

This Week's Briefing

Fleets should react to strong wholesale used vehicle values

New car prices rise and further increases on the horizon

300,000 drivers swap penalty points to beat driving ban

Tougher action demanded over road law breakers

Drive to digital car radios is underway as fitment rates rise

Model update: Alfa Romeo, Audi, BMW, Hyundai, Volvo

Suzuki appoints first national corporate sales manager

The Editor's View

NEW vehicle technology appears to be running ahead of HM Revenue & Customs' company car benefit-in-kind tax rules. Tax experts at BCF Wessex Consultants have been through the smallest of small print in relation to tax rules and believe soon to arrive diesel hybrid cars should be taxed in the same way as petrol hybrid cars. In other words the cars - the first to arrive will be the Peugeot 3008 HYbrid4 - should be exempt from the current 3% benefit-in-kind supplement levied on all diesel company cars. Organisations including the SMMT and BVRLA have long lobbied for the 'out of date' supplement to be axed. But the taxman continues to impose it - and says it applies to the new diesel hybrids. The supplement was initially introduced to penalise so-called 'dirty' diesels. However, it is well past its sell by date with diesel car emissions now 'cleaner' than their petrol equivalents and thus should be axed. With diesel hybrid cars having emissions of around 100 g/km the taxman needs to resolve the anomaly and change its initial guidance.

Fleet file

Tax experts highlight diesel hybrid benefit-in-kind anomaly

MOVES are afoot to lobby Government tax officials to try and ensure that diesel hybrid cars, which will shortly enter the UK market, are exempt from the 3% benefit-in-kind tax surcharge applied to traditional diesel models.

Confusion in HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) tax rules has been highlighted by David Rawlings and Jeff Whitcombe, tax and fleet experts at BCF Wessex Consultants.

The issue has come to a head with the imminent UK showroom arrival of the Peugeot 3008 HYbrid4, the world's first full diesel hybrid.

The official range goes on sale early next year - following the arrival of a special launch derivative later this year - with two versions available with carbon dioxide emissions of 99 g/km and 104 g/km respectively.

That means that both models in 2011/12 fall into the 10% company car benefit-in-tax bracket (13% for diesel cars).

Peugeot's second diesel hybrid, the four-wheel drive 508 RXH, will go on sale in spring 2012 with emissions of 109 g/km. But from April 6 next year a shake-up in benefit-in-kind tax scale charges means that the 10% rate applies to cars with emission up to and including 99 g/km. A model emitting 109 g/km will fall into the 12% tax bracket (15% for diesel cars).

An initial inquiry to HMRC's Employer Helpline suggested that the 3% supplement must be applied to all diesel cars, including diesel hybrids, subject to the overall benefit-in-kind tax cap of 35%.

However, Section 139 of the Income Tax (Earnings & Pensions) Act 2003 explicitly says that the 3% supplement only applies to 'a car which is propelled solely by diesel'.

Following the abolition from April 6 this year of various benefit-in-kind tax discounts on all alternatively fuelled cars, except electric vehicles, applicable secondary legislation only refers to hybrid models which are now included within the code for petrol vehicles (type A cars) for HMRC tax reporting purposes.

Whitcombe said: 'There no longer seems to be a statutory definition by which a hybrid car is restricted to one that is capable of being propelled by electricity and petrol. So, we should resort to the only other relevant legislation, Section 141 (5) ITEPA, which unambiguously states that the 3% supplement only applies to cars that are solely propelled by diesel. Therefore I contend that the supplement should not be applied to diesel hybrids.'

'We should we try to convince HMRC to change its interpretation of the legislation and update its guidance and statutory returns (Forms P46(Car) and P11D), and in the meantime encourage employers to report diesel hybrids as type A cars to ensure that this widely held misconception does not lead to some drivers paying more tax than they should.'

A Peugeot spokesman told the *Digest* the manufacturer had discussed the benefit-in-kind tax issue with HMRC, which had ruled that the supplement did apply to diesel hybrids. However, he admitted that the manufacturer 'had not pushed the issue'.

However, the spokesman pointed out that a sister Government department, the Driver Vehicle and Licensing Agency, classed diesel hybrids as 'alternatively fuelled vehicles'.

He said that Peugeot would be contacting BCF Wessex Consultants to further discuss the issue to see if a case could be put together to take to HMRC for diesel hybrids to be exempt from the 3% supplement.

Volvo helps fleets avoid costs associated with six-month lead times

VOLVO says that fleet chiefs are reviewing vehicle choice lists as they lose patience and money through long manufacturer delivery delays.

In the past couple of months Volvo says it has been added to the choice lists of a number of large fleets through a combination of availability and a strong product range.

One household name, an 850-strong fleet had been running a choice list comprising of three German car brands, but Volvo has replaced one of these based on shorter lead times - normally just six to eight weeks from either its Swedish or Belgian plants.

For some fleets manufacturer lead times have reached critical levels according to Volvo with some holding a full scale review of their car fleet policies to ensure employees are kept mobile and are not faced with hefty car hire charges, costly contract extensions or expensive assets depreciating rapidly.

Long lead times are also becoming a major human resources challenge for the company car benefit hierarchy in that prices can rise during the six to seven month lead time period so a car can move up a band on the company car choice list.

The company, argues Volvo, then has a tough choice, do they not take delivery of the car they have been waiting six months for and order a new one, or do they adjust their band pricing accordingly?.

‘The days of manufacturers holding lots of unsold stock are gone, but the industry should be mindful of the impact long delivery delays are having on the overall UK car market,’ said Selwyn Cooper, Volvo’s national corporate operations manager.

‘UK fleets are definitely suffering because cars are being supplied to countries like China where there is demand and high levels of profitability, compared with the UK where the currency strength against the euro and dollar is constantly squeezing manufacturer profitability. By limiting supply in a market a manufacturer can also start to control and improve used values.’

Expanded MoT could see vehicle maintenance bills rise

A RADICAL shake-up of the MoT test will result in astronomical bills to repair electronic stability control (ESC) systems from next year, it has been claimed.

New European Union rules, which appear to have slipped under the radar of major motoring bodies such as the RAC and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, will also see equipment such as electric seat adjustment motors and factory-fitted tyre pressure monitoring systems (TPMS) added to the Department for Transport’s road worthiness test, according to consumer magazine *Auto Express* (October 19, 2011).

ESC will become mandatory on new car and van models from next month (November 2011) and all new vehicles from November 2014. But the new MoT rules, which make it compulsory for these systems to be in working order, won’t just apply to new vehicles or systems that came as standard, they will apply to any vehicle that has them fitted.

The publication says it contacted more than 20 mainstream car manufacturers in the UK to find out how much ESC could cost to repair. The system is so complicated that many firms simply couldn’t give a figure. However, from those that did, it emerged that the repair bill could top £2,000. Repairing an electric seat adjustment motor can cost upwards of £1,500 and replacing a TPMS system can cost almost £500.

Motoring groups have expressed concern that the new rules apply retrospectively, rather than to cars registered from January 1, 2012 when the changes kick in.

AA president Edmund King said: ‘We think it’s right that the MoT test keeps up with technology - that’s a move in the right direction. But if you look at technology legislation, you are normally given a date from which it applies.’

‘Some people will be caught out unfairly because they were early adopters. A degree of flexibility with older vehicles would have been good.’

New elements being added to the MoT for testing from January 1 next year are: Air bags, brake fluid warning light, catalytic converter, condition of all visible wiring, condition of battery, electronic seat adjustment motor, electronic parking brake, electronic stability control, high intensity discharge (HID) lamps, power steering, seat belt pre-tensioners, trailer/caravan electrical socket and tyre pressure monitoring system.

Itochu puts customers first with multi-million Kwik-Fit investment

MILLIONS of pounds are being invested in Kwik-Fit by new owners Itochu Corporation of Japan whose priority focus on improving the customer experience has resulted in a major refurbishment plan for its UK centre network.

Only three months after Itochu acquired the Kwik-Fit Group for £637 million the company has already embarked upon the roll out of a pilot centre refurbishment programme.

The first four new-look centres in Glasgow, Stafford, Uxbridge and Newbury are expected to be operational by the end of November with 60 Kwik-Fit centres scheduled to be given a major makeover by the end of the first quarter 2012.

Kwik-Fit operates a total of 673 high street centres nationwide - along with 200 mobile tyre fitting vehicles - and the plan is to give the entire network a whole new look within the next six years..

The investment will mean Kwik-Fit centres have a modern and comfortable feel whereby the traditional centre counters will be removed and replaced by desks and flat screen monitors. The reception area will have modern relaxed seating, tea and coffee making facilities and be equipped with WiFi and flat screen televisions.

Itochu has already confirmed its intention to give fleet customers access to the 130 Stapleton's Tyre Services centres in the UK that it already owns. This will effectively increase the size of Britain's largest independent fast-fit business to more than 800 high street locations.

Meanwhile, a further reflection of Itochu's customer service ethos is to strengthen the management team that is responsible for the network of centres. Currently Kwik-Fit's regionally based operations managers are each responsible for up to 22 centres on average compared with operations managers at Stapleton's Tyre Services being responsible for an average 10-12 centres. The plan is to bring the Kwik-Fit ratio in line with that which operates at Stapleton's.

Kwik-Fit Fleet sales director Peter Lambert said: 'Itochu is already stamping its mark on Kwik-Fit with its investment plans. The company's two previous owners have been private equity firms which have both had a completely different approach to the business compared with the new owners.

'We are already benefiting from an IT upgrade in the fleet division with the sales team being given new laptops and office staff now have new PCs. Our customers will shortly benefit from the investment that is to be made in the centres and additional operations managers who will focus on frontline service delivery.

'As a result, we believe that the customer experience for company car drivers will further improve and service quality will be boosted.'

The inclusion of the Stapleton's Tyre Services' network within the Kwik-Fit portfolio means that Itochu's UK fast-fit network is more than double the size of its nearest rival which has just over 300 centres service outlets.

Further investment is also being made in LCV tyre fitting equipment to ensure that all centres have the appropriate training and equipment to support LCVs up to 3.5 tonnes.

A further change will see Kwik-Fit taking a new approach to selling exhausts, sales of which have been declining nationally for years. In recent years sales of new car and van exhausts having been dropping at an annual rate of around 15% due to improvements in reliability and quality of the original equipment. In fact, most exhausts today are replaced due to damage caused by sleeping policemen or in crashes.

Lambert said: 'Kwik-Fit centres will continue to sell exhausts but instead of having them lined up on centre shelves our local suppliers will be able to deliver a replacement to meet a customer's requirements within 45 minutes.

'With fewer exhausts in stock at centres we will be able to stock a greater range of tyres which will further improve our ability to supply the tyres customers require from stock.'

Leased fleets expand slowly as confidence rises

THE size of the vehicle leasing market as measured by the UK's 50 largest contract hire companies has increased 0.7% in the past 12 months, according to an annual analysis by trade publication *BusinessCar*.

That compares with a drop of 3.9% (or 57,000 vehicles) last year and 10% in 2009, according to the publication's annual *BC50* report, which charts the state of the leasing industry

While the economy falters, the latest *BC50* shows encouraging potential despite many in the industry continuing to be cautious for the coming year, says the magazine.

The top 10 leasing firms stay the same with a minor reshuffle among them. Number one, Lex Autolease, continues to drop its fleet size as does Lombard Vehicle Management, while other big players such as Arval and ALD Automotive increase vehicles on risk. Alphabet, previously number 10, now sits at number six, and it is set to rise to number three next year after its acquisition of ING Car Lease was recently confirmed.

Fleet expert David Rawlings, from Business Car Finance, said: 'We are in very difficult times of uncertainty and low consumer confidence, the economy looks bleak and growth at best is minimal.

'However, cars remain fundamental to most businesses. Notwithstanding the increases in company car taxation from April, lower emission vehicles are still a very tax efficient benefit.'

Rawlings said that, without doubt, 2012 would be difficult but added: 'Smart employers will continue to review and manage costs, they will seek out creative ways of rewarding and retaining the best staff and when the economy turns will be well-placed to capitalise on the renewed market.'

Almost half of 25-plus fleets not using fuel cards

ABOUT 40% of fleets with more than 25 cars and vans are not using fuel cards, according to research into fuel buying by MIB Data Solutions.

The company asked 616 companies how they acquired fuel and received the following responses. The results do not total 100% because some use more than one method of purchasing:

Fuel card	60%
Drivers' pay and reclaim	18%
Bunkered fuel	17%
Credit card	11%
Local account	4%

Nick Boddington, managing director of MIB Data Solutions, said: 'While prices have fallen slightly in recent months, fuel has been the fastest rising cost facing fleets in recent years, so the lack of managerial attention the subject receives from some fleets is difficult to explain.

'Those using fuel cards have the highest degree of control over their fuel spend while those with bunkered fuel and local accounts have at least some - but that still leaves around one in four or one in five fleets who abdicate responsibility completely.

‘Fleets using credit cards or pay-and-reclaim have no way of easily seeing where fuel is being bought, how much drivers are paying, who is using excess fuel and even whether fraud is occurring.’

Boddington added that, from anecdotal feedback recorded during the research, fleets that did not use fuel cards simply appeared unaware of their advantages.

He said: ‘Many seem to be of the opinion that fuel costs are not something that can really be managed, that you just have to pay whatever the retailer wants to charge you. However, once the advantages of fuel cards in terms of tracking and controlling spending are explained, they do often respond positively.’

Tyres neglected by 40% of fleet chiefs

ALMOST four in 10 fleet managers fail to check their vehicles’ tyres regularly, according to a poll of 1,000 fleet decision-makers surveyed by business insurance broker Swinton Commercial.

The survey suggests that only 37% of fleet chiefs bothered to check frequently for tyre defects.

With Tyre Safety Month promoted by not-for-profit organisation TyreSafe running throughout October, Swinton Commercial has joined forces with Goodyear Tyres to highlight the importance of proper tyres during the winter months.

Jolene Shaw, technical referral advisor at Swinton Commercial, stressed that fleet operators should at least consider fitting winter tyres.

‘Cold weather tyres are manufactured with more natural rubber and silica, which keeps them supple in the colder weather offering greater grip in snow and ice and can offer up to 55% reduction in braking distance,’ she said.

‘It is vital that fleet managers carry out regular checks of their vehicles tyres, especially during the winter months when road conditions are much worse.’

The broker also advises fleet chiefs to:

- Check around vehicle tyres for defects such as cuts or bulges and remove any embedded objects
- Check tyre pressure and tread depth and make sure they adhere to the legal 1.6mm minimum requirement. Aside from the fine and penalty points drivers receive, fleet managers could also see their fleet insurance policy premium increase as a result of illegal tyres.

ALD wins sole supplier agreement with Haulotte Group

ALD Automotive has signed a three-year sole supplier agreement to manage the 75-strong UK fleet of Haulotte Group, the European leader in people and material lifting equipment.

As sole supplier, ALD Automotive will deliver a range of services to Haulotte Group, including, accident management and ALD’s PoolFleet solution, which involves providing short term vehicles for specific requirements such as for staff in their trial period or for temporary staff.

Haulotte Group will also have access to ALD Automotive’s threesixty online system, the online portal through which all of ALD’s customer applications and functionality is deployed. It is a feature rich, configurable application which will provide Haulotte with a central portal for all vehicle fleet related processes, risk management services and management information

The decision to appoint ALD Automotive followed a detailed tender process, with the key objective to deliver improved efficiency and high levels of service.

Martin Edwards, financial director Northern Europe, Haulotte Group, said: 'As a result of the tender process and meeting the required criteria, ALD Automotive highlighted their experience of exclusively managing entire fleets of vehicles and having the technology available to ensure that high standards of customer service are constantly delivered.'

Keith Allen, managing director of ALD Automotive, said: 'The agreement highlights their confidence in our ability to deliver a fully outsourced fleet solution. They will receive a dedicated service from ALD and a range of solutions that will not only benefit their senior management team, but also their drivers.'

Company car driver puts electric Smart to the test in marathon drive

A COMPANY car driver is out to prove that electric vehicles are a viable fleet proposition and simultaneously raise money for charity.

Craig Pullen, systems development manager at specialist fleet services provider RunYourCars, has been driving a Smart Fortwo electric car for more than six months and has clocked up more than 5,000 miles.

However, journeys to date have been local commuter-type trips. But with the advent of the Ecotricity 'Electric Highway', which sees electric vehicle charging bays located at motorway service stations nationwide, Pullen is hoping to overcome range issues which many drivers associate with electric vehicles.

During the weekend of November 12 and 13 he is planning to make a return journey from Run Your Cars office in Henley-in-Arden near Birmingham via Oxford and London by using charging stations on the M40 (Oxford Services), M25 (South Mimms) and M1 (Newport Pagnell Services).

Planning a round trip of some 300 miles, Pullen said: 'I have successfully used the Smart electric car locally, and thought that the advent of the 'Electric Highway' would provide a good opportunity to disprove some of the myths associated with electric vehicles - notably range anxiety.'

Working in partnership with leading fleet service providers, Run Your Cars offers businesses of all sizes a comprehensive range of fleet management solutions at discount prices.

Pullen said: 'We receive a lot of enquiries about electric vehicles and my experiment will further add to our pool of knowledge and experience. I hope to be able to prove that Birmingham, Oxford and London are fully connected via the 'Electric Highway'.'

He is able to drive approximately 80 miles on a full charge and for longer journeys when recharging has not been possible en route or at his destination has hired a petrol or diesel car.

Pullen explained: 'Driver and vehicle flexibility is key when companies are establishing their fleet policies. We believe that electric cars and vans have a place on a vehicle fleet, but usage has to be managed.'

'Use of the Smart is delivering significant fuel savings and reducing our carbon footprint, but Run Your Cars is flexible enough to realise that it is not the end of the road for the combustion engine. We believe the two power sources can operate side-by-side within most fleet operations.'

Ecotricity PR manager Mike Cheshire said: 'We hope that Craig's commuting round-trip will help to show people that electric vehicles are not only green but that travelling by electric vehicle is getting more and more practical. It's great to see industry leaders such as Craig promoting the everyday potentials of green transport. As an expert in the motoring field, he is a key driver of change.'

'The 'Electric Highway' is providing the infrastructure to get Britain's electric car revolution moving and will reduce carbon emissions at a time when petrol prices are sky-high. It costs just over 1p per mile to travel in an electric vehicle, compared to around 15p per mile in a petrol car.'

In making the journey, Pullen is planning to raise money for automotive industry charity BEN. Anyone who would like to donate can do so via <http://www.justgiving.com/CraigPullenElectric>

Fleet's 'eco' leaders named in *GreenFleet* Awards

THE leading promoters of environmentally-friendly fleet technologies and services alongside the 'greenest' fleets were revealed at the 2011 *GreenFleet* Awards.

Organised by *GreenFleet Magazine*, the annual event gave a pat on the back for vehicle manufacturers, suppliers and fleet managers that have actively combatted climate change by adapting pioneering methods to reduce the carbon output of their fleet.

On top of the 17 category winners, Dr Colin Herron, of One North East, the Regional Development Agency (RDA) for the North East of England was presented with the Award for outstanding achievement in recognition of his work to make the North East an internationally recognised centre for low carbon vehicle innovation and education.

BMW was named Fleet Car Manufacturer of the Year for two years running while Commercial Group's Robert Paddock walked away with the prize for Private Sector Fleet Manager of the Year for the second time in three years. IAM Drive & Survive also repeated last year's success in the Driver Training Company of the Year category.

Other winners were: Leasing Company of the Year, **Automotive Leasing**; LGV Manufacturer of the Year, **Volvo Trucks**; Public Sector Fleet of the Year (above 250 vehicles), **Dumfries & Galloway Council**; Private Sector Fleet of the Year (below 250 vehicles), **Commercial Group**; Private Sector Fleet (250-500 vehicles), **Iron Mountain Europe**; Public Sector Fleet Manager of the Year, **Mark Green (The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead)**; Rental Company of the Year, **Green Motion**; Private Sector Fleet of the Year (over 500 vehicles), **Morrison Utility Services**; Public Sector Fleet of the Year (below 250 vehicles), **Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead**; City Car Manufacturer of the Year, **Fiat**; Electric Vehicle of the Year, **Nissan Leaf**; Industry Innovation Award, **Ford Transit Connect Electric**; IT Innovation Award, **TomTom**; LCV Manufacturer of the Year, **Citroen**.

Marshall Leasing signs up to 1link Hire Network

MARSHALL Leasing has become the latest vehicle leasing company to sign up to epyx's 1link Hire Network.

The Cambridge-based company will use the e-commerce platform to manage the supply of daily rental vehicles to its leasing customer base.

1link Hire Network will allow Marshall to handle bookings and invoicing online for the first time, replacing earlier software and creating a process that is faster, lower cost and more accurate.

The company already uses epyx's 1link Service Network and 1link Relicensing e-commerce platforms for management of vehicle service, maintenance and road fund relicensing.

For purchasers of daily rental services such as major fleets, 1link Hire Network enables online comparison of multi-supplier quotations and subsequent booking. For daily rental suppliers, it provides access to new customers as well as electronically validating bookings and other major process improvements. As with other 1link platforms, a major benefit for all parties is the massive reduction in telephone traffic to manage bookings.

Vauxhall secures police fleet leadership

VAUXHALL Motors Special Vehicles has become the biggest supplier of low and intermediate police vehicles in the UK after winning contracts for six police regions in a tender process initiated by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA).

The contract wins mean that 37 (or 71%) of the UK's 52 Police Authorities are now contracted to buy Vauxhall vehicles.

The agreements, which will see the delivery of around 7,000 cars and vans over the next four years, include a broad range of Vauxhall models, including the Corsa, Astra, Insignia, Astravan, Combo, Vivaro and Movano.

Vauxhall says many factors contributed to its success in winning the tenders, including excellent value for money, low emissions, the Turnkey Vehicle Solution initiative for rapid turnaround of replacement vehicles, service support and Vauxhall's involvement with the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) work on Single Vehicle Architecture.

Dick Ellam, Vauxhall Special Vehicles' manager, said: 'A key factor in our success is our approach to the supply chain. The only element we outsource is the delivery of the vehicle to the customer - everything else is done in-house under our control. We are therefore able to make savings for the police fleets in the time it takes to bring their vehicles into service.'

The list of all six police regions, and the 37 Police Authorities, for which tenders were won is:

- Chiltern Transport Consortium - Thames Valley, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Civil Nuclear Constabulary, South East Special Operations and Counter Terrorism Units
- North East - Cleveland, Northumbria, Durham, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Humberside
- East and West Midlands - West Mercia, West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire
- Scotland - Northern Grampian, Tayside, Central, Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway, Lothian and Borders, Fife
- South West - Devon and Cornwall, Avon and Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire
- North West - Merseyside, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire

LeasePlan to bring Opel Ampera to European fleet customers

LEASING and fleet management company LeasePlan has signed an international co-operation agreement with Opel to bring corporate clients the new Opel Ampera range extended electric vehicle.

Under the terms of the co-operation agreement, LeasePlan has secured up to 650 vehicles for early delivery in 12 European markets before the end of 2012.

Vahid Daemi, chairman of the managing board and CEO of LeasePlan Corporation N.V., said: 'We are pleased to develop this international co-operation with Opel for the introduction of the new Opel Ampera. It is co-operation agreements such as this that further supports our global GreenPlan service in helping our clients to reduce both cost and emissions associated with running their fleets.'

To promote the joint effort in the spreading of green mobility, Opel and LeasePlan are working together to introduce the Ampera to the company car policies of LeasePlan customers.

Additionally the two parties are organising a six-month European Ampera roadshow. At various locations across Europe, visitors will be able to learn all about the technology, characteristics and everyday capabilities of the Ampera, as well as having opportunities to drive the extended range electric vehicle.

Fleets urged to run a Bright Day for Brake as clocks go back

FLEET operators are being encouraged to run a 'Bright Day' this autumn by the charity Brake and partner Autoglass, to help save lives on roads.

Bright Days are an opportunity to remind staff of the vital importance of looking out for people on foot and bicycle, particularly children on their way home from school, who are harder to spot as the evenings get darker, says the road safety organisation.

Bright Days involve everyone wearing bright, reflective and day-glow clothes to work and making a donation to Brake, supporting its work to make roads safer and care for families whose lives are devastated by a road death or serious injury.

Organisations are encouraged to sign up now to run a Bright Day to coincide with the clocks going back at the end of the month, or in Road Safety Week, which is taking place November 21-27 and is coordinated by Brake. Companies who take part get a free resource pack to help them raise awareness and fundraise.

Autoglass is the new national sponsor of Brake's Bright Day initiative, and is working with Brake to encourage organisations, schools and communities to take part and spread road safety awareness.

To order a free Bright Day resource pack contact Martin Howard on 01484 550064 or mhoward@brake.org.uk.

Julie Townsend, deputy chief executive at Brake, said: 'I'd encourage all companies with staff who drive for work to get involved now - sign up to run your Bright Day this autumn, to help save lives on roads and raise vital funds for charity.'

Matthew Mycock, managing director of Autoglass, said: 'Every 30 seconds someone in the world is killed in a road crash and with UK road maintenance budgets being cut, it's a crucial time to raise the public's awareness of road safety issues. We will be working with Brake throughout the winter months to highlight the dangers that darker days and hazardous weather conditions pose to road users, and encourage pedestrians to 'think brighter'.'

Model update

BMW unveils all-new 3 Series saloon

THE all-new BMW 3 Series saloon will go on sale on February 11 next year with on-the-road prices starting at £24,880 for a 316d ES.

Other launch prices include £28,080 for either the 320d saloon or its EfficientDynamics counterpart, £29,060 for the 328i saloon and £35,525 for the 335i saloon.

BMW says price rises for the new sixth generation model over the current version are low and include, for example, a £75 rise for the 320i, a £180 increase on the 320d, a £530 rise for the 328i, which is more powerful than the 325i in the previous range, but £2,935 cheaper than the 330i which it out-performs.

BMW says that in all cases the standard specification of the car has been significantly enhanced compared to the previous model, claiming that the price rises are negated in real terms.

The new 3 Series saloon will appear in public for the first time at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit in January 2012.

Towards the end of 2012 BMW plans to introduce four-wheel-drive and hybrid powertrains to the 3 Series saloon for the first time in the UK.

BMW's xDrive all-wheel-drive system has been available on the 3 Series in some markets previously, and has now been engineered for right-hand-drive cars. It will be available with selected petrol and diesel engines.

The ActiveHybrid 3 will arrive at roughly the same time, and will use the powertrain recently announced for the ActiveHybrid 5. This pairs the 335i's 306 bhp six-cylinder engine with an up to 40kW electric motor.

BMW says that the new 3 Series saloon is a car of contradictions: larger and more spacious than the model it replaces, but lighter; quicker in many cases, but more fuel-efficient; and more nimble and agile while safer.

There have, says BMW, been big steps forward in style, quality, comfort and specification and a wider choice of trim levels and an extensive personalisation programme will allow buyers to order virtually a bespoke car.

All engines in the new 3 Series saloon feature BMW TwinPower Turbo technology. They include a new four-cylinder 2.0 litre petrol unit, developing 245 bhp and 350 Nm of torque, in the 328i. It replaces the six-cylinder 3.0 litre engines in the previous 325i and 330i. Efficiency is also significantly improved and both manual and automatic versions of the 328i have fuel economy of more than 44 mpg and emissions below 150 g/km.

The 328i is one of four engines that will be available at launch, three of which are familiar from the outgoing model. The other petrol engine on offer is the 3.0 litre six-cylinder TwinPower Turbo unit in the 335i. Demand for diesels will be catered for by an improved 2.0 litre 184 bhp 320d and the 163 bhp 320d EfficientDynamics, which features longer gear ratios, reduced friction components and revised electronics to generate 68.9 mpg fuel consumption and emissions of 109 g/km.

Previously only available as a manual, the 320d EfficientDynamics will also be available with a new eight-speed automatic transmission - whilst retaining the same 109 g/km emissions level.

Less than a month after launch, three new engines will be added. There will be 316d and 318d diesels, powered respectively by 116 bhp and 143 bhp variants of the 2.0 litre diesel engine, plus another version of the 2.0 litre turbocharged petrol engine. This will slot into the new 320i, and will be tuned to deliver 184 bhp and 270 Nm of torque.

By March 2012, when additional engines have been added to the four at launch, BMW will have eight versions of the new 3 Series saloon with emissions at or below 120 g/km while competitors, says the marque, can muster only one each.

An eight-speed automatic gearbox, giving a wider spread of ratios than the former six-speed unit is available as an alternative to the standard six-speed manual with every engine option. Automatic versions of the new 3 Series saloon are also now as fuel-efficient, or more so, than their manual equivalents.

All versions of the new saloon feature Drive Performance Control as standard - a switch which allows the driver to swap between up to four driving modes, varying from sporty to extremely economical. The four modes are ECO PRO, Comfort, Sport, and Sport + (Sport + is included only on Sport models or with selected optional equipment).

The new saloon features a stiffer body and an all-new chassis based on a longer wheelbase (now 2,810mm, an increase of 50mm on the previous model) and wider tracks (by 37mm at the front and 47mm at the rear). The car is 93mm longer overall.

Luggage space has increased by 20 litres to 480 litres.

The new 3 Series saloon will be available in ES, SE and, in 2012, M Sport trim levels, but there will also be Sport, Modern and Luxury models, each with a distinct character and increased opportunities for individualisation. The increase in specification options mirrors the 'Lines' range first showcased on the BMW 1 Series launched earlier this year.

ES and SE trim levels will be available from launch, whilst Sport and M Sport are targeted at the more enthusiastic driver and Modern and Luxury are different takes on the exclusive and sophisticated compact premium saloon.

In addition to the enhanced range of trims, all models including ES, which is only available on 316d, will receive as standard: 17-inch light alloy wheels, automatic air-conditioning, Bluetooth, BMW Professional radio with 6.5-inch colour screen and iDrive, keyless starting, USB, a multi-function leather steering wheel, cruise control and automatic boot opening.

Audi revises TT Coupe range and adds a new model

AUDI has revised its TT Coupe model range for 2012 and added a new 1.8 TFSI derivative with a choice of Sport or S line specification priced from £24,070 on-the-road.

The new versions join the existing 1.8 TFSI Roadster, priced from £25,320.

Performance-enhancing turbo charging helps the 1.8 litre four-cylinder petrol engine deliver 160 PS from 4,500 rpm and 250 Nm of torque available from 1,500 rpm through to 4,500 rpm. As a result, the front-wheel-driven TT Coupe 1.8 TFSI with six-speed manual transmission passes the 62 mph yardstick in 7.2 seconds, and can continue to a top speed of 140 mph. The S tronic version cuts the acceleration time to 7.1 seconds and can achieve the same top speed.

Due to fuel-rationing FSI direct petrol injection and energy recuperation both versions return combined fuel cycle figures of 44.1 mpg.

Rapid shifting S tronic twin-clutch transmission, which is available on the new models, is also a new addition to the TT Coupe and Roadster 2.0 TDI quattro models, which until now have been available solely with the six-speed manual gearbox.

The equipment list already offered by Sport models, and further embellished in S line and Black Edition versions, is carried over unchanged to the new 1.8 TFSI Sport models. It includes 17-inch alloy wheels, electronic climate control, leather and Alcantara combination upholstery and a concert audio system with single CD player and MP3/iPod connectivity.

S line versions upgrade with features including 18-inch alloy wheels, lowered S line sports suspension, a short-shift gearbox for manual versions, S line exterior and interior detailing and xenon headlights with LED daytime running lamps.

Black Edition specification, which takes S line as its basis and is available for all 2.0 litre TFSI and TDI versions, adds 19-inch alloy wheels, a black styling treatment for the single frame grille surround and number plate holder, dark tinted rear privacy glass for Coupe models, acoustic rear parking sensors for Roadsters, a Bluetooth phone interface and an upgraded Symphony audio system linked to a Bose premium sound system.

The latest TT Coupe and Roadster ranges offer a choice of five petrol and TDI engines delivering outputs ranging from 160 PS to 340 PS, and mated to either front-wheel-drive or quattro all-wheel-drive. On-the-road prices range from £24,070 for the 1.8 TFSI Sport manual to £47,185 for the TT RS Coupe 2.5 TFSI S tronic.

Hyundai reveals pricing for new Velostar coupe

THE new Hyundai Veloster three-door coupe will go on UK sale in February 2012, priced from £17,995 on-the-road for the 1.6 GDi in Velostar trim and topping out at £21,745 for the 1.6 GDi DCT in Velostar Sport trim.

The Veloster will be available in two main trim levels - Veloster and Veloster Sport - and is powered by a 1.6 litre four-cylinder GDI petrol engine, generating 140 PS. It will be available with the option of a six-speed manual gearbox or Hyundai's first dual-clutch transmission.

Hyundai's Blue drive technologies - incorporating Intelligent Stop & Go technology and low rolling resistance tyres - will feature in the Veloster line-up ensuring emissions of 137 g/km and a combined cycle fuel economy of 47.9 mpg.

Standard features include: 17-inch alloy wheels, a seven-inch Touch screen media centre, Bluetooth Connectivity with voice recognition, climate control air conditioning, reversing sensors, front and rear fog lights and striking LED daytime running lights.

Alfa Romeo cuts emissions with new petrol engine model

ALFA Romeo's five-door Giulietta hatchback range has been given a boost with the introduction of what the manufacturer claims is the lowest carbon dioxide emitting c-segment petrol engine car.

Offering improved performance, efficiency and lower fuel consumption, the twin dry clutch semi-automatic transmission Alfa TCT is now available to order with either the 1.4 TB MultiAir 170 bhp petrol (International Engine of Year Award 'Best New Engine 2010') or the 2.0 JTDM-2 170 bhp diesel engine.

The sporty credentials of the 1.4 TB MultiAir 170 bhp Giulietta with TCT transmission result in fuel consumption and emissions of 54.3 mpg and 121 g/km respectively making, says Alfa Romeo, the Giulietta the lowest emissions car of any petrol engine in the C segment

The values recorded in combination with the 2.0 JTDM-2 170 HP diesel engine are combined cycle fuel consumption of 62.8 mpg and emissions of 119 g/km.

Available to order now, the Giulietta 1.4 TB MultiAir 170 bhp TCT and the 2.0 JTDM-2 170 bhp TCT are available in Lusso and Veloce trim levels, with prices starting from £21,855 on-the-road.

Volvo helps drivers get a grip by adding AWD to more models

VOLVO has launched its 2011/2012 winter programme, which includes the availability of all wheel-drive (AWD) versions of the XC60 D3 and XC70 D3 as well as the V60 D5.

The new models are in addition to the launch of the marque's winter tyre programme and free winter safety inspections.

The V60 D5 AWD (215 bhp), XC60 D3 AWD (163 bhp), XC70 D3 AWD (163 bhp) are available from £34,020, £29,100 and £30,615 respectively and can be ordered now.

Last year, demand for winter tyres far outweighed supply, with ranges being completely sold out within six weeks and some sizes even being sold out within the first two weeks. To ensure dealers can offer drivers the benefit of using winter tyres, Volvo has increased its stock level to hold a minimum of 10,000 tyres, over four times its stock of last year.

‘The time is right for drivers to start thinking about changing from their standard tyres to winter tyres. As we've experienced over the last few years, there is strong demand for these tyres and it is growing every year,’ said Lee Berrell, aftersales manager for Volvo Car UK.

Drivers have the option of ordering alloy wheel and premium tyre packages, a set of four premium tyres or individual premium tyres. Volvo offer 16-inch, 17-inch or 18-inch tyres and packages, dependant on model and existing wheels fitted to the vehicle. Prices start from £495 (plus £85 fitting) for four tyres and £1,100 (plus fitting) for alloy wheels and tyre packages. Alloy wheel and winter tyre packages for the XC range start from £1,200 (plus £85 fitting).

Volvo has also introduced a free-of-charge inspection that includes a 30 point check. The inspection ranges from fluid checks to security checks on major and integral parts of the vehicle and is carried out by fully trained Volvo technicians.

[Manufacturer news](#)

Saab struggles on with Chinese cash lifeline

CHINESE car maker Zhejiang Youngman Lotus Automobile has given ailing Saab a new injection of cash, keeping alive the Swedish car maker's hopes of survival.

The money is part of a €70 million euros loan planned by Youngman that is intended to see Saab through a period of creditor protection until Chinese authorities approve a bigger investment by Youngman and China's Pangda.

A spokeswoman said: ‘We are putting bridge financing in place so we can fund business during the reorganisation - so we don't incur new debt. We have running costs that we need to take care of. There are a number of business-critical operations that need to be funded.’

Saab hopes the Chinese investment will give it a long-term future, though analysts have noted the company's small size in what is a competitive market.

Saab would not say how much money had been paid by Youngman, but Swedish newspaper *Dagens Industri* reported that the manufacturer had received about \$15m. Further payments from Youngman are expected imminently.

[Light commercial vehicles](#)

Vauxhall's new Combo van breaks cover

VAUXHALL'S all-new Combo panel van will go on sale next year and will be available in two wheelbases, two heights, two gross vehicle weights (2,000 kg and 2,300 kg) two trim levels and with four engine choices.

Combo, says the manufacturer, boasts the highest payload (up to 1,000 kg with driver), large load volume (up to 4.2m³), highest rear axle capacity (1,450kg) and longest wheelbase in its sector.

Vauxhall is also claiming new standards in commercial vehicle exterior design with the new Combo's steeply raked deep windscreen, together with the low bonnet line, giving drivers' exceptional visibility.

Two lengths (4.39m and 4.74m) combined with two heights (1.85m and 2.10m) offer a variety of loading possibilities. With the L1 the load volume is 3,400 litres whereas the L2 packs in 4,200 litres with load lengths of 1.82m (L1) and 2.17m (L2) and the load width of 1.71m. New Combo offers a choice of two payloads: 750 kg and 1,000 kg.

New Combo will be available with four diesel engines. The units include a 1.3 CDTi and a 1.6 CDTi, each with 90 PS, as well as a 1.6 CDTi variant with 105 PS and a 2.0 CDTi engine providing 135 PS. The 1.3 CDTi engines is fitted with five-speed manual transmissions, while the more powerful CDTi units have a six-speed manual transmission. The 1.6 CDTi is also offered with Vauxhall's 'Tecshift' automated five-speed manual transmission.

Standard equipment has been improved over the outgoing model with a raft of equipment including remote central door locking with deadlocks, full-steel bulkhead, trip computer, electric power steering, driver's air-bag, ABS with EBD, CD/radio and a 12 volt power outlet in the dashboard. New Combo also sees the introduction of a Sportive trim level for the first time.

Order banks for new Combo are open now. Prices start at £14,703.33 on the road (excluding VAT) for the L1H1 2000 1.3CDTI 16v (90 PS) model.

Nissan expands heavy van offer with all-new NV400

NISSAN'S plan to double its share of Europe's LCV market within three years has been given a boost by the arrival of the NV400, the company's new heavy van.

Developed in cooperation with Alliance partner Renault, NV400 has its own unique bonnet, front wings, headlamps with integrated daytime running lights, grille and front bumper.

Nissan says the van is one of the most versatile and practical heavy van ranges on the market with gross vehicle weights (GVW) ranging from 2.8t to 4.5t.

For the first time, Nissan is offering the choice of front- or rear-wheel drive versions while NV400 comes in three wheelbase versions, four different lengths, three different heights and with cargo volumes ranging from 8 m³ to 17 m³. There are three power options plus six-speed manual and robotised transmissions.

Front-wheel drive means a lower kerb weight for improved payloads, a lower frame height and improved fuel economy. Rear-wheel drive offers greater choice for chassis cab conversions and thanks to its high rear axle capacity is better suited to medium duty applications. Rear-drive versions are available with single or twin rear wheels.

In addition there are many different bodywork options. As well as factory-built panel vans and combis, there are crew vans, box-bodies, tippers and dropsides all built in house. Nissan will also continue to build chassis-cabs for specialist body builders.

'NV400 is very versatile and offers a solution to each need in the heavy van sector,' said European van chief Sergio Alcaraz. 'It is much more than a replacement for Interstar and takes us into a much wider market segment thanks to the great breadth and depth of the range.'

Power comes from a direct injection, four-cylinder, 16v turbo diesel newly developed by Renault. At 2.3 litres it is smaller than Interstar's 2.5 litre dCi unit yet power outputs are the same - 100, 125 and 150 bhp - and torque figures have improved to 285, 310 and 350 Nm respectively. All are Euro 5 compliant. Major service intervals which have been extended to 40,000 kms or every two years.

The new cabin is slightly longer than before to create extra leg room while the seats are wider and longer for greater comfort.

Safety features include twin front airbags as standard and side airbags optionally available. Electronic Stability Programme (ESP) is standard on all rear-wheel drive models and optional on front-wheel drive versions while anti-lock brakes are standard on all grades.

Standard or optional equipment levels reflect passenger car values and include Nissan Intelligent Key, automatic air conditioning, automatic lights and wipers, daytime running lights, parking sensors, cruise control with speed limiter, trip computer, Bluetooth mobile phone connectivity and USB and iPod playback through the sound system.

New Fiat Ducato enters UK showrooms

THE new Fiat Ducato has gone on UK sale this month and is powered by an extended range of new engines making the latest model cheaper to run than the version it replaces.

A new interior gives the Ducato a much more car-like cockpit and with more versions than ever before, Fiat says it is offering commercial vehicle buyers huge variety.

The three power outputs from the previous Ducato's three engines have been replaced by four outputs from two engine capacities (2.3 and 3.0 litre) on the new model - 110, 130, 148 and 177 bhp units. All are Euro5 emission compliant and service intervals have been increased to 30,000 miles with the timing chain designed to last the life of the vehicle.

The re-designed dashboard now has a slot to accommodate the Blue&Me TomTom Live satellite navigation unit. The integrated radio/CD and MP3 player can accommodate the latest generation of Blue&Me. Vehicles specified with Blue&Me can also have eco:Drive Professional, a version of Fiat's eco:Drive Fleet, which allows drivers and fleet managers monitor how vehicles are being driven and alter habits accordingly to improve economy and lower costs.

Each engine is available with a six-speed manual gearbox while the 3.0 litre can be specified with the six-speed Comfort-Matic Manual Transmission Automated.

There will be eight different capacities of van ranging from eight to 17 m³ meaning that there will be around 2,000 chassis/engine/mechanical variations which will allow for a huge range of vans, minibuses and conversions.

There are two basic mechanical architectures allowing GVW between three and four tonnes. On 15-inch wheels, the GVW is 3.0, 3.3 or 3.5 tonnes, while on 16-inch wheels the GVW is 3.5 to four tonnes.

Payloads can vary between 1,000 and 2,000kg including the driver, and van buyers have a choice between four lengths, three wheelbases and three heights.

DHL Express joins Van Excellence scheme

DHL Express has become the first logistics company in the UK to receive accreditation under the Freight Transport Association's Van Excellence scheme.

Its 1,000-strong fleet was independently audited by the FTA on all aspects of van operation, including vehicle safety and maintenance, driver behaviour and responsible operating procedures.

DHL Express was commended highly in the audit and now becomes one of 14 companies from different industries to have been accredited.

Van Excellence is an industry-led initiative to raise standards and improve the image of the UK's growing van sector and includes a tough accreditation system and a strict code of practice, and is backed by many household names.

Van Excellence is a standard set by van operators for use by van operators, sharing and formalising working practices already used by leading companies in the sector.

Richard Crook, director of fleet for DHL Express, said: 'The creation of this robust and self-regulating scheme will hopefully formalise industry standards and enable companies such as DHL to set an example to other operators, thus raising standards of van operation in general.'

FTA Van Excellence project manager Mark Cartwright, said: 'There has been a massive growth in van use in recent years and the large number of liveried vans on the road means that the way in which they are presented, driven and operated can have an important effect on the reputation of a company.'

The Van Excellence programme is open to both members and non-members of FTA. The 14 operators who have been accredited are: AAH Pharmaceuticals, Balfour Beatty, Clancy Docwra, DHL Express, Enterprise, Iron Mountain, Kelly Communications, London Borough of Redbridge, Menzies, Morgan Sindall, National Blood Services, Network Rail, South and Central Ambulance Trust and Wakefield District Housing.

Tyre firms 'keep it in the family' with Mercedes-Benz Sprinter

TWO of Britain's best-known tyre businesses are investing in new fleets of Mercedes-Benz vans - but while one has been relying on vehicles bearing the three-pointed star for two decades, the other is gaining its first experience.

Sister companies National Tyres and Autocare, and Viking Wholesale Tyres and Equipment have ordered a total of 60 Euro5 Sprinter vans from Glasgow dealer Western Commercial.

The new vehicles are the subject of a four-year Mercedes-Benz Financial Services operating lease; the first are already on the road and all will be in service by the end of the year.

Most - a combination of 3.5-tonne 316 CDI Long and 3.0 tonne 210CDI Medium models - will wear the colours of Viking.

Viking has been operating Mercedes-Benz vans for some 20 years. Its latest Sprinters will be used to distribute tyres from the company's network of eight strategically located warehouses to retailers, dealerships and other customers which, depending on their locations, can receive up to three deliveries a day.

The remaining 23 Long and Medium-length Sprinter 316CDIs are being equipped with tyre-fitting machines, wheel balancers and compressors, for use by National Tyres and Autocare's highly-trained mobile fitters. They are the first Mercedes-Benz vans to be operated by National Tyres, which has more than 200 branches nationwide and has previously sourced its vehicles from another manufacturer.

Stewart Mackenzie, logistics manager for both businesses and responsible for a fleet of 90 Viking and 40 National Tyres vans, led a comprehensive evaluation exercise that involved presentations by various manufacturers and considered the merits of several models before coming down in favour of the Mercedes-Benz contender.

'Viking's experience over a number of years has confirmed the Sprinter to be an extremely reliable and economical vehicle to operate, with very few issues being reported by our depots,' he said.

Citroen Relay's bio-diesel compatibility attracts EAE

THE Citroën Relay's combination of environmental and operational benefits has convinced EAE Ltd to convert its 21-strong fleet of large vans.

The Edinburgh based company has initially ordered four Relay 35 L3H2 and three Relay 30 L1H1 100 panel vans with a similar number scheduled for delivery next year.

EAE distributes display stands, tourist information leaflets and other promotional material to some 5,000 locations in Scotland. The company required vans offering high payloads and large internal load volumes.

The class-leading Citroën Relay not only met those operational requirements, but also EAE's environmental parameters including the ability to run on up to 30% bio-diesel, without technical modification or invalidating the manufacturer's warranty.

Glen Bennett, EAE's managing director, said: 'Citroën was the only manufacturer to cover high levels of bio-diesel usage under warranty. EAE is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and using 30% bio-diesel will reduce the Relay's annual emissions by around 3.8 tonnes per vehicle. This is a significant reduction and will play a key role in our move to achieve carbon-neutral operational status by 2015.'

EAE has installed a 5,000 litre tank to bunker its bio-diesel. As part of its emission reduction programme, all EAE drivers have benefitted from eco-driving training, which alone has seen a 15% improvement in fuel economy.

Supplied by Citroën Glasgow, EAE Ltd's Relay vans are being operated by Lombard on four year/100,000 mile with maintenance contract hire agreements.

Mercedes-Benz Sprinter plays its part for Component Distributors

COMPONENT Distributors, Ireland's leading aftermarket motor parts supplier, has taken delivery of seven Euro5 Mercedes-Benz Sprinters from neighbouring dealership Mercedes-Benz Truck & Van (NI), and another four from Dublin agent MUTECH.

Four of the new vans have been added to the fleet now working from Component Distributors' Dublin depot, while the other seven are based at its newly opened facility in Cork.

One is a 316CDI with 163 bhp engine but the other 10 are all 129 bhp Sprinter 313CDIs - a model that is 15% more fuel-efficient than the 311CDI it replaced, equating to an extra 4.5 mpg, while emissions are down by 13%.

Component Distributors imports motor parts direct from manufacturers, which it then distributes to independent motor factors throughout Ireland. Deliveries are made by its fleet of 35 Sprinters, as well as a single, 10.5-tonne Mercedes-Benz Atego truck.

The company's new vans are on a flexible Agility contract from Mercedes-Benz Financial Services. This offers the benefits of conventional hire purchase with a balloon payment but gives operators extra options at the end of the term. Key to the Agility concept is the agreement of a guaranteed future value.

Component Distributors' managing director Ken Knox said: 'No other vehicle comes close in terms of reliability and durability, while they are also highly cost-effective to operate.'

Residual value update

Fleets should react to strong wholesale used vehicle values

STRONG demand for quality used vehicles, including LCVs, across all sectors is driving wholesale auction values to fresh highs, according to online auction, CD Auction Group.

In the first week of October, CD Auction Group successfully sold a record number of vehicles at an average of 102.7% of CAP 'clean', the industry benchmark for value. The average conversion rate across all sales was also up, at 85%, and reached 90% for one branded sale.

The record results come on the back of a successful August and September - and Roger Woodward, managing director of CD Auction Group, predicts the wholesale market will stay buoyant in the run-up to Christmas.

‘A shortage of good quality stock, coupled with the fact that retail used car sales seem to be picking up, has brought buyers back into the market,’ he said.

‘The major supermarkets and dealer groups are back buying for stock and bidding is very competitive. This is not just local; with our online platform, we are seeing buyers from across the UK, the Republic of Ireland and even Cyprus and Malta.’

Fleets should take advantage of the current market to maximise residual values after a turbulent year, according to Woodward.

‘Fleet operators have a window of opportunity to remarket between now and, say, late-November to maximise value and refresh their vehicles. After that, the usual seasonal price drops will apply,’ he said. ‘At the moment we see none of the oversupply that appears to be worrying other operators in the industry.’

Woodward claims that a significant factor in the rising demand for quality cars is the strong following that CD Auction Group sales are attracting from professional buyers.

‘It’s clear that buyers are following vehicles from particular vendors where they know that cars or vans have been properly maintained and prepared for sale,’ he said. ‘Because we operate in an online environment, these cars can be grouped and sold together rather than scattered all over the country. It means we attract maximum bids.’

Marshall Leasing moves to CD Auction Group

FLEET finance and management company Marshall Leasing is to move more of its vehicle remarketing online in a significant new agreement with CD Auction Group.

Key factors in the decision have been better de-fleet prices achieved at auction and cost savings achieved through more efficient, online sales processes, according to Martin Brown, operations manager at Marshall Leasing.

The company, which was voted Fleet Service Company of the Year in 2010 ACFO, has been trialling online sales through CD Auction Group since the start of the year. The trial was part of a comprehensive review of the business designed to improve value and service to its blue-chip customer base.

‘Marshall Leasing has been growing steadily in the last few years on the back of the personal service we offer,’ said Brown. ‘We believe in building a fleet management solution specifically designed to suit a customer’s individual requirements.’

‘CD Auction Group has similar values to us. You can talk to the main guys and they provide a personal touch which is important, plus they are outperforming the physical auctions. So this is producing value on the bottom line.’

Marshall Leasing has around 5,500 vehicles under management and, while a significant proportion are resold through Marshall dealerships, around 40 to 50 vehicles a month go to auction. Brown says there have been significant cost benefits in managing that process through CD Auction Group’s secure online systems.

‘The ability to remote manage the sales process from my own desk, rather than travel round the country to physical auctions, has been great and we’ve been able to create a good following for our products on a national basis,’ he said.

‘Going to physical auctions, shipping cars around, having a presence on the rostrum, can no longer be justified when you can sit at your desk and watch a dozen cars go through. We will be growing our volumes with CD Auction Group simply because of the success we’ve had.’

Politics and regulation

300,000 drivers swap penalty points to beat driving ban

UP to 300,000 drivers, mainly men, and almost certainly including company car and van drivers may have persuaded others to take their penalty points for speeding, according to an AA survey of almost 17,000 members.

But drivers who look for someone else to take the blame and the penalty points for a speeding offence face a one in eight chance that they will be reported to the police - 12% of AA members said that if asked, they would not only refuse to say they were driving at the time of the offence but would also report the point-swapping attempt to the police.

Among professional and senior manager groups the percentage who would report a point-swapping attempt to the police drops to 11% but rises to 16% among skilled manual and service workers.

Among the unskilled, unemployed and those on state pensions, 20% would inform the authorities.

Overall, only 1% would agree to take the blame and the points for a driving offence. Another 82% would refuse point blank but keep quiet about it.

A total of 2% of AA members have had someone seriously suggest they take another driver’s points, although 13% say someone they know reasonably well has been involved in points swapping, either as the offending driver or the one taking the blame.

The size of the points-swapping problem is best indicated, says the AA, by the 1%, mainly male, who have persuaded another driver to take the blame and the points for a motoring offence. That is equivalent to around 300,000 drivers among the 31 million UK driving licence holders.

AA president Edmund King said: ‘The poll indicates that one in eight drivers might report someone to the police if they were asked to take their points. The AA suspects these drivers may be ‘passing off’ penalty points to avoid getting banned or to avoid getting higher insurance premiums.

‘Some drivers don’t seem to realise the serious nature of this offence. Often drivers will be charged with perverting the course of justice which typically results in a four to nine-month prison sentence or a large fine. The best advice is to stick to speed limits to avoid detection in the first place.’

Road safety charity demands tougher action over law breakers

ROAD safety charity Brake is demanding tougher treatment for drivers who endanger lives by repeatedly breaking the law.

New research by Brake and Direct Line reveals 43% of out-of-control drivers across Britain who clock up 12 points are not being disqualified. That is despite breaking vital safety laws, such as driving uninsured, using a phone at the wheel and speeding.

Brake and Direct Line analysed data provided by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and found that 10,072 drivers whose risky driving totted up 12 points or more have kept their licence and are still driving, while 13,449 drivers with 12 points or more are disqualified.

London and the South East, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the North West, each have more than 1,000 of these potentially deadly drivers still on public roads, says the charity.

Analysis of the worst drivers, with 25 points or more, shows that 13 have committed uninsured driving offences, while 13 have been given points for speeding or failing to identify the driver of the vehicle. Other offences include driving without due care and attention, mobile phone offences and defective vehicles.

Although drivers can expect a ban of at least six months when they reach 12 points, many are successfully pleading that being disqualified would cause 'exceptional hardship'.

That is a situation which the charity calls 'untenable' and means a huge number of the riskiest drivers continue to plague Britain's roads, able to cause crashes that could kill and maim, resulting in devastation to families and a significant burden on health and emergency services.

The research reveals that one driver in Bradford has totted up 32 points on their licence, the most in Britain. That is after being caught driving uninsured four times, receiving eight points for each offence.

Julie Townsend, Brake campaigns director, said: 'We are asking the Government to act quickly to address this appalling situation. Clearly when the points system was designed, it wasn't intended that nearly half of drivers with 12 points would evade disqualification.'

'It is outrageous these individuals, who rack up offence after offence, are allowed to continue driving, causing enormous risk to the public. It's time for the Government to get tough with these selfish, irresponsible and potentially deadly drivers.'

Brake is working with Julie Hilling, the MP for Bolton West, to press the Government to take action. She said: 'It is vital that this issue is kept at the forefront and that Ministers take action to resolve this. I am pleased that the Justice Secretary [Kenneth Clarke] has promised to investigate and I look forward to hearing the results of his findings.'

Brake is calling for automatic bans, as for drink-driving offences, when drivers reach 12 points. It also wants the government to investigate and close administrative loopholes that could lead to drivers escaping a ban.

Government orders blitz on road sign 'clutter'

A BLITZ on traffic signs is to take place following what the Government has called the 'biggest review into Britain's traffic signing system for 40 years'.

Unnecessary Whitehall bureaucracy will be tackled and costs for councils reduced as a result of the review, says the Department for Transport.

The Government hopes that the review will dramatically reduce the number of signs councils need to use by relaxing rules - such as by removing the requirement for some signs - including those to indicate the start of a pedestrian zone, to be placed on both sides of the road.

The new measures will significantly cut red tape by allowing councils to put in place frequently used signs without needing to get Government permission every time.

There are also proposals to save councils money by allowing them to publicise their Traffic Regulation Orders in a manner that is appropriate for the target audience, rather than forcing them to pay for newspaper advertising as is currently the case.

In addition, there will be changes to reflect the way that travel has transformed over the decades, to make sure that road users are getting the right information at the right time.

New roads signs will be introduced to alert drivers to parking spaces with charging points for electric vehicles and councils will be able to indicate estimated journey times on cycle routes, to help people plan their journeys.

Transport Minister Norman Baker said: ‘Sometimes the jungles of signs and tangles of white, red and yellow lines can leave people more confused than informed. This expensive clutter can also leave our roadsides looking unsightly and unwelcoming.

‘These changes will ultimately save councils money and lead to more attractive streets which improve the quality of life for local people.’

Dealer news

Vertu set to grow despite pre-tax profit drop

VERTU Motors, the UK’s fast growing automotive retailer with a network of 82 sales and aftersales outlets, has reported a 16% fall in pre-tax profits to £4.1 million for the six months ending August 31, 2011 compared with £4.9m for the same period last year.

The company said that the decline was in line with board expectations and came despite a 7% growth in revenue to £547m (2010: £511.1m), which Vertu said reflected the substantial growth in its business over the last 12 months

The company blamed the profit drop on the impact of the absence of the Government’s vehicle scrappage incentive programme and new dealerships being acquired or started which generated losses in the period.

Chief executive Robert Forrester said that ‘against the backdrop of continued pressure on the UK consumer’, the group had continued to deliver and invest in its growth strategy. Vertu has opened a further seven sales outlets since March 1, 2011.

Vertu said that new like-for-like retail car volumes were 10% better than the market and aftersales continued to be robust.

Gross margins strengthened in the period from 11.5% to 11.6% due to the increased contribution of after-sales to the business and the growth of retail vehicle sales at the expense of low margin fleet sales as the group expanded through the purchase of new retail focused outlets.

Forrester added: ‘The group continues to generate substantial amounts of cash. With our strong, ungeared balance sheet and the on-going significant operational cash generation Vertu Motors is clearly in a position where current market weakness will create further acquisition opportunities in line with our growth strategy.’

General motor industry news

New car prices rise and further increases on the horizon

NEW car prices increased by an average 1.049% last month or £295 from £28,117 to £28,412, according to statistics published by DrivenData.

Its New Car Price Index is calculated from the retail prices of every car model currently sold in the UK.

It is the first time since June that the average price of new cars has increased and in the past 12 months the average annual price since September 2010 has increased by 3.988%, or £1,089.59 from £27,322.41 to £28,412.00.

However, the underlying pace of inflation in car prices has slowed down over the past 12 months to 3.988%. It rose by 4.651% between September 2009 and September 2010.

John Blauth, editor-in-chief of DrivenData, said: 'Financial centres across Europe are putting more and more pressure on politicians to stop their weak dithering and kick Greece (and Spain and Portugal as well if necessary) out of the euro. Not to do so is harming taxpayers and businesses everywhere.'

'This will re-align the currency in the right direction and after the initial shock markets will rally and confidence will return.'

'Directly related to current indecision, our figures show the first increase in new car prices for three months - and an annual change of nearly 4% since September 2010.'

'Until [premieres] Merkel and Sarkozy stop worrying about future elections and start making hard decisions, industry and the markets will, by default, run the European economy for them. And that means more and more price increases.'

Drive to digital car radios is underway as fitment rates rise

THE UK new car market has seen a 184% increase in the standard fitment of digital radios in the first nine months of 2011 compared to the same period in 2010, making it clear that the drive to digital is well under way.

The latest data from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and CAP was revealed as SMMT chief executive Paul Everitt spoke at the UK's first conference to discuss the switchover to digital radio from an automotive perspective, coinciding with announcements from the BBC confirming that it would build coverage of its national services to 97%, including a focus on improving coverage on motorways and major roads.

'Significant progress has been made in developing the content and coverage of digital radio, driving consumer demand in the new car market. The massive increase we've seen this year puts us well on the way towards delivering our commitment to fit all new cars with digital radio by the end of 2013,' said Everitt.

'In the last 12 months, at least 14 car brands have announced plans to fit digital radio as standard, but we must also ensure that plans are in place to support the 25 million cars on the road that will need safe, reliable upgrades undertaken by accredited technicians.'

The 'Drive to Digital' conference discussed a range of issues including the introduction of digital radio to new models as well as progress towards converting approximately 25 million vehicles within the parc by 2015.

Addressing the need to ensure robust aftermarket installation standards for existing vehicles in use, Everitt said: 'Industry is recommending a single qualification which can be offered by the IMI, in conjunction with Motor Codes to allow motorists to identify aftermarket traders with accredited technicians to install their upgraded digital radio.'

In the first quarter of 2010 just 26,924 new cars out of 611,548 registered were fitted with digital radios. In the third quarter of 2011 93,186 models out of 523,456 were equipped.

Drivers advised to prepare for winter motoring

AN Arctic blitz is being forecast and Auto Windscreens says drivers should follow a series of 'simple' tips through the winter months that could save money and avoid costly repairs.

Auto Windscreens' innovation and training manager Chris Bonsall, who has worked in the industry for nearly 40 years, says:

- Whenever possible drivers should always park their vehicle in a garage overnight, next to a building or even between other cars to give it some protection from the elements. However, if the vehicle is covered in snow, remove it all, not just from the windscreen, as built-up snow on roofs and bonnets can slide off and obstruct your view.
- The correct care of glass in vehicles can save time in the longer term and prevent damage. Clean glass, lights and mirrors regularly as grit and salt can make them dirty very quickly. Ideally, when leaving the car, protect glass with a special removable cover, but if you do need to remove ice, never pour boiling water on it, which could cause it to crack or explode.
- Carry ‘must-have’ winter equipment - de-icer and an ice scraper. Clear all glass and mirrors of frost and snow - never make ‘portholes’. Ensure side windows are free of frost at the edges of the felt or rubber runners to prevent damage to the opening mechanism.
- Vehicles should undergo regular winter ‘health checks’. Check wiper blades for wear and don’t pull them off an icy windscreen, as the rubber on the blade will tear. Ensure you top up with anti-freeze screen wash daily and don’t be tempted to use washing-up liquid in place of anti-freeze, particularly in cold weather. Check your windscreen for damage - if you see any chips or cracks get specialist advice as soon as possible

Simon Elstow, head of training at driver training specialist IAM Drive & Survive agrees that now is the right time to give vehicles a health-check before winter conditions take their toll.

He said: ‘Many roads are still pot-holed after last winter so having a well-maintained car, and paying particular attention to tyres, is going to be extremely important.’

To help drivers stay safe this winter, the IAM has launched a new website, www.drivingadvice.org.uk with traffic updates, weather forecasts and tips on how to drive safely in winter.

[People on the move](#)

New Transport Secretary appointed

JUSTINE Greening, a Treasury Minister, has been appointed Transport Secretary in a Cabinet reshuffle resulting from the resignation of Defence Secretary Liam Fox.

Her promotion follows the decision of Prime Minister David Cameron to hand the Defence Secretary’s job to Transport Secretary Philip Hammond.

Suzuki appoints first national corporate sales manager

SUZUKI GB has appointed Andrew Wale as its new corporate sales manager - a new position that has been created as part of the company’s strategy to build its corporate sales business.

Wale joins the company with a wealth of experience in the motor industry, having previously worked for a number of manufacturers including Volvo, Honda and Nissan during the past 22 years. Notably he was a founder member of Honda UK’s corporate sales team and worked for five years as its national leasing and rental manager.

Wale’s initial focus will be the further development of Suzuki Contract Hire, which was launched earlier this year. He will be working with dealers to use this service to attract new local business opportunities.

‘We will be looking in particular at the public sector, where our vehicles can be of real value, not least the 4x4s with their ability to keep people on the move during winter weather. Salary sacrifice schemes, driving schools and Motability sales will also yield important prospects for us,’ he said.

Fiat Professional appoints new director

FIAT Professional has appointed Sebastiano Fedrigo to the role of director, responsible for all the business activities of Fiat Group Automobiles UK's commercial vehicle division.

He returns to the UK from his previous role as area sales manager based at Fiat's headquarters in Turin during which time he was responsible for supporting the commercial activities of Fiat Professional in several European markets.

Fedrigo has previous direct experience of the UK market having held positions here as a regional sales manager at Iveco Ltd in Watford, and also with FGA's Slough headquarters as Fiat Professional network sales manager.

SEAT appoints Chris Stevens as marketing chief

SEAT UK has appointed Chris Stevens (35) as its new head of marketing. He joins the Spanish brand from fellow Volkswagen Group member Skoda, where he was previously head of planning in the UK.

Prior to his position at Skoda, Stevens spent time in other Volkswagen Group brands including four years as a product marketing manager with Volkswagen Passenger Cars.

Murray takes RMI chair for second time

ALEC Murray has taken the chairmanship of the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMI) for the second time.

He was previously Chairman of the RMI's National Franchised Dealers' Association in the mid-nineties and again from 2005-2006. He also acted as RMI chairman from 2006-2008.

Murray's business roles have included being managing director of Ford Credit Britain, chief executive of Quicks Group and deputy chairman of Caledonia Motor Group.

He takes over from acting chairman Colin Parlett.

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