

This Week's Briefing

Government urged to drop £3.5bn motoring tax bomb

UK needs 'innovation strategy' for step-change in green cars

RMI demands Government clarity over MoT review

Saab in new court battle for survival despite cash injection

Road crash data highlights need for winter tyres

Volkswagen to pass Toyota as world's biggest carmaker

Model update: BMW, Lexus, Mazda, Nissan, Volkswagen

The Editor's View

CHANCELLOR of the Exchequer George Osborne will make the Government's Autumn Statement on November 29. Given the state of the UK, European and global economies it will make interesting listening. Effectively a financial report on the state of the UK economy, the Chancellor will outline the latest projections for the economy over the following three years and broad spending allocations for each department. The coalition Government re-introduced the Autumn Statement last year, which replaced the previous Labour Government's Pre Budget Report which was widely seen as a mini Budget in which draft tax and spending decisions were outlined. Nevertheless, pressure is growing on the Chancellor to use his House of Commons speech as an opportunity to abandon a planned two-pronged fuel duty increase in 2012 that could add a staggering 8p to the price of a litre of fuel. The scheduled duty rises on January 1 and August 1 next year would be devastating for private drivers, businesses and hauliers alike.

Fleet file

Car salary sacrifice scheme drivers get the 'green' message

EMPLOYEES entering car salary sacrifice schemes are more conscious than ever of their green responsibilities and definitely more aware of the positive benefit-in-kind tax implications of opting for cars with lower carbon dioxide emissions.

That's the view of Roddy Graham, commercial director at the Leasedrive Group, following an analysis of more than 3,500 cars supplied under its salary sacrifice car scheme, mycar.

The analysis revealed that:

- The Audi A3 is the most popular vehicle choice among public sector employees
- The Ford Fiesta is the most popular car choice for private sector employees.
- Average vehicle emissions dropped in the past year in the salary sacrifice fleets of both sectors - dropping from 120.6 g/km to 117.9 g/km in the public sector and from 142.9 g/km to 135.9 g/km in the private sector.

- Red was the most popular vehicle colour in the public sector and black by a significant margin in the private sector.

Graham said: ‘The disparity in green choices between public sector and private sector drivers is not altogether surprising as the average contract mileage for a vehicle under the mycar salary sacrifice scheme is 29% higher in the private sector, at 40,032 miles compared to 30,913 miles in the public sector. The higher average mileage of the private sector vehicle explains the 15% higher emission figure - drivers covering longer distances prefer larger, more comfortable vehicles.

‘A properly designed and communicated salary sacrifice scheme, such as mycar, offers significant benefits to employers, employees and the environment. It’s a win-win-win situation on all fronts.

‘An employer pays a more tax efficient remuneration and reduced National Insurance (NI) contributions. As most organisations’ HR departments have the process and system capability to deliver benefits through salary sacrifice the cost exposure of introducing such a scheme is negligible, providing they put buffers in place. A salary sacrifice scheme also eliminates the ‘grey’ fleet risk, which frequently carries a significant but mostly unrecognised cost.

‘Employees can enjoy the benefits of a company car at a lower than expected cost, with the savings on income tax and NI contributions outweighing their benefit-in-kind tax contributions. They also enjoy the use of a more fuel efficient, fully serviced and maintained new car for two or three years backed by comprehensive insurance.

‘In terms of the environment, a salary sacrifice scheme reduces the carbon footprint across an organisational fleet and lowers fuel costs. It also improves an employers’ corporate social responsibility standing.

‘A salary sacrifice scheme also acts as a valuable recruitment and retention tool in the war for talent. With the current pressures on salaries, salary sacrifice provides a creative way to enhance the total remuneration package in the eyes of the employee at no additional cost to the employer. It is a tax-efficient scheme for the employee, saving them money.’

Road crash data highlights need for winter tyres

MORE than 18,000 road crashes in Britain last year were caused by snow or ice, latest Government statistics have revealed.

A total of 15,479 car accidents were attributed to snow or ice on the roads, while 927 light goods vehicles were involved in accidents under similar conditions, according to Department for Transport data.

That poses a huge threat to fleets, especially as the first snow has already fallen in the UK this winter, says ATS Euromaster which is reminding businesses that they must prepare for difficult travelling conditions and the record low temperatures expected by long-range forecasters.

Peter Fairlie, ATS Euromaster’s group sales director, said: ‘The accident figures speak volumes and it shows that you cannot be too prepared when it comes to the winter months. Cold weather tyres [also known as winter tyres] are a simple and cost-effective way to ensure your fleet stays safe and mobile during the winter - not only when driving on snow and ice - but as soon as the temperature drops below seven degrees Celsius.

‘It makes good business sense to be prepared, but people need to start fitting their cold weather tyres now. A company’s productivity and financial security - not to mention their staff’s safety - could be jeopardised if they delay.’

The statistics also reveal that younger drivers were far more prone to accidents than their middle-aged counterparts. Accidents were most commonly seen by drivers in their twenties, suggesting that fleet managers should be wary of sending younger drivers out in cold weather without the right equipment, says ATS.

In anticipation of high demand from businesses, ATS Euromaster has significantly increased its investment in cold weather tyres this year, with a choice of premium, mid-range and low-cost brands on offer to suit all fleets.

Inchcape Fleet Solutions is the latest leasing and fleet management company to point to the viability of winter tyres to increase fleet and driver safety

The company's commercial manager Peter Eldridge said: 'Winter tyres are irrefutably proven to increase driver safety in cold conditions. There is a clear link between the number of insurance claims made in the winter months and the drop in temperature.

'The swap process is very simple. Typically, if one of our customers decides to make the switch to winter tyres, we would arrange, via our supplier network, for its fleet's summer tyres to be placed in storage and winter tyres fitted in their place.

'When the temperature rises again, it is simply a case of changing the tyres back over. There is a nominal fee attached to this service for tyre storage, management and fitment but this often fluctuates, due to raw material pricing.'

However, he added: 'Naturally it is best to make these arrangements earlier in the year, but we appreciate sometimes this is just not possible. Approaching the winter months, we will do our utmost to accommodate our customers' needs as best we can, but would stress the importance of getting in touch at their earliest convenience.'

- STABLEMATES Citroen and Peugeot have this week become the latest manufacturers to launch their own winter tyre programmes. Meanwhile, motoring website www.honestjohn.co.uk has compiled what it call the 'complete guide to winter driving'.

Fleet operators count accelerating fuel costs

MORE than 25% of van drivers fail to take into account how much fuel they are using despite pump prices being close to record levels and fleet operators are little better, according to new research from Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles.

The research, commissioned to highlight the savings available to drivers and fleet operators offered by the new Volkswagen Crafter, claimed to be the most efficient large van in its class, provides an insight into how important efficiency is for businesses today.

It appears that it is not just drivers who are guilty, with van fleet operators admitting to having only taken a limited number of measures to optimise their drivers' fuel efficiency.

Less than half (42%) have considered planning routes for their staff, while only 35% have considered the effects of the driving habits of their van drivers.

According to the findings, only 18% of van drivers have received any form of training to help them drive more fuel efficiently while only 23% have their routes planned for them, and 81% still don't have satellite navigation to help plan the optimum routes.

In fact, nearly a quarter (23%) of van drivers felt their routes were inefficient as far as fuel consumption was concerned, often finding themselves making two trips on the same route in the same day.

Interestingly, of the 60% of commercial van drivers that have a company logo on their vehicle, 58% of them thought this made them drive more carefully than they might otherwise.

Fleet operator Charlie Mullins, founder of Pimlico Plumbers, London's leading service company, said: 'This research highlights the importance of efficiency in the workplace. Due to increases in fuel prices last year, we had to spend £150,000 more on fuel. However, there are ways to improve fuel efficiency and these can be as simple as taking the shortest routes and placing speed restrictions on vans.'

Alastair Hemmings, national fleet manager, Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles UK said: 'This research clearly shows that van drivers and fleet operators can easily save money by choosing more efficient vehicles and considering other areas of their operation where efficiencies can be made.'

Chauffeur firm to take delivery of 2,100 Volvos

TRISTAR Worldwide has renewed a solus three-year car supply deal with Volvo for 2,100 cars to service its Virgin Atlantic Airways' Upper Class chauffeur contract.

Volvo will supply 700 cars per year to Tristar to chauffeur Virgin Upper Class passengers to and from their UK airport of choice. This will be the 15th consecutive year the three companies have worked together.

The Tristar/Virgin fleet will comprise a mix of S80 and V70 163 bhp D3 SE models, while other Volvo models will be specified as and when they are needed. In a bid to further reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, Tristar will later also introduce Volvo's Geartronic models featuring fuel and emission-saving start/stop technology into the fleet.

To ensure the highest levels of passenger safety, all models chosen will feature Volvo's City Safety technology - which can lessen the severity of, or entirely avoid, low-speed rear-end collisions at speeds of up to 18mph.

City Safety keeps watch on vehicles in front with the help of a laser sensor built into the windscreen at the height of the rear-view mirror. The car automatically brakes if the driver does not respond in time when the car in front slows down or stops - or if the driver is driving too fast towards a stationary object. City Safety is fitted as standard to all Volvo S60, V60, XC60, V70, XC70 and S80s.

John McKee, Tristar's UK commercial director said: 'Volvo continually brings new things to this contract and City Safety is an exciting advancement for all concerned. It should further improve customer safety by reducing the number of incidents and knock-on repair costs across the Virgin chauffeur fleet.'

'Volvo's range continues to provide the right combination of safety features, comfort for both passengers and chauffeurs, and a continued reduction in emissions and an increase in fuel economy.'

IFS recruits new business team to grow client portfolio

INCHCAPE Fleet Solutions, which has a fleet of about 50,000 vehicles currently on its books, has recruited a new business team to nurture and expand its client base.

The team's remit is ultimately to address the company's growth agenda, whilst raising awareness of the process changes sweeping the business.

Comprised of four individuals from diverse backgrounds, the team can count the following areas of expertise on its collective CV: fleet management, vehicle rental, project management, consultancy, account management, financial services and risk management.

Marc Garrett, Inchcape Fleet Solutions' new business leader, said: 'Inchcape Fleet Solutions occupies a privileged position within the fleet industry. The company is well known for its customer first approach, supplemented by a truly innovative product set and supported by powerful, online fleet management tools.'

‘The sheer buying power of our parent company, Inchcape plc, also means we do not have to compromise on any of these core strengths in order to price ourselves competitively within the marketplace.

‘Within this industry, projects are often multi-faceted and complicated. With that in mind, it is to be expected that our dialogue with interested parties might take place across weeks, months or even years.

‘No matter the timescale a project spans, businesses need to be assured they are covering all bases when operating a fleet and getting the best advice available.’

Richard Middleton, Inchcape Fleet Solutions’ sales and marketing director, said: ‘The creation of the new business team sends out a very clear statement of intent: I believe Inchcape Fleet Solutions possesses an incredibly expansive product portfolio and employs the finest industry experts with which to support and maintain it. It is high time we communicated these facts to our collective audience.

‘Marc and his team are proficient in a wide array of business disciplines. It is this diversity that will ultimately help our future customers obtain the guidance and expertise they require.’

Santander launches company car scheme with Zenith

SANTANDER, one of the world’s largest banks, has launched a new company car scheme to its UK essential business users, run by Zenith.

The Santander UK Essential Business User Car Scheme is available to 750 eligible UK employees throughout the Santander group. All eligible drivers cover more than 8,000 miles a year on business and are based in Santander offices nationwide. Employees within certain grades are permitted to opt out of the scheme and into a new salary sacrifice car scheme, also run by Zenith.

The new scheme is designed to improve the reward package and provide a consolidated car benefit to eligible drivers across the group. The contract was awarded to Zenith following a rigorous and competitive process.

Under the new Santander UK Essential Business User Car Scheme, the fleet consists of models from BMW, Mini, Audi, Volkswagen and Vauxhall and all are restricted to a maximum of 140 g/km or 160 g/km emissions, depending on the grade.

Tom Manahan, fleet manager for Santander, said: ‘We wanted to bring all our company car policies together under one single scheme and sought the services of our procurement function to ensure that the best provider was appointed. As a result of that competitive process, we appointed Zenith to run the entire company car scheme, including a new salary sacrifice car scheme called the Santander All Employee Car Scheme. Zenith demonstrated that it had the expertise to provide the highest quality, innovation and cost effective solution.’

Aramark selects ING Car Lease for first managed fleet

ARAMARK Workplace Solutions (AWS), a leading facilities management company, has taken its first step into the world of fleet leasing with top 10 fleet management company ING Car Lease.

The agreement, which has been secured for an initial four-year term, will see Farnborough-based AWS lease a total of 40 cars and vans from ING Car Lease in a contract hire deal which also includes full maintenance, UK and European breakdown cover, accident management, as well as lead-in and short term hire solutions.

It further cements a long standing working relationship as AWS is the planned preventative maintenance service provider for the ING Group across a number of locations.

Aidan Bell, managing director of AWS, said: ‘The replacement of fleet vehicles reinforces our business strategy and commitment to investment in the AWS brand. The movement from owned to leased vehicles is just

one way in which we are ensuring our business is as cost effective and efficient as it can be. We chose ING Car Lease as a partner as a result of its ability to offer us value for money, additional services and support throughout the transition.’

Frances Toogood, account manager at ING Car Lease, added: ‘AWS is one of the first of our customers to select the latest telematics tracking technology, which provides real-time data on the performance of the 28 LCVs within the fleet, as well as ensuring health and safety compliance for lone working.’

- Photo caption: AWS managing director Aiden Bell with the first of 40 vans and cars leased to Aramark Workplace Solutions by ING Car Lease. With the vehicles are AWS engineers (left to right) Greg Riley, Lee Williams and Mick Nichols. Picture: Professional Images.

Model update

Lexus fires up hybrid compact to create new F-Sport

LEXUS has added some extra visual muscle, introduced more top-flight equipment features and sharpened up the handling of its CT 200h full hybrid premium compact model to create the CT 200h F-Sport.

On the outside the CT 200h F-Sport makes its presence known with 17-inch dark-finish alloys, a larger rear spoiler, flared side skirts, a mesh front grille and new aero-styled bumpers front and rear.

In the cabin the distinguishing features include an F-Sport steering wheel with a flat bottom section and aluminium pedals and scuff plates.

Adding to the specification of the SE-L grade, the F-Sport gains cruise control, F-Sport black leather upholstery, heated front seats, electric driver’s seat adjustment, auto-dimming (electrochromatic) electrically retractable door mirrors and a rear parking camera that links to a display in the rear-view mirror.

Lexus has also tuned the CT 200h F-Sport’s suspension for a more engaging drive, and fitted its lateral damping system as standard. Coil spring rates have been changed and the standard Showa shock absorbers replaced with Kayaba dampers that give more sports-oriented performance.

Headline performance from the new F-Sport matches its CT 200h sister models with a zero road tax 94 g/km carbon dioxide emissions and 68.9 mpg official combined cycle fuel consumption.

The new Lexus CT 200h F-Sport is available to order now, with first UK deliveries in January. On-the-road prices are from £27,850.

Lexus to unveil F Sport version of new GS hybrid

LEXUS will reveal the new GS F Sport at SEMA, the world’s leading automotive special products show in Las Vegas on Tuesday (November 1) with the model destined for UK showrooms next year.

Featuring a new front bumper design with larger side grilles together with a dedicated mesh design for the upper and lower grilles, gives the GS a stronger appearance, reinforcing its wider track and sportier stance, says Lexus.

At the rear, the F Sport is distinguished by a grey metallic finish to the bumper diffuser. On the GS 450h F Sport there is an additional chrome moulding on the bumper’s lower section.

The F Sport package also includes a rear spoiler and - exclusive to the grade - dark metallic finish 19-inch alloy wheels.

Other features include aluminium trim elements, 16-way adjustable F Sport front seats, a black headliner and pillar finish, dimple perforated leather steering wheel and gear knob covers and aluminium pedals. The scuff plates bear the F Sport logo in black and the F Sport badge is also featured on the steering wheel.

The new GS features a drive mode select function that lets the driver choose between Eco, Normal, Sport S and Sport S+ driving modes, designed to maximise the car's environmental efficiency or its dynamic performance.

The GS 450h F Sport is equipped with the Lexus Dynamic Handling system, making it the world's first hybrid vehicle to feature an integrated four-wheel steering system.

Full details and specifications of the GS F Sport for the UK market will be confirmed nearer the time of launch.

Order books open for new Volkswagen Beetle

ORDER books for the new Volkswagen Beetle have opened ahead of the first UK deliveries in spring 2012.

At launch, two engines will be available: a 1.2 litre TSI 105 PS mated to a seven-speed DSG transmission and a 1.4 litre 160 PS TSI with a six-speed manual gearbox.

Three trim levels will be available: Beetle, Design and Sport. The 1.2 litre will be available in Beetle or Design trim from £16,490 on-the-road and the 1.4 litre in Design or Sport trim from £19,470. Initially four models will be available.

Three other engines - a 1.6 litre TDI BlueMotion Technology 105 PS, a 2.0 litre TDI 140 PS and a 2.0 litre TSI 200 PS - will be joining the line-up later in 2012 along with the option of a six-speed manual gearbox for the 1.2 litre TSI model.

The standard Beetle comes with air conditioning, remote central locking, an RCD 310 CD system with DAB radio and rear Isofix seat preparation.

Moving to the mid-level Design trim adds 17-inch alloy wheels in a choice of two styles, Bluetooth telephone preparation with MDI (multi-device interface) iPod connectivity, front fog lights, an alarm, an RCD 510 DAB CD/radio, multifunction leather-wrapped steering wheel and body-coloured door and dashboard panels.

The range-topping Sport specification brings 18-inch alloys in a choice of two styles, tinted glass, cruise control, sports seats, parking sensors, gloss black door mirrors, dashboard and door panel and 2Zone electronic climate control.

BMW launches a raft of new models

A NUMBER of new models have been added by BMW to its various ranges and include the 520d EfficientDynamics saloon, the Z4 sDrive20i and sDrive28i and the 6 Series Coupé.

The 520d EfficientDynamics saloon is powered by a 184 bhp engine that delivers combined cycle fuel economy of 62.8 mpg and has carbon dioxide emissions of 199 g/km. The model costs £30,435 on-the-road.

The Z4 sDrive20i and sDrive28i herald a new entry points to two-seat sports car ownership of BMWs. The sDrive20i is powered by a 184 bhp engine returning 41.5 mpg on the combined fuel cycle and emissions of 159 g/km, while the sDrive28i is powered by a 245 bhp engine with identical fuel economy and emissions figures. The sDrive20i costs from £29,480 and the sDrive28i from £33,645.

Now in its third generation, the new 6 Series Coupé features a sweeping coupé roofline, long bonnet, short over-hangs and set-back passenger compartment.

Initially, the model comes with a choice of two turbocharged petrol engines - the 650i is powered by a 407 bhp unit and the 640i by a 320 bhp powerplant - and a twin turbocharged diesel powerplant, which is powered by a 313 bhp unit. Range prices start from £59,565 for the 640i SE Coupé.

New Ford Ranger to enter showrooms next month

THE all-new Ford Ranger will go on UK sale next month priced from £15,515 on-the-road excluding VAT with the range-topping Double Cab Wildtrak 3.2 litre 200 PS TDCi automatic costing £25,040.

The Ranger will be offered in three cab bodystyles - Double, Super and Regular - along with an extensive list of practical features that are available across XL, XLT, Limited and Wildtrak models. The pickup will also come in 4x2 and 4x4 drivetrains. Ranger now delivers more payload and class-leading towing capability, says Ford.

Designed and developed by a global team headquartered in Australia, the windscreen has been raked back for a sportier and more dynamic silhouette, while the traditional square form of the truck has been sculpted to give the vehicle a more modern and aerodynamic look.

Larger headlamps, bigger mirrors and stamped-in wheel lips provide an integrated look across all series and contribute to an aggressive and sporty stance.

Designers also raised the beltline significantly, along with the rails of the load box, giving the Ranger a substantive presence on the road while increasing its functionality with the deeper box. The Regular Cab and the Super Cab have the biggest box volume in its class at 1.82 cubic metres and 1.45 cubic metres respectively while the Double Cab is among the top with 1.21 cubic metres.

At 5,359mm long and 1,850mm wide, the new Ranger is bigger than the previous-generation model. The B-pillar in the Double Cab has also been moved forward, delivering best-in-class rear leg room and knee clearance.

Ford says that the new Ranger is a leader in innovation with smart technologies on selected models that include electronic stability control, Bluetooth, USB and iPod connectivity, voice control over the radio and electronic air-conditioning and mobile phone functions. Dual-zone climate control and cruise control are available on the high series while selected models offer a five-inch colour screen with satellite navigation.

The Ranger is powered by a choice of two new engines - a 3.2 litre 200 PS five-cylinder diesel engine and a 2.2 litre 150 PS four-cylinder diesel engine with the latter available in both 4x2 and 4x4 guise. For the first time, selected Ranger diesel models will be available with either a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission.

Ranger can tow up to 3,350 kg on selected models with diesel engines while the 4x4 can wade through 800 millimetres of water when fully laden. It also boasts payload capacity of more than 1,340 kg on some 4x4 variants, as well as ground clearance of up to 232mm.

Nissan creates 'super' Juke-R

NISSAN revealed its ultimate compact crossover, the Juke-R, during a Qashqai driving event in Malaga this week.

Shown for the first time in the metal, Juke-R harnesses the design of Nissan's Juke with the speed and power of the company's flagship GT-R to create the world's fastest crossover.

Two versions of the Juke-R are being created, one in each of left-hand and right-hand drive. The cars have been developed by Nissan and are being built by leading motorsports outfit RML with input from Nissan Technology Centre for Europe (NTC-E). Testing of the model will begin in November.

Having created what Nissan's calls 'the ultimate compact crossover' it wants to test public reaction to the sporty Juke, which is powered by the 3.8 litre twin-turbo V6 engine adopted directly from Nissan's flagship supercar.

'Nissan Juke is one of the most exciting cars on the market today. Its bold crossover design has captured the imagination of car buyers all over Europe; after just a year on sale we are celebrating sales of more than 100,000 units,' said Paul Willcox, senior vice president, sales and marketing for Nissan in Europe.

'Juke lends itself perfectly to a sports derivative and Juke-R explores that territory. Equally at home on road and track, Juke-R showcases two of the most exciting cars in our range and highlights the technical innovation that drives Nissan. This car will more than live up to the dynamic driving experience we engineer into all our cars.'

Mazda concept previews new '6'

MAZDA will take the wraps off the Takeri concept at this year's Tokyo Motor Show opening on November 30 to give a glimpse of what the marque's new upper medium sector contender will look like.

The Takeri is effectively the next generation Mazda6, which will go on sale in about 18 months and feature the brand's environmentally-focused SkyActiv technology, which debuts in the new CX-5 next spring.

SkyActiv technology includes Mazda's first regenerative braking system. The technology converts kinetic energy to electricity during deceleration, stores it in capacitors and then uses it to power the vehicle's electrical equipment - reducing load on the engine and saving fuel.

In the Takeri it combines with the new SkyActiv-D diesel engine, Mazda i-stop, new lightweight structure, aerodynamic and chassis technologies.

New Ford Ranger becomes first pick-up to notch five-star safety rating

THE new Ford Ranger has become the first pick-up to achieve a five-star safety rating with impressive scores in all areas of the European New Car Assessment Programme's crash test assessments.

The third generation Ranger model, details of the UK model were released yesterday (Wednesday, October 26), was designed and engineered by Ford Australia and marks a significant improvement over the two star adult occupant rating of the previous Ranger in 2008.

In particular, the Ranger's 81% pedestrian score was the highest score recorded for pick-ups tested by Euro NCAP so far and therefore sets a new standard in that area.

The model's safety performance was, said Euro NCAP, the result of a softer and well-engineered front end, absorbing the impact energy and better protecting pedestrians.

Michiel van Ratingen, Euro NCAP secretary general, said: 'With such pedestrian protection the Ford Ranger is undoubtedly raising the bar of safety in the category of pick-up trucks, which had until now not proven to be the safest.'

Other vehicles that obtained good scores for pedestrian protection in the latest Europe NCAP tests and an overall five-star rating included the BMW 1 Series, the Mercedes M-Class and the Toyota Yaris, which all scored more than 60% of available points, the lower limit that Euro NCAP will set for a five-star rating from

2012 onwards. The 1 Series is one of the few cars fitted with Assist Advanced eCall, an automatic emergency call system rewarded under Euro NCAP Advanced.

Also achieving a top five-star safety rating in the latest Euro NCAP results were the Audi Q3, Chevrolet Captiva, Hyundai Velostar, Vauxhall Astra GTC, and Vauxhall Zafira Tourer.

In this latest set of results, the Fiat Freemont, the M-Class, the Lancia Thema and Lancia Voyager are equipped with active bonnets in order to improve pedestrian protection.

The Lancia Thema, Lancia Voyager and Fiat Freemont are the first three tangible results of Chrysler's takeover by Italian automobile manufacturer Fiat. The Lancia Thema saloon gained overall five stars, whereas the new Voyager received four stars. Previously tested in 2007 under the Chrysler Voyager, the new Voyager is offering better safety but the town and country minivan is still lagging behind with 79% in adult protection and 67% in child occupant protection. On the up side, the minivan, said Euro NCAP, demonstrated promising progress compared to the results of 2007 when the previous generation model scored no points and was awarded no stars for the protection it offered to pedestrians. Finally, the Fiat Freemont, a seven-seat MPV built on the Dodge Journey, also achieved a Euro NCAP five-star overall rating.

Manufacturer news

Saab in new court battle for survival despite \$70m cash injection

STRUGGLING motor manufacturer Saab is on the brink of bankruptcy after the Swedish court appointed administrator said he would be applying for termination of the voluntary reorganisation of Saab Automobile and two subsidiaries

Saab successfully secured court approval last month for the reorganisation to give it time to raise much-needed capital.

However, Saab parent company Swedish Automobile N.V. said it had been informed that the administrator of the reorganisation, Guy Lofalk, would apply to the courts for termination.

Simultaneously, Saab Automobile said it would contest the application and request for continuation of the voluntary reorganisation process, while also applying at the court for the replacement of Lofalk as administrator.

The termination announcement came despite Saab just hours earlier announcing that it had secured a \$70 million funding commitment from United States private equity group North Street Capital to keep the business afloat.

The cash would be used to fund the working capital of Swedish Automobile, Saab Automobile and Saab Great Britain.

Meanwhile, Swedish Automobile says it remains in discussions with potential Chinese investors Pang Da and Youngman, although the parent company of Saab says that current offers made by the two motor manufacturers were unacceptable.

Volkswagen to accelerate past Toyota as world's biggest carmaker

VOLKSWAGEN is on course to overtake Toyota as the world's biggest carmaker this year, seven years earlier than the date management predicted.

Forecasts reported by the *Financial Times* (October 24) show that Volkswagen's global growth, coupled with Toyota's supply chain problems following the year's Japanese earthquake and tsunami, mean the German carmaker will claim the number one spot for both sales and production.

It would be the first time that Volkswagen would top the chart, accelerating past both Toyota and General Motors which have vied for the number one spot in recent years.

Volkswagen is predicted to sell eight million cars this year - a target achieved seven years ahead of management forecasts.

Jaguar cruise control 'fault' prompts recall

JAGUAR has recalled almost 18,000 cars over fears the vehicles' cruise control cannot be switched off.

The problem affects diesel-engined X-type models produced between 2006 and 2010.

Letters to customers say that if the cruise control is in operation, it might not be possible to switch it off. Turning the ignition off will cancel the cruise function, the letter said.

A total of 17,678 Jaguar cars in the UK have been recalled by the carmaker after the 'potential' problem was spotted by an employee. No customers have been affected and there had been no accidents or injuries.

UK's most reliable 4x4s revealed

HONDA'S HR-V (1998-2006) has been revealed as the UK's most reliable 4x4 in an analysis by Warranty Direct with only three in 100 recording a fault in the last 12 months, followed by Suzuki's Grand Vitara (2005 onwards).

In stark contrast, Land Rover's Range Rover (2002-onwards) was shown to be the most break down prone off-roader - two thirds of its reported faults were suspension or electrical hiccups - behind the Jeep Grand Cherokee (1999-2005) and Volkswagen's Touareg (2003 onwards).

The study of nearly 16,000 three- to eight-year-old 4x4s and SUVs revealed the market segment to have some of the most expensive to run vehicles on Warranty Direct's books.

Nevertheless, with another harsh winter predicted, there's no better type of vehicle to tackle the snow and ice, said Warranty Direct.

Predictably, the top-10 is dominated by Japanese and Korean manufacturers, but Land Rover's Freelander (2006 onwards) breaks their stranglehold, with only one in five breaking down annually and a modest average repair cost.

Top 10 rated 4x4/SUVs

(A lower Reliability Index rating means the vehicle is more reliable and less expensive to run)

Make Model Year Reliability Index

Rating Average Repair

Cost (£)

Honda HR-V (98-06) 6 213

Suzuki Grand Vitara (05-) 20 186

Honda CR-V (07-) 21 254

Subaru Forester (02-08) 46 235

Mitsubishi Shogun Pinin (99-06) 50 351

Kia Sportage (05-) 56 259

Land Rover Freelander (06-) 56 264

Nissan X-Trail(07-) 69 591

Kia Sorento (03-) 69 391
Hyundai Santa Fe (01-06) 74 292

Bottom five rated 4x4/SUVs

(A higher Reliability Index rating means the vehicle is less reliable and more expensive to run)

Make	Model	Year	Reliability Index	Rating	Average Repair Cost (£)
Land Rover	Range Rover	(02-)	305	519	
Jeep	Grand Cherokee	(99-05)	253	502	
Volkswagen	Touareg	(03-)	232	525	
BMW	X5	(00-07)	216	468	
Volvo	XC90	(02-)	205	460	

Light commercial vehicles

Citroën launches 'five-star Euro5' LCV initiative

CITROËN has launched a '5 Star' Euro 5 LCV Programme designed to maximise the use of advanced technology to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and improve the fuel efficiency of its van range.

The Programme focuses on:

- Advanced, fuel-efficient, low emissions Euro 5 petrol and HDi diesel engines fitted to models
- New e-HDi Airdream micro-hybrid drivetrains for selected Berlingo vans
- A Diesel Particulate Filtration System (DPFS), with its effective self-regeneration capability
- The Citroën Trafficmaster Smartnav and Trackstar stolen vehicle tracking telematics package fitted as standard on all Berlingo, Dispatch and Relay panel vans, which delivers even better fuel efficiency, lower vehicle running costs, lower driver stress levels and improved safety
- The ability of all Citroën HDi engines to run on up to 30% bio-diesel without effect on warranty or need for technical modification, providing additional benefits

Scott Michael, Citroën's commercial vehicle operations manager, said: 'The launch of our 5 Star Euro 5 programme offers a significant step forward for LCV operators. It demonstrates Citroën's unique and all-embracing approach to improving the efficiency and reducing the carbon footprint of our LCVs.'

'With the Citroën 5 Star Euro 5 programme our customers can now benefit from further fuel efficiency improvements of up to 19% and emissions reductions of up to 17.5%.'

Joining the already introduced Euro 5 Nemo range are the Euro 5 Berlingo, Dispatch and Relay ranges.

In Euro 5 format, the Berlingo van range is available with the choice of a new, more powerful 1.6i 95 petrol and HDi 75 or HDi 90 diesel engines. In addition there is the availability of a new e-HDi 90 Airdream micro-hybrid powertrain, with Stop & Start technology.

In Euro 5 format, both the HDi 75 and 90 engines have been further refined to give better fuel economy and lower emissions. While power and torque figures are unchanged, both HDi 75 and 90 engines develop their peak torque at 1,500 rpm, 250 rpm less than the outgoing Euro 4 engines, giving improved driveability. In Euro 5 form, the combined mpg of 54.3 and 52.3 for the HDi 75 and 90 engines respectively is an improvement of up to 9.5%. Emissions have reduced to 136 g/km (HDi 75) and 140 g/km (HDi90).

A Berlingo with the e-HDi Airdream powertrain offers combined fuel consumption of up to 60.1 mpg and an emissions figure of 123 g/km.

Priced from just £11,645, the Euro 5 Berlingo range includes two panel van load lengths (L1 & L2), four payloads (625, 725, 750 and 850kg), three trim levels (X, LX and Enterprise), four engines (1.6i 95, HDi 75,

HDi 90 and e-HDi 90), five-speed manual or six-speed automated manual EGS6 gearboxes, a five-seat Crew Van, an enhanced traction XTR+ van and a Platform Cab.

The new Euro 5 Dispatch range includes an HDi 90 and a new, more powerful HDi 125 diesel engine. In Euro 5 format the HDi 90 engine has seen its emission reduced from 191 g/km to 182 g/km and its peak torque rating reduced to 1,500 rpm for improved driveability. Fuel economy on the combined cycle has also been improved by 4.2% to 40.9 mpg.

The previous HDi 120 engine used in Dispatch Euro 4 models has been replaced by a new Euro 5 HDi 125 engine. As well as developing more power, the new engine sees a torque boost of 15lb.ft, a major emissions reduction from 194 g/km to 179 g/km and an improvement in combined fuel consumption to 41.5 mpg.

Priced from £16,070, the Euro 5 Dispatch range is available in two load lengths (L1 and L2), two roof heights (H1 and H2), two trim levels (standard and Enterprise), two payloads (1000 and 1200kg), as a Platform Cab model for special bodywork and as six and nine-seat Combis. In November, a six-seat Crew Van will also join the range. The Dispatch Ready to Run range for bespoke conversions includes, temperature controlled vans and glass carrying vans.

The Relay Euro 5 range now includes the widest choice of engines ever offered for the model, with a choice of HDi engines ranging in power from 110 to 180 bhp. The Relay Euro 5 range includes a new HDi 110 engine with a six-speed gearbox, which replaces the HDi 100 five-speed drivetrain previously available in Euro 4 models. Similarly, the Euro 4 HDi 120 engine has been replaced by a new, more powerful HDi 130 diesel. A new HDi 150 engine has also been added to the range. The Euro 5 HDi 180 engine is the most powerful model available in the Relay range.

The Relay's HDi 110 engine not only offers more power, but also a lower peak torque speed for enhanced driveability. Fuel consumption has improved from 34.9 mpg to 37.7 mpg for the new Relay 30 HDi 110 6 six-speed manual. There has also been an emissions reduction with the new Relay 110 HDi, now delivering sub 200 g/km figures at 199 g/km (versus 208 g/km for the Euro 4 HDi 100).

Similarly, the Relay's HDi 130 engine offers more power, coupled with an increase in peak torque from the HDi 120's 221lb.ft to 236lb.ft. Fuel consumption has improved from the HDi 120's 30.4 mpg to up to 38.2 mpg for the new HDi 130 six-speed manual. The new HDi 130 engine also provides a 16% emissions reduction to 195 g/km (down from 232 g/km).

Priced from £18,190, the Euro 5 Relay panel van range includes four load lengths (L1, L2, L3 and L4), three roof heights (H1, H2 and H3), two trim levels (standard and Enterprise), four gross weights (3.0, 3.3, 3.5 and 4.05 tonnes), body volumes ranging from 8 -17m³ and payloads of up to 1,827 kg. The Relay is also available in chassis cab, back to back cab and chassis crew cab formats, as well as four specialist versions. For bespoke conversions, the Relay Ready to Run range includes dropsides, tippers, Luton vans, high-cube low-loading vans, minibuses, temperature controlled vans and glass carrying vans.

[Residual value update](#)

Fleet chiefs urged to accept first bids on deflected cars

FIRST bids on used cars are invariably the best bids and should be accepted amid fears that trading conditions will not improve in the coming weeks.

That's the view of the National Association of Motor Auctions (NAMA), the auction division of the Retail Motor Industry Federation, which has reported a 'significant but unsurprising' change in used car market with a stark contrast in price movements between September and early October.

In September cars of all ages increased in price by just over 2%, with three-year-old fleet cars faring slightly better at 3%. However interim NAMA show that by the end of the second week in October, the 3% gain in the fleet sector had been completely reversed.

Average conversion rates reached a four-month high of 77% last month, but by the second week of October a combination of additional auction supply and a reduction in demand, eroded the figure to close to 70% and falling prompting the first bid acceptance advice from the organisation.

Andrew Hulme, NAMA chairman, said: 'Professional wholesale and auction buyers have more choice than at any time since the late spring and demand has become increasingly polarised.

'Values remain healthy for grade one and two cars largely due to the ongoing shortage of retail ready stock, but there is little appetite for grade four and five stock unless it is realistically valued to sell. Buyers factor in the real cost of refurbishment and downtime financing and simply deduct that from their bidding, because they want cars to retail today, not to sit in refurb shops for up to 28 days.

'Vendors must focus on their least attractive vehicles and invest in appearance re-conditioning and refurbishment to generate buyer interest. This will address the current build up of unsold, multiple entered stock that is starting to clog the arteries of the wholesale market.

'Sellers must recognise the absolute realities of the market - they are unlikely to achieve Cap 'clean' prices for Cap 'average' cars and, if further proof were needed, September's data records a price differential of £900 between first time sales and subsequent sales.

'There is every reason to believe there will be an increase in poor quality stock coming into the market over the next eight weeks, yet little indication that retail activity and wholesale demand will improve during that period.

'It will ultimately be seen as an act of good management if these conditions are interpreted pragmatically and all remarketing teams need to ask themselves 'why should we sell a vehicle for less next month when we can sell it today for more?''

NAMA sale prices for first time entries compared to second or subsequent entries for cars at all ages reveal that in January £25 more was achieved on average second time around. However, apart from June when first and second time average prices were almost identical, second time entry prices have slipped away and are now on average almost £1,000 less.

New Honda Civic secures strong RVs

HONDA'S new Civic has been given strong residual values based on the manufacturer's track record for reliability and product quality.

Based on a three year/60,000 mile profile, EurotaxGlass's predicts the 150 PS 2.2 i-DTEC ES will retain 42% of its cost new.

Meanwhile, CAP estimates that both the Civic 150 PS 2.2 i-DTEC ES and entry-level 100 PS 1.4 i-VTEC will achieve a trade value of 38% of their original cost new price. This equates to £8,050 and £6,175 respectively.

'We have worked really hard to improve the way we communicate our new models and the new Civic is the first model to benefit from this work. Our target was to have all the relevant new vehicle data including pricing, SMR and insurance groupings with the data providers in time for the data to be packaged and released on the day the car was unveiled at Frankfurt - and we achieved it,' said Ollie Parsons, national leasing and SMR manager, Honda (UK).

‘On September 30 we opened our order books for the new car and every single leasing company was in a position to give a customer a quote. This will be how we will launch all new Honda cars in the future.’

Dave Hodgetts, managing director, Honda (UK), said: ‘These excellent residual value predictions combined with lower emissions and improved fuel consumption make the Civic a very competitive proposition for both private and corporate customers.’

Honda adopts new digital technologies for new used car stock locator

HONDA has launched a new used car stock locator and claims to be one of the first to market to use the very latest technologies in digital developments and new media solutions.

Aimed at providing customers with a more engaging online search experience Honda UK’s partner for the project is Manheim Retail Services, which developed the used car stock locator in line with Honda UK’s online marketing strategy.

Enhanced search engine optimisation techniques improve overall performance on the internet and are driving increased traffic. In turn intuitive and interactive functions within the locator encourage customer engagement with the Honda brand.

The complete search process is streamlined into three steps based on changing consumer search behaviours. Some users will know exactly what they want and need to return results quickly, while others require a more defined search process. Visual tools such as a model carousel viewer add a new level of interactivity. Additional equipment information allows customers to fully research vehicles so that they can quickly identify their preferred model.

With the growth of social media, new integrated links now allow customers to share vehicle information through Facebook, straight from vehicle view pages. Customers can also search non-approved and non-franchised national used car stock.

Underpinning the used car stock locator is Manheim Retail Services’ end-to-end stock management solution, eBusiness Centre. This links with Honda UK’s in-house systems, offering Honda dealers a joined up approach to manage their stock. Through eBusiness Centre, each dealer can instantly update vehicle details, highlighting key selling points and differentiate stock positioning.

Forming part of a larger used car marketing programme with Manheim Retail Services, a mobile optimised version of the used car stock locator has also been launched.

Over the coming months, advanced developments are planned, including a lifestyle search which guides customers through a series of questions important to their daily lives, so they find Honda models to match their specific requirements.

The initiative has been launched against a background of changing consumer car buying process, with more research being carried out online ahead of decision making.

Politics and regulation

UK needs ‘innovation strategy’ for step-change in green cars

CHANCELLOR of the Exchequer George Osborne and Business Secretary Vince Cable should act now to put the UK in the fast lane towards a green car fleet, according to new research published by the Institute for Public Policy Research think tank.

The report says that to meet climate change targets, 1.7 million vehicles will need to be electric or plug-in hybrid by 2020, a tough car emissions targets is needed and that the best research and development into low carbon motor manufacturing needs to be co-ordinated and backed by Government.

The IPPR analysis, using an econometric model to predict the impact of the shift to green cars, shows that fuel duty revenues - more than 2% of GDP in 2010 - will more than halve in real terms by 2030 - by at least £10 billion. In 2010, the combined revenue from fuel duty and VAT on fuel and fuel duty was £29.5bn.

As well as depriving the Government of much-needed revenue, such a shift in the costs of motoring could harm growth as it will lead to greater congestion. The report shows that declining North Sea oil reserves will lead to increased oil imports unless the UK decarbonises its road transport sector.

The report argues that the Government should build on the forthcoming road-user charging scheme for HGVs by piloting revenue neutral 'pay-as-you-go' driving schemes after 2015. The Coalition Government has said that it would 'work towards the introduction of a new system of HGV road user charging to ensure a fairer arrangement for UK hauliers' but has made no further comment as yet on its future plans.

Nick Pearce, IPPR director, said: 'To meet our climate change targets we need to decarbonise road transport over the next decade, which means setting a tough target for car emissions of 95 g/km by 2020. If UK manufacturing is going to be at the forefront of this green cars revolution, we also need an active industrial strategy that backs the best R&D.'

'Our analysis shows that the Treasury is going to lose at least £10bn of revenue by 2030 in reduced fuel duty. Road-user charging is going to need to be carefully introduced to make up for this loss of revenue, building on the forthcoming scheme for HGVs and on the experience of toll roads like the M6.'

The IPPR's report recommends:

- An exhaust pipe emission standard of 95 g/km or better by 2020, with a review in 2015 to examine possible tightening if technology moves faster than policy.
- The launch in 2013 of a new 'feebates' scheme to encourage consumers to buy new vehicles below a specified level of emissions and enjoy a rebate paid for out of fees charged on vehicles above the specified level.
- Partnerships with the private sector to install the planned public electric vehicle recharging points in urban areas to overcome consumer anxieties about the range of such vehicles.
- Voluntary trials from 2015 onwards of revenue neutral pay-as-you-drive schemes offering motorists the opportunity to opt out of fuel duty and into a distance-based road pricing scheme.
- A Government-led partnership initiative to bring low-carbon car sharing schemes to communities in need of better transport interconnection.

The report also argues that a framework for vehicle decarbonisation should be set within a wider transport strategy aiming to address the looming travel affordability crisis, ensure deep emissions reductions and integrate a wide variety of different modes of transport.

The total number of cars in Britain is forecast to rise from 28.5 million in 2010 to 36.4 million in 2030, according to the Department for Transport. Under this scenario take-up of electric cars reaches 60% of new vehicles (31% of the fleet) in 2030, of which 30% are battery electric and the remaining 70% are plug-in hybrid cars.

- IPPR's report - '*Untying the knot*' - is available to download from <http://bit.ly/IPPR8106>

Government urged to drop £3.5bn smouldering tax bomb for motorists

CALLS have been made for the Government to drop plans to increase fuel duty by an unprecedented 8p per litre in seven months next year.

The demand came from Brian Madderson, Retail Motor Industry Petrol chairman, in a letter to Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, detailing the concerns of the independent petrol retailing industry ahead of the Autumn Statement on November 29.

He warned of the 'serious consequences' of the proposed fuel duty increases in the letter. Although the previous Government's fuel duty escalator will be replaced by the coalition Government's fair fuel stabiliser, the precise mechanics of the new scheme have yet to be announced.

Road fuel volumes have plummeted since 2008 from a combination of high taxes and high global oil prices which produced record levels at the pump of 137p per litre for petrol and 143p per litre for diesel in May this year, said Madderson. Despite Brent Crude oil prices falling from around \$125 barrel to a recent low of \$100, wholesale prices to UK retailers in £/litre have remained stubbornly high, partly a result of the weakening pound sterling.

He said: 'What remains as the backbone of this new stabiliser package is the in real terms inflation element plus VAT. A fuel duty increase of 3.02p per litre (assumes RPI at 5.2%) was announced in the 2011 Budget for implementation on January 1, 2012 which with 20% VAT means an overall tax increase of 4p per litre.

'The next fuel duty increase on August 1, 2012 seems set to follow the stabiliser format and with RPI forecast to peak in the New Year close to 5.5%, this could result in another 4p per litre tax hike.

'If these proposed fuel duty increases were to be implemented, together they would add up to a staggering 8p per litre tax hike in just seven months - a level never before seen in the UK.'

Madderson continued: 'The impact will be to take a massive £3.5 billion out of the consumers' pocket next year when every household and business is already under immense financial strain. It is the antithesis of fair taxation to which this Government is pledged.

'With unemployment hitting a 17-year high this month, most retailers worrying about falling demand trends, the UK economy failing to ignite, inflation still climbing and independent forecourts continuing to close the Government needs to address this smouldering tax bomb with the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. It cannot be right to press ahead with either of these crippling tax hikes next year, so the Government must announce cancellation of both planned duty increases without delay.'

Average petrol prices have dropped slightly this month to 134.51p a litre, compared with 135.61p a litre in September, according to the AA's latest monthly fuel price report. However, diesel pump prices increased fractionally to an average of 139.65p from 139.62 last month.

Although petrol prices have fallen slightly over the past month, the average cost remains within 3p of the record high set in May, says the AA in its latest monthly fuel price report. Meanwhile, diesel costs that have barely moved since the first week of September are similarly close to the all-time peak.

A 10 cent drop in the value of the pound against the dollar has negated most of the benefit of Brent crude oil falling around \$15 a barrel since hitting \$126 at the start of the summer. The price of a barrel of oil is currently \$110.

RMI demands Government clarity over MoT review

THE motor industry has called for Government clarity over its MoT review intentions as soon as possible claiming that garages have been working in a vacuum for 12 months deterring investment in premises and jobs.

The plea came from Retail Motor Industry chairman Colin Parlett at the organisation's annual dinner, held at the Dorchester Hotel, London.

Commenting on the impending MoT review, Parlett said: ‘Last year Mike Penning, Minister for Transport, stood here and said he would shortly be announcing a review of the MoT. Twelve months on and we are still waiting for this announcement.

‘The Federation calls on Government to reflect on the success of the existing scheme and not necessarily follow the example of our European partners. The existing situation much be addressed as a matter of urgency not losing sight of the fact that the MoT was introduced to improve safety on the road along with a reduction of road deaths.’

The RMI has been engaged with the Department for Transport for some time on the wider issues around the current test and says it continues to view the review as a positive step.

The RMI says that there are many areas of the MoT that could be improved and it has been in discussions with the Department to air its views on what positive changes could be made.

However, Parlett said: ‘This does not deflect our opposition to any change to the frequency of MoT testing. After the impending announcement of the review the RMI intend to continue to work with senior officials at the Department.’

Police crackdown on hand-held mobile phone users

WELSH police have caught 1,000 motorists illegally using a hand-held mobile phone while in a co-ordinated nationwide crackdown.

For two weeks in September and October, officers from all Welsh forces carried out proactive patrols to target motorists who endanger other road users by using hand-held mobile phones, and educated drivers on the penalties they faced if caught.

The All-Wales Anti-Mobile Phone While Driving campaign saw:

- 429 notices in the Dyfed Powys force area given out
- In North Wales a total of 168 offenders were caught and apprehended.
- South Wales Police issued 274 fixed penalty notices to law-breakers
- In Gwent a total of 129 were issued.

Dyfed-Powys Police chief constable Ian Arundale said: ‘These results highlight our commitment to addressing this serious issue. Research indicates that you are four times more likely to crash while driving and using a mobile phone. Obviously there is an element among the motoring public that continue to put themselves and others at risk by driving while using a handheld device.

‘We would encourage drivers to switch off their phones while driving; no phone call is so urgent that it requires you to answer it and put yourself and others at risk. We will continue to work closely with our partners to raise awareness, educate and enforce those drivers who continue to flout the law.’

Susan Storch, chair of Road Safety Wales added: ‘Driving while using a mobile phone is not only illegal but dangerous. It doesn’t just put your own life at risk but more importantly those of your passengers and other road users who may not have a say in your actions behind the wheel.

‘We all need to take account of how we drive on our roads and driving a vehicle requires us to multi-task so anything above and beyond that needs to wait until we are safely parked up or until our journey has finished.

‘While it’s saddening to see that so many motorists got caught using a mobile phone while driving it has also demonstrated the resolve of all the Road Safety Wales partners in tackling this issue and we will continue to work together to drive home the message that you need to switch off before you drive off.’

Dealer news

Used car sales outpace new model business at Pendragon

USED car sales continue to outpace new car volumes amid increased economic uncertainty, according to a trading update from Pendragon, Britain's largest car dealership group, which owns the Evans Halshaw and Stratstone brands.

Pendragon said used car volumes were up 18% in the three months to September 30, while new car sales fell at Stratstone and Evans Halshaw by 10.3% and 10.8% respectively.

But the company, which has 300 outlets in the UK, warned its used car profit margins were squeezed in July and August and were down compared to the same period last year as it cut prices on used cars.

Aftersales, such as its vehicle check programme, which offers the highest profit margins for Pendragon, saw turnover drop by 2% in the period, but profit margins increased.

New car sales were offered some support from the recently launched Range Rover Evoque and a new Porsche 911 model, said the company.

Pendragon, which did not give overall group sales figures, said its underlying trading performance was in line with expectations.

But said it expects a stronger performance from its premium ranges, which are sold through Stratstone, and include top-of-the-range marques such as Aston Martin, BMW and Maserati.

The market for new cars has been hit by a squeeze on household incomes with hard-pressed consumers searching for cheaper deals on used cars.

General motor industry news

RoSPA survey backs calls for 'clock change' to make roads safer

AN overwhelming majority of people want clock change - that's according to a survey carried out by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

RoSPA's online poll, conducted in advance of the clocks going back this weekend, asked: 'Would you like to see an extra hour of evening daylight all year round, across the UK?' The answer was emphatic, with 92% of respondents saying 'yes'.

With the end of British Summer Time on Sunday, many schoolchildren and workers will begin thinking about travelling home in the dark for the first time in months.

RoSPA has been at the forefront of a crusade to give the UK an extra hour of evening daylight for decades - citing research that shows lighter nights would save 80 lives and prevent more than 200 serious injuries on the roads each year.

Apart from the avoidance of grief and suffering, fewer road accidents would also bring considerable annual savings to taxpayers.

The clock change campaign is closer to succeeding now than at any time since 1970, thanks to Rebecca Harris MP's Private Members' Bill - which passed its second reading in Parliament in December with a huge majority. To help the Bill clear the next hurdle, RoSPA has called on the public to help convince Westminster of its popularity. People can do this by clicking the 'Support Our Campaign' button at www.rospa.com/about/currentcampaigns/lighter-evenings/.

If successful, the Bill will lead to the Government carrying out a cross-departmental analysis of the benefits of Single/Double Summer Time (GMT+1 in winter/GMT+2 in summer) - which in turn could trigger a three-year trial.

RoSPA's chief executive Tom Mullarkey, said: 'With almost every opinion poll ever conducted showing resounding support, we now throw down the gauntlet to our politicians: give the people what they want; a proposal that brings so many benefits to the UK at no cost.'

Meanwhile, the safety charity is urging drivers and motorcyclists to ensure they keep a proper look-out for vulnerable road users, not least because failing to look properly is the most frequently-reported factor in accidents on Britain's roads. They also need to watch their speed, particularly in residential areas and around schools.

Motorists in for a bumpy ride as councils lose funding

NEW research has revealed widespread concern about the state of the UK road network, particularly in rural areas, as cuts to council budgets are increasingly hitting home.

The RAC survey of 20 UK councils reveals that a year on from the Comprehensive Spending Review, 80% have experienced a real term reduction in funding to their road maintenance budgets - with 55% of councils seeing an outright reduction in funding.

A further 25% reported that funding had stayed at the same level, meaning a loss in real terms due to inflation in materials and labour costs required for road maintenance.

Even with the budgetary constraints, more councils (50%) reported a focus on permanent long-term fixes than was the case six months ago (40%). However, 20% reported that they were prioritising short-term fixes for safety reasons.

Looking ahead to this winter, 80% reported that they were well prepared for another winter of extreme weather and 50% mentioned their well stocked salt and grit supplies.

The view from the road however is less positive as the constraints on councils are being felt by road users.

Research among RAC patrols found that 89% felt that current road conditions showed the effects of underinvestment in road repairs. Three quarters of patrols think that the condition of rural roads is 'poor' or 'very poor', with just 2% saying that they were in good condition. In addition, two-thirds of RAC patrols think that suburban roads are in poor condition.

Patrols are also concerned at the quality of road repairs as 71% said that the quality of short term road fixes since last winter had been inadequate compared with 45% who said the same of long term road fixes.

An RAC spokesman said: 'While councils are doing the best they can with the resources available, the fact is that reduced budgets can only stretch so far and councils are being forced to make very difficult decisions. Our patrols are reporting rural roads in poor and even dangerous condition and damage to their vehicles caused by potholes. Roads are an essential lifeline to people, particularly in rural areas, and need to be maintained to a decent standard.'

'The Government must seriously consider the consequences of reduced funding allocations to road maintenance.'

Chesnel to lead Citroën international B2B sales

STÉPHANE Chesnel has been appointed director of Citroën Business International, the entity responsible for growing the brand's B2B sales. He reports to managing director Frédéric Banzet and is a member of the manufacturer's executive committee.

Citroën Business International is the preferred contact for international key accounts. It is also tasked with supporting the Citroën Business teams at the subsidiaries and developing the Business Centre network.

Chesnel (37) holds a diploma in Automobile Network Management (professional chair in partnership with the ESSCA, ESTACA and ENSAM) and is a graduate of l'Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Commerciales in Angers.

He began his career in the automotive industry in 1996 with an equipment manufacturer before going on to hold a number of positions with carmakers. After working for General Motors, he joined Volkswagen to manage the development of the Skoda network and then assumed responsibility for the key accounts markets for the Group's five brands. He became head of the fleet strategy and remarketing department in 2010.

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