fuel efficiency, low emissions and zero-emissions electric driving range that will be offered by the next development of Toyota's hybrid technology, Prius Plug-in Hybrid.

The car will be launched next year, together with the new Yaris Hybrid - a new entry point for hybrid technology - and the Prius+ seven-seat MPV. The launch programme for 2012 also includes the new Avensis, the Toyota GT 86 sports car and the all-new full hybrid Lexus GS 450h.

A significant increase in budget is being allocated to achieve targets with the extra investment in communications seeing the introduction of personalised web portals for customers to access their account information online.

That will make it quicker and easier for users to view information tailored to their requirements, make demonstrator requests and maintain a dialogue with their Toyota and Lexus Fleet Services representative.

Ewan Shepherd, general manager for Toyota and Lexus Fleet Services, said: 'Introducing the right product at the right time and putting the customer first are central to this strategy.

'Deliveries of the new 2012 Avensis start from January next year, and with this being our strongest-selling fleet model, next year's performance is set to build on the momentum of this introduction right from the start.

'Our message at the conference and to all fleet operators is that we will be delivering improvements in all areas of our fleet strategy, showing that drivers can save thousands of pounds in tax and lower their running costs, leading to a stronger business performance in 2012 and beyond.'

Light commercial vehicles

Nissan and FedEx Express test electric vehicle on London's roads

A PROTOTYPE zero-emission all-electric delivery vehicle is ready to start extensive real-world testing on the streets of London.

FedEx Express and Nissan are collaborating over a two-month period to evaluate how the NV200 electric vehicle prototype copes with the rigours of daily duties in the capital.

The NV200 electric vehicle prototype uses the same electric vehicle powertrain and battery originally developed for the Nissan Leaf - the world's first 100% electric mass-market family car and the 2011 European Car of the Year and 2011 World Car of the Year.

Nissan Corporate vice president Hideto Murakami, responsible for the global LCV business unit, said: 'Zero-emission vehicles like Nissan Leaf are already playing an increasingly significant environmental role in our towns and cities. The NV200 electric vehicle prototype delivery vehicle will not only improve the quality of urban life, but thanks to best in class running costs has great potential to ease the economic burdens placed on companies.

'FedEx Express feedback from the evaluation process will help us tailor a future battery-powered light commercial Nissan vehicle that meets customer needs.'

Dennis Beal, vice president of global vehicles for FedEx Express, said: ‘Through collaboration we can exponentially improve and expedite what is possible. We value the opportunity Nissan has given us to provide experienced feedback and contribute to development of the best Nissan NV200 possible.’

FedEx Express currently operates 43 all-electric vehicles in London, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Memphis.

Nissan is aiming to become the global leader in zero emissions and sees the application of its technology to the LCV and business-to-business markets as an important next step in the development of sustainable mobility for all.

Additional trials are anticipated for 2012 mirroring similar trials held in 2011, where the NV200 electric vehicle prototype was used by the Japan Post Service on delivery and collection duties in Japan.

Van manufacturers, suppliers and fleet managers earn awards

BRITAIN’S top light commercial vehicle manufacturers, suppliers and fleet managers at the forefront of fleet safety have been named in the fourth annual awards from industry publication *Fleet Van*.

Safety champion awards: Large public sector fleet (more than 500), **Environment Agency**; Small public sector fleet (up to 500), **NHS Blood & Transport**; Large private sector fleet (over 500), **Mitie Group**; Small private sector fleet (up to 500), **Iron Mountain**; Innovation in fleet safety, **AAH Pharmaceuticals**; Driver management initiative of the year, **Bethell**; Fleet safety champion of the year (private), **Rob Lindsay, Balfour Beatty Plant & Fleet Services**; Fleet safety champion of the year (public), **Rick Stillman, South Central Ambulance Service**.

Supplier awards: Van Leasing and Fleet Management Company of the Year, **Hitachi Capital Commercial Vehicle Services**; Van Rental Company of the Year, **Europcar**;
Van Equipment Supplier of the Year, **ATS Euromaster**; Van Fleet Safety Award, **Kwik-Fit Fleet**.

Manufacturer awards: Van Manufacturer of the Year, **Ford**; City Van of the Year, **Peugeot Bipper**; Small Van of the Year, **Volkswagen Caddy**; Medium Van of the Year, **Volkswagen Transporter**; Large Van of the Year, **Mercedes-Benz Sprinter**; 4x4 Truck of the Year, **Mitsubishi L200**; Van of the Year, **Volkswagen Transporter**.

Residual value update

Fleets to reap the financial benefit of ‘quality’ used vehicles

FLEETS disposing of three to four-year-old vehicles across the segments with a decent factory specification, in a desirable colour and having covered average or below average mileage can expect buyers to be queuing up for them in 2012 with resulting high prices, according to the Vehicle Remarketing Association.

The VRA expects the overall used car market to be quite steady next year, but that is subject to a number of macro economic influences which, in the current climate, are becoming almost impossible to predict with any degree of certainty.

Meanwhile, vehicle remarketing organisations are becoming concerned at the number of vehicles missing routing services in the current economic climate.

Dealers are having to correct more faults than normal to bring vehicles up to retail standard and, should that trend continue, it is expected that they will begin to adjust their bids to reflect the problem.

A spokesman said: 'The VRA is advising its members to be aware of the hidden cost of incomplete service records. Further evidence of this comes from the recovery companies who are reportedly attending an increasing number of breakdowns caused by lack of basic maintenance.'

Meanwhile, the VRA anticipates that the stock shortage will continue in 2012, as the reduced new car registrations at the onset of recession, translate into fewer three to four year old used vehicles entering the market.

Additionally, there are reports from some leasing companies belonging to the VRA that average customer fleet sizes are reducing, driven by falling employee numbers and an increase in schemes such as cash for cars. Some estimates suggest a reduction of 5% to 10% of vehicles returning from the corporate sector this coming year.

The LCV sector reveals a market continuing seemingly unabated with prices remaining at near record levels across most segments, says the VRA.

Again, given the ongoing severe shortage of used models, that is predicted to continue well into 2012 and probably right through to the end of the year.

With owners of older vans in London also facing Low Emission Zone penalties in the New Year, there may be a spike in the volumes of older vans coming to market, but that is not expected to have any impact on the corporate stock.

The spokesman said: 'The outlook for sellers of LCVs in 2012 is excellent, but not necessarily so for buyers who will have to hunt very hard for the right stock.'

Currently, in line with VRA predictions last month, used car prices are nudging down, but only slightly, as lower volumes of stock in the wholesale market are met with corresponding demand.

The search for those rare two to four year old 'ready to retail' lower mileage vehicles is getting harder and there are signs that dealers are hanging on to a significantly higher proportion of their part exchanges, in order to keep forecourts stocked up.

Demand for older vehicles, over five to six years is also still strong, with auction conversion rates in excess of 75%, says the VRA. This remains significantly above the current overall average conversion rate of 65%, which in itself is 'a very respectable performance' so late in the year.

The VRA says that some downward pressure on the values of late year low mileage vehicles is evident, as a result of a number of highly attractive new car incentives.

That is diverting a degree of consumer attention away from used models but, even with supplies of late year vehicles increasing, it is not causing a major problem at the moment.

However, with values of late year vehicles having recovered well since the depths of recession, they will reach a point when they may not appear to be as attractive as they once did. Perhaps that point, says the VRA, is not too far away amidst the competitiveness of the new car.

Brake goes on RVs but quality issues hit fleet cars

THE average reduction in used car trade values of 1.8% reported in the December edition of price guide *Black Book* was smaller than the historical 'norm', according to CAP.

However, one key trend emerging is the poor quality of ex-fleet vehicles.

The unusual stability in used car prices at a time when larger falls are typically recorded reflects a continuing delicate balance between supply and demand in what is still an essentially fragile market, says the organisation.

On the demand side of the equation dealers are consistently reporting difficulty in finding cars of sufficient quality for retail, which has forced many to pay more for vehicles with minor damage and absorb the cost of reconditioning.

The problem is partly fuelled by the ongoing troubles in the new car market, which remains very weak. This has forced franchise dealers to compete with their independent counterparts in the open market in actively sourcing used car stock due to the lack of part-exchanges that would normally be generated through new car sales.

According to *Black Book*, a recent snapshot of more than 100 dealers' experience of sourcing retail quality stock revealed 73% of independents having difficulty, compared with 59% of franchised dealers, who benefit from first choice of manufacturer used stock. In terms of stock levels, 80% of independents described their own as too low, compared with just 47% of their franchised counterparts.

Crucially, however, the complaints revolve around the quality rather than quantity of vehicles available. One of the issues CAP has identified is the number of ex-fleet cars entering the market that fail to qualify as prime retail stock.

Black Book identifies one of the main factors behind this as fleets disposing of many 'tired' vehicles as they take advantage of manufacturer incentives on new replacements.
CAP also believes the ongoing stability of the market will be heavily dependent on the volume of nearly new cars which enter the marketplace in the coming weeks, driven by the hunger in some quarters to meet new car registration targets.

Black Book editor Mark Bulmer said: 'Much will depend on the behaviour of manufacturers in relation to pre-reg and late plate supply. One major volume player has a vast quantity of metal to shift which, at recent rates, could take up to nine months to move on. In general there is a lot of late plate stock around and this was illustrated recently when scrutiny of one major trade and retail website revealed 88,000 cars available up to one year old.

'That said, there is still very significant demand for older vehicles around the £3-4,000 price mark and those who specialise in turning these around for retail are enjoying very strong trading.

'Bearing in mind the cautionary note around pre-registering and late plate supply levels we still expect dealers to be out in the marketplace actively seeking stock in the lead up to the New Year and possibly into January. After all, the lessons of being caught short in early 2009 will not be easily forgotten.'

Defleeted rental vehicles boost average car auction prices

AVERAGE values of used cars sold last month at auction increased from £4,558 to £4,849, equivalent to a 6% rise, according to the monthly report from the National Association of Motor Auctions (NAMA).

Year-on-year, the average price of cars at auction increased by 2.1% from £4,849 this November compared to £4,749 a year ago.

The month-on-month price increase would appear to be a very positive result for this time of year, said NAMA.

However the percentage of younger used cars sold at auction in November was much higher than in the previous month - nearly 4,000 more cars below 3.5 years old sold in the month.

That, said NAMA, was reflected in an increase in manufacturer disposal activity which was mainly down to the seasonal defleeting of rental cars. The preference towards younger vehicles at auction also means higher prices which in turn boosted the overall market average by 6%.

That picture, said NAMA was reinforced by the market sector price movements which were much less pronounced. Values for both fleet and manufacturer/rental recorded a 1% decrease whilst dealer prices increased by 1%. Average fleet prices fell from £6,975 in October to £6,875 last month, with manufacturer/rental down from £13,400 to £13,225. Average prices for dealer part exchanges increased from £2,400 to £2,425 for the period under review.

David Scarborough, NAMA committee member, said: ‘Although the overall increase must be viewed with some caution, a month-on-month increase at this time of year has to be welcomed. Dealers, for example, have been enjoying disposal profit (the measure between sale prices and stand-in values) which is significantly better than for the same time last year.’

With November being the third month running when car prices have been slightly higher than the equivalent month last year, it would appear to contradict the difficult retail conditions reported by dealers, said NAMA.

However, the organisation said that in reality, dealers had been very successful in maintaining their sales volumes in line with targets, even if that had been at the expense of reduced profits.

Tony Gannon, NAMA committee member, said: ‘The supply of cars is still weighted towards the poorer condition cars and the better examples were becoming more difficult to source by the day. Furthermore, we have also witnessed a few more speculative buyers returning to the market, keen to ensure that they are able to present a comprehensive selection of cars to retail buyers immediately after Christmas. There is also the strong motivation to buy before prices increase early in the New Year.’

Online sales at BCA up 11% year on year

ONLINE sales at vehicle auction giant BCA have passed 100,000 units in 2011 - an 11% increase on last year.

The milestone figure was reached nearly a month earlier than in 2010. The 100,000th car - a 2009 Audi A3 Sport - was sold in the GE Capital sale at BCA Blackbushe on November 30.

BCA commercial director D’Vidis Jacobs said: ‘Online sales volumes have again grown significantly this year at BCA with Live Online, Bid Now, Buy Now and e-Auction numbers rising by around 11% across the board.’

He continued: ‘BCA has taken nearly two million Live Online bids from professional buyers this year to date, an increase of around 18%. The number of individual trade buyers regularly using BCA’s online selling channels also continues to grow, year on year.

‘Online is set to continue to grow in importance for all customers and in 2011, over 20% of all BCA’s sales will be via online channels.’

Politics and regulation

DVLA plans could save fleets and Government millions, says BVRLA

THE British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association has welcomed Government proposals to centralise Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) activities and move more of its services online.

It believes that the reduction is bureaucracy with the centralisation of DVLA services and the provision of much more choice and flexibility by introducing more web-based services will save the Government and fleets millions of pounds.

Announcing a consultation on the plans, Transport Minister Mike Penning said that they would make 'dealing with the DVLA easier and quicker for motorists and businesses'.

The Department for Transport has predicted that the proposals could deliver significant efficiencies with an estimated £28 million year-on-year saving.

Penning added: 'Centralising the DVLA's services is the first crucial step towards making more of its transactions available online, allowing people to deal with the DVLA at their chosen time and place. This will mean quicker turnarounds and meet our customers' growing needs.'

Under the proposals, customers should have far more ways to access the DVLA's services than the 39 regional offices the DVLA currently operates in Great Britain.

However, the announcement means that the 39 regional offices, 10 of which include its regional enforcement centres, are expected to close by the end of 2013, with work currently processed at those offices centralised at the DVLA's headquarters in Swansea with resulting job losses.

BVRLA chief executive, John Lewis said: 'Last spring we sat down with the minister and told him that there was a massive opportunity to streamline and modernise the way the DVLA dealt with its customers.

'With this announcement, the coalition Government has shown that is willing to listen and take brave decisions when it comes to poor legislation and inefficient working practices.

'It is always regrettable when people face redundancy, particularly at this time of year and in the current economic environment. But reducing bureaucracy is a great way of boosting the private sector and creating jobs.'

The BVRLA will be taking the consultation opportunity to restate some of its earlier suggestions on how the DVLA could save and its customers time and millions of pounds each year. They include:

- Electronic notification for SORN or vehicle disposal
- Prepayment accounts for refund and purchase of VED
- Electronic V5 (printed on demand only)
- E-licensing for goods vehicle
- Real-time online driving licence check
- Multi-year VED
- Removing the need to display the tax disc

The consultation closes on March 6, 2012. The consultation document can be found at: http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/consultations.aspx

Fines fail to stop drivers using mobile phones

A DOUBLING of the fine for illegally using a hand-held mobile phone while driving and the introduction of three penalty points has failed to deter motorists from using devices, according to new data.

Freedom of Information requests to all 43 England and Wales police forces reveal that the number of drivers given Fixed Penalty Notices for using mobile phones is higher than in 2006, before the punishment was doubled from £30 to £60 accompanied by three penalty points on the driver's licence.

One in five (18%) UK drivers admit to using a mobile phone while driving in the last year and more than 1.5 million drivers admit to illegally using their smartphones to access social networking sites while driving

Fines collectively totalling £10 million in the last 12 months do not appear to be enough to deter drivers from using mobile phones, according to car insurance company Swiftcover.com.

A total of 171,223 motorists - equivalent to one driver every three minutes - were given Fixed Penalty Notices for using hand-held mobile devices while in control of a vehicle in 2010/11. This is more than double the number of offences recorded in 2004 (74,000), shortly after mobile phone use while driving was outlawed. In 2006, the year before the measures were introduced, 166,800 drivers were given Fixed Penalty Notices for use of handheld mobile phones while driving.

Robin Reames, chief claims officer at swiftcover.com, said: ‘It’s clear that current measures to stop motorists using their phones while driving simply aren’t working. An irresponsible but substantial minority of motorists are continuing to flout laws and endanger others, all for the sake of a phone call that could be taken at another time.’

New research, also carried out by Swiftcover.com, suggests that nearly almost seven million UK drivers have spoken on their mobile phones while driving in the last 12 months, implying that less than 2.5% of drivers who use their mobile phones are caught, and suggesting that British motorists could be given Fixed Penalty Notices worth more than £400m if all those who used their mobile phones while driving were caught.

Swiftcover.com’s research also found that 5% of drivers admitted to using social networking sites such as Facebook while driving within the last year, and those aged between 18 and 34 were particularly reckless, with 12% having accessed social networks while behind the wheel.

Reames continued: ‘While the vast majority of Brits drive safely and responsibly, our research shows that an alarming number recklessly endanger themselves and others by using mobile phones while driving.

‘There’s simply no excuse for using your mobile phone while driving. Not only do you face fines, disqualification or even the possibility of a jail sentence; but anyone who crashes their vehicle while on the phone will be unable to make a claim with their insurer. If your conversation is really that important, pull over somewhere safe and take the call, or consider investing in a hands-free set.’

Roads to ‘deteriorate’ as Government cuts maintenance budget

A FURTHER deterioration in the condition of Britain’s roads is possible following a £1.23 billion cut in national and local road maintenance budgets, according to a report by the National Audit Office.

The Government’s 2010 spending review set a transport budget that was 15% lower in 2014-15 compared with 2010-11, which includes a 23% cut in local roads maintenance and a 20% reduction in national roads.

The watchdog said that there was now a risk that a proportion of the budget reductions in the road maintenance budget may not be financially sustainable and risked ‘deterioration in road quality and higher long term costs to the Department or local authorities’.

General motor industry news

Sir Stelios launches car club with a difference

A CAR club with a difference has been unveiled by one of Britain’s best-known businessmen, easyJet founder Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou, in conjunction with lastminute.com founder Brent Hoberman.

The Car Club will launch in London next year and will see vehicle owners rent their cars out providing an alternative for hirers to using a traditional vehicle hire company.

Vehicle owners will sign up to Car Club and set their own hourly rental rate for their vehicle and its availability. The vehicle will be given an automatic entry and tracking system and will be unlocked remotely for the renter. Insurance will be provided by car Club and hirers will pay for fuel. Hirers will be able to use smartphone apps to book slots in vehicles.

The businessmen claim Car Club will be a cheaper alternative to traditional car rental and help people with cars to make cash from hiring them out. The Car Club aims to test the first 1,000 cars this spring in the London area.

Sir Stelios said the new scheme, which will operate a longside the traditional easyCar rental business, 'could prove to be the future of car rental and ownership in cities of the future'

Car Club says that every car shared is estimated to get 10 cars off the road and reduces personal car emissions by more than 40%.

Sir Stelios added: 'Rather than having to buy the cars to be rented and pay the ownership costs, this business model relies on the fact that there are plenty of under-used cars on the road already and that is lazy capital that can be put to work again.'

SMMT publishes new 'Towing and the Law Guide'

THE Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) has launched the sixth edition of its *'Towing and the Law Guide'* that helps businesses and individuals to stay on the right side of the law when towing anything weighing up to 3.5 tonnes.

Available since the late 1950s, the regularly updated publication has sold more than 300,000 copies in the last 10 years alone, catering for those towing anything from a trailer or caravan to a horse box or boat.

The booklet includes a new, easy to follow guide to ensure drivers hold the correct licences and a revised presentation of the information about tachograph use.

In addition to these updated sections, the new 36-page booklet covers crucial 'need to know' subjects from towing in Europe and the various types of coupling, to essential safety points such as the use of breakaway cables and correct tyre pressures.

Only available in hard copy, the sixth edition costs £6 plus postage and packing (£3.50 for SMMT members). To order a copy go to http://www.smmt.co.uk/reports-publications.

Deadline looms for VBRA under run scheme membership

THE deadline is looming fast for members of the Vehicle Builders & Repairers Association to benefit from a cash saving on a scheme to ensure rear under run protective devices (RUPD) on new vehicles meet all European Commission Whole Vehicle Type Approval (WVTA) regulations.

Bodybuilders signing up to the VBRA RUPD manufacturing scheme before Tuesday (December 20) will pay £900 for the annual licence while after that time the cost will be £1,350 a year.

Bodybuilders who wish to continue selling vehicles when WVTA comes into play within their sector will have to use rear under-run protective devices that are approved by the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) or another WVTA-recognised certification body.

Such approval means not just submitting drawings but manufacturing the rear under run devices and testing them to destruction to prove that they are safe and fit for purpose.

Once this is achieved, the bodybuilder has to demonstrate to VCA that each subsequent device will be built and fitted to the same parameters through their own VCA-approved conformity of production and quality control procedures.

In order to save bodybuilders the time, hassle and expense of undertaking their own research and development, VBRA has put together a set of manufacturing drawings and specifications for rear under-runs that have been tested and approved already by VCA.

Bodybuilders who sign up to the VBRA RUPD scheme then only have to show VCA that they will be made via approved conformity of production and quality control processes.

More information is available to members and non-members via the VBRA websites: www.vbra.co.uk and www.wvta.co.uk

- THE seventh annual report of the Vehicle Builders & Repairers Association's body repair code of practice data reveals a customer satisfaction rate of 97%. The report is part of the VBRA's audit obligation under the Office of Fair Trading Consumer Code of Practice Scheme (CCAS). VBRA is the only trade association for vehicle body repair garages that operates CCAS and was the second motor trade body to achieve acceptance onto the scheme in 2004. Last year 21 complaints were notified to VBRA. Of those eight were found to be work carried out by non-VBRA members; two were withdrawn; eight were resolved by the member with VBRA assistance; and two are ongoing. In total therefore 10 complaints were made in the last year. VBRA director general Malcolm Tagg said: 'It is extremely pleasing to say that through this difficult economic climate when the cost of fuel and motor insurance are higher than ever, VBRA members continue to deliver the highest levels of service and care to their motoring customers. 97% customer satisfaction is a really enviable result.'

People on the move

Changes at the top at Vauxhall

DUNCAN Aldred, managing director of Vauxhall for the past two years, will add the chairmanship of the business to his responsibilities from January 1, 2012.

As chairman and managing director, Aldred will oversee all Vauxhall operations, including the company's HR function and personnel in the UK plants at Ellesmere Port and Luton.

Current chairman Bill Parfitt will take the title of director, government affairs and public policy, also with effect from January 1, 2012. He will continue to pursue his key role in government liaison and as negotiator and supporter of growth in the UK supply chain.

Stead joins Vertu Motors as non-executive director

FAST growing motor dealer group Vertu Motors has appointed Nigel Stead as a non-executive director. Vertu has a network of 82 sales and aftersales outlets across the UK.

Stead (62) was until recently chief executive of Lex Autolease, the UK's largest contract hire and leasing group. He has also been a non- executive director of Motability Operations Group plc and Universal Salvage plc. He is currently a director of the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association and a non-executive director of Prohire plc and Merrion Fleet Management.

Stead said: 'I intend to utilise my skills and experience in the motor industry to help the Group to evaluate opportunities as it continues to expand and grow.'

Vertu Motors says it is eying growth both organically and through acquisition.

Published by AWD Communications Ltd **info@awdcomms.com** **www.automotiveindustrydigest.com**