

This Week's Briefing

Mobile phone addiction threatens road safety

Government set to consult on 80 mph motorway speed limit

European fleets slash up to 1.28m tonnes off emissions

Vehicle blind spots cost drivers £437m in crashes a year

Minister seeks cut in Northern Ireland drink-drive limit

Energy Saving Trust reveals the realities of going electric

Model update: BMW, Ford, Mini, Nissan, Škoda

The Editor's View

A DEFINITION of addiction is an abnormal psychological dependency on something, which historically has been taken to include substances such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs. However, the modern day list of addictions also includes computers, the internet and work. A new one has now been added to that list by road safety charity Brake - the mobile phone while driving. It is now almost eight years since the use of a hand-held mobile phone while driving was made illegal. Yet, on a 190-mile round trip drive to a business meeting this week I lost count of the number of drivers on the phone - many of them at the wheel of sign written lorries and vans and what appeared to be company cars. There is only one conclusion to be drawn from this idiotic behaviour: that these drivers have a death wish. Brake believes that many drivers are 'addicted' to their phones and the rise in popularity of social media will only increase their use. The catalogue of research highlighting the danger of phone use while driving is huge. If drivers won't voluntarily stop their use of phones then the punishments should be harsher.

Fleet file

Commission approves acquisition of ING Car Lease by BMW

THE European Commission has given the go-ahead for the acquisition of ING Car Lease, the car leasing business of the Dutch global financial institution ING, by Alphabet, the wholly-owned contract hire and fleet management subsidiary of BMW.

The Commission said that the €637 million deal announced in the summer (*Digest: July 14*), would result in only limited overlaps between ING Car Lease and BMW's own existing car leasing activities.

In all the markets concerned, the merged entity would continue to face several strong, effective competitors with significant market shares, said the Commission in making its judgment.

The Commission particularly examined whether current rivals of ING in the car leasing business could be denied access to BMW cars. But it concluded that the merged entity would have neither the ability nor the incentive to shut out its competitors given its position on the markets concerned.

Alphabet operates local and international fleets, which consist of over 300,000 multi-brand vehicles world-wide.

ING Car Lease is active across Europe in the car leasing and fleet management business. Its primary focus is multi-branding operational leases, but it has also some more limited activities regarding stand-alone fleet management, short term rentals and financial leases.

European fleets slash up to 1.28m tonnes off emissions

NEW company cars across Europe's major markets reduced their carbon dioxide emissions by 7.2% between 2008 and 2010, according to the *Key Solutions CO₂ Assessment* published by GE Capital.

Based on data from GE Capital's 250,000 vehicle pan-European fleet, the report reveals that between 2008 and 2010 emissions fell by an average of 11 g/km of CO₂ per car.

When extrapolated to represent all new company cars in the 11 markets assessed, the findings show that the industry's output has been slashed by more than 1.28 million tonnes of CO₂ over the three-year period, which is equivalent to the energy used by 354,000 three-bed apartments for one year.

The report was produced by GE Capital's Key Solutions consultancy team and is available for download from GE Capital's European fleet website at www.gecapital.eu/fleet.

The study also examined the financial benefits generated from adopting a 'green' car policy. In addition to saving substantial sums by minimising CO₂-related liabilities, companies stand to save considerably as CO₂ output is directly correlated to fuel consumption, says the report.

GE Capital's Key Solutions team estimates that, on average, a 2010 company car saved €162 in its first year when compared to a 2008 model. On 300 vehicles, such a reduction in fuel consumption represents a potential saving in excess of €160,000 over the next three years at current fuel price, the company has calculated.

'Our findings confirm that when it comes to company cars, businesses can take a position that is beneficial to the environment and that also improves the bottom line. Reducing CO₂ emissions should be a top priority for every fleet manager,' said Arthur Mathysen Gerst, managing director of GE Capital's Fleet Services division in EMEA.

'Fuel already represents 21% of a fleet's total cost of ownership and we expect this value will soon reach 25%, making the financial benefits of a 'greener' car policy even greater in the coming years.'

New fleet business helps Nationwide expand

NATIONWIDE Accident Repair Services says that its three-year growth plan to leverage business outside of its core insurance market which sees it expanding into the fleet sector is paying dividends.

The company has reported revenue up 6% to £92.3 million (2010: £87.2m) for the six months ending June 30, with pre-tax profits static at £3m although underlying pre-tax profits increased by £500,000.

Chairman Michael Marx said: 'The results show the continued steady progress we are making to develop our core insurance market, while sensibly leveraging our infrastructure and systems to build sales in non-insurance funded markets, especially fleet and retail, where our presence is relatively low currently.'

'While we expect current economic conditions to create some challenges, we believe that the group is well positioned for the remainder of the year and remain very positive about the group's long term prospects.'

The company's revenues from the fleet sector increased by 28% to £10.1m over the six months under review, with retail sales rising by 72%. New fleet business came from a number of operators including West Mercia Police, rental operator Burnt Tree and Norfolk County Council.

Nationwide said that there remained strong potential for further growth in both the fleet and retail markets.

Vauxhall provides whole picture for fleet costs with online calculator

FLEET decision-makers and company car drivers can now make more informed decisions about their next fleet of vehicles or individual cars using a new online tool from Vauxhall that provides whole life costs.

With the Whole Life Cost Calculator, available on the main Vauxhall Fleet website at www.vauxhall.co.uk/fleet, fleet decision makers can create a fleet of vehicles online and calculate whole life costs.

It also allows company car drivers to work out which model makes the most sense for them, both financially and personally, with access to all information on Vauxhall models, as well as all other manufacturer data for the most comprehensive comparison.

'Understanding whole life costs, from taxation to residual values, can be incredibly complicated,' said Steve Catlin, fleet marketing manager at Vauxhall. 'Our new Whole Life Cost Calculator helps fleet managers to work their way through complex data and make informed decisions that are best for them.'

'The calculator is also handy for company car drivers in understanding their tax implications and fuel costs of any models that they may be looking at for their next company car, as well as any technical information about the model.'

Data for the Whole Life Cost Calculator is supplied by CAP and all information and comparisons created can be downloaded as a PDF.

Companies urged to back Pledge2DriveSafely campaign

COMPANIES are being urged to do more to improve the safety of their at-work drivers through the Pledge2DriveSafely campaign.

The Fleet Safety Forum, a not-for-profit initiative by road safety Brake and Colas Ltd, an integrated service provider to the highway and airfield sectors, are working together to improve the safety of at-work drivers and other road users.

In 2010, at least 540 people were killed in crashes involving an at-work driver, according to Department for Transport figures.

Brake's Pledge2DriveSafely campaign aims to combat this carnage on the UK's roads by appealing to people who drive for work to do so with the utmost care and attention, protecting themselves and other road users.

The campaign revolves around Pledge2DriveSafely workshops, sponsored by Colas. Managers are invited to attend the sessions at various locations around the UK and throughout the year, which offer training and practical tools to enable them to pass on effective and engaging safe driving messages to their at-work drivers. Brake can also arrange in-house training sessions on request.

The workshops are designed for fleet and driver training managers, and are delivered by experienced and qualified trainers. Workshop attendees are shown how to run discussion based workshops on six core principals of safe driving, which ask people to pledge to drive:

- Slow - within speed limits

- Sober - free from alcohol and drugs
- Sharp - not tired, ill or with poor sight
- Silent - phone off and out of reach
- Secure - belted up in a safe vehicle
- Sustainable - only when you have to

Colas chief executive Lee Rushbrooke said: 'It is very pleasing to note the synergies between the Pledge2DriveSafely ethos and the core message of Colas' own long-standing Safer Attitudes in Driving Campaign, which has seen the number of road crashes involving our company vehicles reduce by approximately 40% over the past decade.'

Attendees are provided with access to interactive learning materials through Brake's Fleet Safety Forum website www.fleetsafetyforum.org.

Workshops cost just £75 + VAT and include a free subscription for one year to Brake's Fleet Safety Forum (normally £155 +VAT), dedicated to helping fleets improve their road safety. For more information and to book online, visit www.fleetsafetyforum.org and click on Events, or contact Brake on 01484 559909 or admin@brake.org.uk.

Marie Curie Cancer Care extends Leasedrive deal

LEASEDRIVE, the largest independent privately-owned vehicle management group in the UK, has resigned with Marie Curie Cancer Care, one of the UK's leading charities, for another two years.

The new contract covers 174 cars, mainly Peugeot and Renault, on contract hire or contract purchase plus the provision of short-term rental.

Leasedrive commercial director Roddy Graham said: 'Marie Curie Cancer Care has been a customer of ours since 2005. It has also been one of our prime nominated charities and, given the fantastic work it undertakes by providing free nursing care for terminally-ill patients in their own homes, we have a special bond which goes beyond a normal commercial partnership.'

'All charities are under tremendous pressure to maintain fundraising levels in the current climate, so we were conscious that the onus was on us to demonstrate that we were continuing to deliver real value through our totally-integrated online fleet management system, Drive:Manager and ensuring that Marie Curie had the highest level fleet consultancy input.'

Jeremy Sothcott, fleet manager at Marie Curie Cancer Care, said: 'When we went out to tender, we wanted to ensure that we were gaining maximum value from our fleet provider. After careful scrutiny, we were satisfied that this was indeed the case with Leasedrive from whom we will be receiving additional dashboard reporting.'

Marie Curie Cancer Care has been one of Leasedrive's nominated charities since 2005. In that time, Lease-drive has raised over £45,000.

Ford power for National Grid fleet

NATIONAL Grid is the latest blue chip British company to plug into the low operating costs of the Ford Fiesta with the delivery of 80 Ford Fiesta Edge ECONetic models.

The Fiestas, which deliver combined cycle fuel economy of 78.5 mpg with carbon dioxide emission of 95 g/km, will be driven by the 2011 recruits to the National Grid's engineering training programmes which combine academic study with on- and off-the-job instruction.

National Grid put its fleet requirement out to competitive tender, citing value for money, low fuel consumption and emissions among its key criteria.

‘Our user-chooser company car scheme was not appropriate for such a large number of new, young engineers,’ said fleet operations manager David Morse. ‘Ford was successful in the tender process and the Fiesta EOnetic fitted the bill perfectly.’

The new Ford Fiestas have been supplied through Ford dealer GK Group of Chesterfield, and National Grid’s fleet management company Inchcape Fleet Solutions.

The trainees will use them to travel between university and college and the National Grid training centre at Eakring, near Newark in Nottinghamshire, as well as to various sites around the country to undertake managed field experience.

Model update

Fifth Mini model enters showrooms

THE fifth variant in the Mini range - the Coupé - enters UK showrooms on Saturday (October 1) priced from £16,640 on-the-road.

Selling alongside the Mini Hatch, Convertible, Clubman and Countryman, the British-built Coupé is the first two-seater sports car in the UK brand’s history.

Standard equipment on the four-strong Coupé range includes; DAB digital radio, air conditioning, park distance control, alloy wheels, three-spoke sport leather steering wheel and sport stripes on the body work.

Mini’s tlc servicing packages is also available on all Coupé models offering five years/50,000 miles of peace of mind motoring for £249. For owners looking for more service coverage the tlc XL package is also available and covers eight years/80,000 miles for £275.

The range of powered by the familiar engine line-up. Prices are £16,640 for the Cooper Coupé; £19,775 for the Cooper S Coupé, £20,510 for the Cooper SD Coupé; and £23,795 for the John Cooper Works Coupé.

Residual values are claimed to be class-leading with the Cooper SD model retaining 47% (£9,575) of its original value over three years/60,000 miles and the John Cooper Works model retaining 45% (£10,625).

Ford extends Fiesta EOnetic range with two new models

FORD has extended the availability of its low emission EOnetic engine in the Fiesta to now include the mid-range Zetec and top-of-the-range Titanium models.

The addition of Zetec and Titanium models to the current Edge EOnetic means a three-model ‘green’ line up for customers to choose from.

All three EOnetics have the Dagenham-built, specially calibrated version of the 1.6 litre, 95 PS Duratorq TDCi engine with Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) which gives combined cycle fuel economy of 78.5 mpg. The EOnetic Fiestas now have carbon dioxide emissions of 95 g/km, down by 3 g/km.

The EOnetic models in the Fiesta range start with Edge EOnetic, priced from £13,895, which includes Electronic Stability Programme (ESP), air-conditioning, lowered suspension, aerodynamic improvements and low rolling resistance tyres.

The Zetec EConetic, priced from £14,445, has 14-inch six-spoke alloy wheels, front fog lights, rear wheel air deflectors, chrome surrounds on headlights, lower front grille, tailgate handle and belt line finisher, three-spoke leather steering wheel and ambient lighting.

The Titanium EConetic, priced from £15,645, adds Sony DAB Radio, Bluetooth voice control and USB connectivity, cruise control, front upper grille chrome strip, power-operated folding door mirrors, privacy glass, electronic automatic temperature control (EATC), automatic headlamps, automatic wipers, two rear speakers and a perimeter alarm.

BMW to launch fifth generation M5

BMW has revealed first details of the fifth generation of the world's most successful high-performance saloon in the premium segment of the executive class - the M5.

The model is powered by a newly developed M high-performance 4.4 litre V8 engine with M TwinPower Turbo package - consisting of Twin Scroll Twin Turbo technology, cross-bank exhaust manifold, high precision direct petrol injection and Valvetronic fully variable valve control.

The powerplant delivers 560 bhp at 6,000-7,000 rpm and maximum torque is 680 Nm from 1,500 rpm. Combined cycle fuel economy is 28.5 mpg, a 30% improvement on the previous, and emissions are 232 g/km.

Power transfer to the rear wheels via BMW's seven-speed M Double Clutch Transmission Drivelogic.

Standard specification includes: Merino leather upholstery with extended features, exclusive aluminium Trace interior trim strips, BMW Individual roof liner in anthracite, electrically operated steering column adjustment, four-zone automatic climate control and ambient light.

The model is expected to be available from November and carry a price tag of around £73,000.

Nissan improves Juke efficiency

NISSAN Juke 1.6 litre petrol and 1.5 litre dCi diesel drivetrains have undergone an optimisation programme to further reduce emissions and boost fuel economy.

Thanks to revised gear ratios, the 1.6 litre petrol variant now returns 47.1 mpg on the combined fuel cycle - an improvement of 2.3 mpg - and has emissions of 139 g/km, a reduction of 8 g/km.

Fuel economy on the revised 1.5 litre dCi diesel has improved from 55.4 mpg to 57.6 mpg on the combined cycle, and emissions have fallen from 134 g/km to 129g/km.

The improvements come without any change in list prices.

Škoda to launch into city car sector

ŠKODA is to enter the city car segment with its sixth production model - the Citigo - which will be launched in the UK in summer 2012.

Available in three-door and five-door versions, the Citigo will measure 3.56 metres long, 1.65 metres wide and 1.48 metres high and have 251 litres of boot space, which can be extended to 951 litres by folding down the rear seats.

For the first time in a Škoda vehicle, a portable navigation system will be available. The device is fitted to the dashboard and can be removed and used on the go.

Also for the first time in a Škoda vehicle, the designers have used a head-thorax side airbag to protect the heads of both the driver and the front seat passenger. Along with a number of other items, the system is part of a safety package usually found on much larger cars, says the manufacturer.

The model will be powered by a choice of two 1.0 litre engines delivering 60 PS or 75 PS and returning combined cycle fuel economy of 62.8 mpg and 60.1 mpg respectively and emissions of 105 g/km and 108 g/km respectively.

Manufacturer news

Ford to launch feature to prevent door dents and scratches

FORD is introducing a new feature designed to prevent vehicle dents and scratches when occupants open their car doors.

The feature, called Door Edge Protector, will debut in early 2012 on the Ford Focus.

The system - designed by Ford engineers in Germany - works automatically when the door is opened.

A protective flap concealed in the door moves into position in a fraction of a second as the door opens providing a buffer that prevents damage to paint and body work. The cost to repair a dented car door can reach £250 and 85% of British drivers do not believe the perpetrators of the damage would confess to the incident, claims Ford.

Ford's Door Edge Protector helps prevent damage by fully extending into its protective position at a door opening gap of less than 15cm. The feature is said to defend against more than 90% of variously positioned obstructions to the front doors and 85% at the rear doors.

'The Door Edge Protector will be one of those features that we think will make customers say 'Why didn't someone think of this sooner?', said Matthias Tensing, product development system engineer. 'It will help parents with children in the backseat or anyone who needs to park in a tight spot.'

According to research car owners in the Midlands are most likely to suffer a car park scratch or dent with 57% of drivers reporting damage. By contrast 49% of drivers in the North of England and 54% in the South have reported such damage.

The Door Edge Protector retracts in 60 milliseconds to allow for doors being slammed shut and includes a clutch mechanism that prevents damage if the flap is obstructed when returning.

The protective flap can be replaced by heavy users, with the unit clipping into place.

'The small scuffs and scratches that result from car doors being opened into obstacles, or from having a car door opened into your own vehicle, can be frustrating for car owners - often too small to be covered by insurance but expensive to have repaired out of car owners' own pockets,' said Matthew Avery, crash and safety research manager at Thatcham, the UK Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre.

'Ford's new Door Edge Protector is an excellent innovation for preventing these annoying dents and scratches.'

European carmakers pave way for uniform EV charging system

EUROPEAN motor manufacturers have defined a comprehensive set of recommendations to standardise the charging of electric vehicles.

The joint industry proposal will enable the use of one type of plug independent of car make, electricity provider or country.

‘This is a major step towards the broader introduction of electrically-chargeable vehicles in Europe and paves the way for a harmonised solution around the globe,’ said Ivan Hodac, secretary general of ACEA, the automobile manufacturers’ trade association.

‘We call on the European Commission, the standardisation bodies and the infrastructure providers to adopt these recommendations and to clear remaining issues as soon as possible.’

Standardisation of the connection between the electricity grid and electrically-chargeable vehicles is one of the prerequisites to help e-mobility gain a viable market share, says ACEA. At present, a variety of solutions are used, leading to a fragmentation of the market across Europe and abroad.

The industry recommendations cover the whole link between the public charging infrastructure and the vehicle inlet including the communication between the two, and they address both slow and fast charging with direct or alternate current.

As soon as approved by the relevant standardisation bodies, vehicle manufacturers will start integrating the uniform application in their production cycles. The more industry advocates the full implementation for new vehicles types from 2017.

‘Standardisation provides predictability to investors; it enables economy of scale and reduces costs. We have also ensured a solution that meets the highest safety standards and is easy to use,’ said Hodac.

However, Calvey Taylor-Haw, managing director of Elektromotive, the Brighton-based electric vehicle re-charging point manufacturer, says ACEA’s announcement could be ‘too little, too late’.

He claimed that the continued lack of agreement across Europe on a common standard for electric vehicle plugs and sockets was delaying the roll-out of recharging points and holding back vehicle sales.

‘While consensus from car manufacturers is both necessary and very welcome, the proposed timescales for implementation need to be much shorter,’ said Taylor-Haw.

‘We have a range of electric vehicles on the market right now, and many more are due next year. In order to give people across Europe sufficient confidence in the market so that they will actually buy these vehicles, we need widespread agreement on standards - right now.’

Saying that car manufacturers were only part of the issue, Taylor-Haw explained: ‘More pressing is the need to ensure European governments reach a similar consensus, enabling the electric vehicle market to bring forward the deadline for when common standards can be implemented.’

‘At a time when the driving range of electric vehicles is improving, allowing users to cover much greater distances, we have a situation where electric vehicle owners in one country could cross a national border and then find they can’t recharge their vehicle due to the sockets being different.’

‘Governments and the International Electrotechnical Commission need to come together, now, to hammer out an agreement. Only then will we see real momentum in sales of electric vehicles.’

Meanwhile, a new study by Jato Dynamics suggests that government incentives have little effect on electric vehicle sales.

Demand for electric vehicles increased ten-fold to 5,220 across Europe in the first half of this year compared to the 500 registered in the same period last year, says the research company.

Germany, where incentives amount to around €380 per vehicle, is the leading electric vehicle market with January-June registrations of around 1,000. Denmark has incentives which amount to some €20,600 over five years of ownership but registered fewer than 300 electric vehicles in the same period.

And where incentives are similar - such as Spain and the UK at around €6,500 per vehicle - there is a wide gap between registrations. The UK registered 599 electric vehicles and Spain 122.

Gareth Hession, Jato's vice president for research, said: 'The discrepancies highlight the apparently low influence of price on purchase decisions across the region. Given this, it's reasonable to conclude that sales are more affected by other factors such as the degree of urban geography, market maturity and charging infrastructure than was previously thought.'

He added: 'As the market matures we might expect subsidies to exert greater influence as other considerations such as charging infrastructure are addressed. As it stands today, even the large subsidies don't address the majority of end user concerns around real world application, flexibility and fitness for purpose.'

Light commercial vehicles

Firm takes delivery of 17-vehicle Mercedes van fleet

GLASGOW dealer Western Commercial has won a three-cornered contest to land an order for a fleet of 17 new Mercedes-Benz Vito vans from W Munro (Rehab), one of Scotland's leading suppliers of rehabilitation products and orthotic services.

W Munro (Rehab), whose customers include Scotland's major health care trusts and local authority social service departments, conducted a tender process involving two other van manufacturers.

The company's vehicle contract team said it chose Mercedes-Benz due to the manufacturer's outstanding build quality and highly competitive whole life running costs.

Gordon Munro, sales director at family-owned W Munro (Rehab), said: 'It very quickly became clear that the Vito ticked all the right boxes in terms of practicality, driver acceptability, safety and fuel efficiency, but it was the free Service Package offered by Mercedes-Benz that clinched the deal.'

Most of the new vehicles will be Vito 110CDI models, which are powered by 96 bhp engines. These vehicles meet the latest Euro5 emissions standard as well as producing 13% less carbon dioxide than the Euro4 model, the new 110CDI is also 4.5 mpg more frugal than its predecessor.

The first six vehicles are already in service. Four are Compact models, the other two - an Extra-long panel van and a Long Dualiner with second row of seats - allow the company to transport larger hoisting equipment for installation projects.

Politics and regulation

Mobile phone addiction threatens road safety

A NEW survey has revealed that nearly three in 10 drivers (28%) texts at the wheel and one in 13 (8%) do so at least once a week. Additionally, it is claimed, that one in 11 drivers (9%) surfs the web, emails, uses apps or social networking sites when driving.

Texting has been found to make drivers 23 times more likely to cause a crash, potentially killing or maiming innocent road users, while using a phone to email or surf the web also causes serious distractions.

In the United States, death from distracted driving has been increasing and researchers put that down to increases in drivers using smartphone technology.

Meanwhile, a recent Ofcom report warned of increasing levels of smartphone addiction in the UK by users who are unable to go without checking their phone even for short periods or through the night. Over a quarter of adults and nearly half of teenagers now own a smartphone and the volume of mobile data transferred over the UK's mobile network increased 40-fold between 2007 and 2010.

Julie Townsend, campaigns director of road safety charity Brake, which conducted the survey of more than 840 drivers, said: 'People who text, use the web or social networking when driving are taking enormous risks with their own and other people's lives. This kind of irresponsible behaviour is illegal and it kills so there should be no excuses.

'We are concerned that the increasing uptake of this technology could lead to more crashes and casualties caused by distracted drivers, as is happening in the US. It is vital that the Government acts now to prevent an upsurge in distracted driving, and it's vital that drivers listen to these warnings and make a pledge to never use their phone when driving.'

Brake is calling on drivers to commit to turning off their phone and putting it out of reach when driving to prevent temptation. The charity also wants the Government to take urgent action against driver distraction from phone use at the wheel.

In a bid to crack down on mobile phone use, Brake wants the Government to:

- Make traffic policing a national policing priority, to enable an increase in traffic police, enforcing mobile phones offences and providing an effective deterrent to drivers who would flout the law.
- Conduct widespread media campaigns that highlight the dangers of mobile phone use at the wheel, alongside other distractions, and the consequences of being caught or causing a serious crash.
- Ban the use of hands-free mobile phones when driving in line with research showing it dramatically increases crash risk.
- Change the law so being caught using a mobile phone while driving results in a disqualification for a minimum 12 month period, to provide a real deterrent.
- Incorporate road safety into the national curriculum to ensure that the next generation of drivers understands the dangers of using a phone at the wheel.

Research into the impact of sending or receiving text messages among young drivers found the amount of time drivers spent with their eyes off the road increased by up to 400%. Drivers made 28% more lane excursions and 140% more incorrect lane changes.

Research using a driver simulator to explore risks drivers face when using phones for emailing found a heightened crash risk. In a large-scale study of commercial drivers, which monitored the impact of them texting at the wheel, their crash risk increased to 23 times that of a driver paying full attention.

Studies looking at the impact of talking on a mobile at the wheel have found that the crash risk is quadrupled, whether the phone is hand-held or hands-free.

Drivers who are caught using a hand-held mobile phone receive a fixed penalty notice of £60 and three points on their licence.

Mobile phone use 'a bigger issue than drink-driving'

IPODS, email and mapping apps are the main distractions for younger drivers, while 25% of drivers now consider mobile phone usage a bigger issue than drink-driving.

Those are two of the main conclusions from the 2011 RAC Report on Motoring, which claims that the problem of smartphone use among young drivers (18-24 year olds) has reached 'staggering new levels'.

Nearly half (48%) of that age group admitted using their phone while driving. The most common distraction was for music (24%), followed by emails (23%) and Google maps (22%). A further 15% said they talk to friends using BlackBerry Messenger or other similar services. Fifteen percent tweet behind the wheel, while an astonishing 8% even admitted to playing games on their smartphone. Texting is also a problem on the rise for younger drivers.

In car distractions are a problem among all ages, says the report, however the issue appears to be particularly acute among the young. By contrast 9% of all drivers admit to sending or reading emails while driving and a similar number use Google and other maps when on the move.

The findings within the Report on Motoring also indicate that mobile phone use behind the wheel is accelerating across all ages. When questioned, 12% of motorists admitted they receive or make calls on hands-free phones while driving in 2011, compared to 8% in 2010.

For some motorists, checking their phone on the move is impossible to resist. According to the Report on Motoring, 13% of drivers would always read and/or respond to a text message while driving and 15% would answer some or all calls they received without a hands-free kit. Younger drivers were again more likely to respond to their phones while on the move.

Yet drivers overwhelmingly agree that using a phone behind the wheel is dangerous (82%), although, worryingly, 14% agree that they feel 'confident and safe' doing so.

The research also suggests that, for many, the use of mobile phones behind the wheel has become a bigger road safety issue than drink-driving. A total of 25% of motorists disagreed with the notion that 'drink driving is a bigger road safety issue than mobile usage'.

Two-thirds (69%) of motorists would like to see a 'three strikes' rule introduced whereby drivers caught using their phone three times would lose their license for a year. And over half (53%) would like to see an increase in the number of points awarded to a driver's license if caught.

Adrian Tink, RAC motoring strategist, said: 'Drivers using handheld mobile phones is still an all too common sight, and one that appears to be getting worse. The fact that a quarter of motorists now believe this issue is on a par with drink-driving proves that awareness is growing, but it still lacks the taboo of drink-driving.'

'Sustained education and public awareness campaigns have turned drink-driving into a socially unacceptable offence - we need to do the same for using handheld mobile phones behind the wheel.'

Government consultation expected on 80 mph motorway speed limit

THE Government could announce next week a consultation document on increasing the UK's motorway speed limit from 70 mph to 80 mph.

Speculation is mounting that the document could be announced at next week's Conservative Party conference in Manchester.

Ministers believe that increasing speed limits to 80 mph will shorten journey times and help boost the economy.

However, a condition of the increase is likely to be that an 80 mph limit would be more strictly enforced, to prevent motorway speeds rising to 90 mph. Another part of the deal, to keep the Conservatives' coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats happy, is understood to be the introduction of more 20 mph zones in residen-

tial areas.

Meanwhile, John Ball, MoT chairman at the Retail Motor Industry Federation says that if cars are allowed to go faster there will be an increased need for a rigorous MoT test. The Government is also currently considering changes to the MoT, although it has fallen short of making any recommendations and has yet to issue a consultation document.

He said: ‘One area for concern is tyres. There is plenty of data to show the public are now increasingly driving with illegal tyres. At the annual MoT the amount of cars with tyre tread below the legal limit is rising. If under the forthcoming review MoT frequency changes from once a year to once every two years that figure will inevitably grow.

‘The RMI urges the Government to consider this when reviewing the frequency of MoTs under the forthcoming review.’

Minister seeks cut in Northern Ireland drink-drive limit

MOVES to cut the drink-drive limit in Northern Ireland have been announced with road safety organisations calling for the rest of the UK to follow suit.

Northern Ireland Environment Minister Alex Attwood has announced a package of measures to tackle drink driving, including introducing a lower drink-drive limit and graduated fixed penalties.

The new legislation, which could be ready to go out consultation in March 2012, would include:

- Lower blood alcohol limits of 50mg/100ml for most drivers and 20mg/100ml for young or inexperienced drivers and for those who drive for a living. At present the drink-drive limit is 80mg/100ml - the same as it is across the UK.
- A graduated penalty regime including fixed penalties for first offences at lower limits and court prosecution for high level first offences or any second or subsequent offences.
- Random breath testing powers which would enable police to breathalyse drivers without the need to have reasonable suspect that the driver had taken alcohol.
- Automatic referral of offenders to an approved drink-drive rehabilitation scheme.
- Removal of the right, in certain circumstances, for a driver to ask for a blood or urine sample to replace a breath test sample.

Attwood said: ‘All road deaths are unacceptable and many could be avoided with a better understanding of the road environment and how to share it with others. Everyone has a role to play and everyone should be committed to doing what they can to make a difference.’

Julie Townsend, campaigns director at road safety Brake, said: ‘We welcome these moves in Northern Ireland to help tackle the devastating, needless and costly casualties caused by drink-driving. In particular, we support proposals for a lower drink-drive limit, and random breath testing powers for police, which will provide a more effective deterrent and show that drink-driving is a crime you can’t get away with.

‘We hope to see the rest of the UK following suit on these points: drink-driving remains one of the biggest killers on our roads and it’s high time we saw decisive action to stamp out this abhorrent menace.’

However, Brake said it would like to see a tougher regime than that proposed in Northern Ireland.

Townsend said: ‘We advocate a zero tolerance drink-drive limit of 20mg per 100ml of alcohol for all drivers, in line with evidence that even very small amounts of alcohol affect your driving. This sends a clear message that it’s always none for the road.’

RoSPA also welcomed the proposal to lower the drink-drive limit in Northern Ireland.

Kevin Clinton, head of road safety at the charity, said: 'RoSPA has long campaigned for a lower drink-drive limit across the whole of the UK, which no government has yet been willing to implement.

'We support Northern Ireland's proposal and hope that if it goes ahead the rest of the UK would follow its lead. A lower limit would save lives.'

Dealer news

Franchise dealers launch winter tyre programme

MOTOR manufacturers Audi, Mercedes-Benz and Saab have this week all launched winter tyre initiatives via their franchise dealer networks.

Winter tyre sets are now available from Audi Centres for the vast majority of Audi models priced from £550 including VAT and fitting

Complete 16-inch to 19-inch wheel and tyre sets are also available from £792 including VAT and fitting.

Winter tyres' special rubber compound offers significant benefits in grip and braking effectiveness at temperatures below +7 degrees C in snow, and also boosts traction and reduces risk of aquaplaning on wet roads at these temperatures

Grip on roads encumbered with snow, ice and slush, or high levels of surface water, is improved by up to 60%, and braking distances are reduced by as much as 20%, or two car lengths with winter tyres.

Wheel and tyre sets include heavy duty storage bags to protect original fit 'summer' wheels and tyres while they are in storage. Some Audi Centres can also offer wheel and tyre storage facilities at extra cost.

Mercedes-Benz now offers a complete range of winter tyres from premium brands such as Continental and Pirelli to suit both passenger car and light commercial vehicles.

A full fitting and tyre management service also forms part of the manufacturer's Cold Weather programme.

Example prices for a complete set of premium winter tyres and alloy wheels for the E 220 CDI start from £999 plus fitting, and for a complete set of tyres and steel wheels for a Vito 113 CDi the cost starts from £700 plus fitting.

Mercedes-Benz also offers the option to store summer radials either at the motorists' home in garage space, or as part of the Mercedes-Benz dealer network storage solution.

Saab is offering alloy wheels and winter tyre packages from £559 including VAT. The manufacturer says that customers interested in the package should contact their local Saab dealership for more information including fitting charges and tyre storage options.

Saab dealerships are also preparing for the winter by stocking a range of AutoSock to help motorists deal with driving in snowy conditions.

Developed by scientists working with the Norwegian Ski team, AutoSock Snow Socks are durable textile socks that fit over the driving wheels of a car to wick away water found between the ground and the tyres to offer a strong grip on the surface.

Available from Saab dealerships, the light-weight, reusable socks are said to be ideal for storing in the car and are easily fitted to the driving wheels. Prices start from £54.95 including VAT.

Manheim Aftersales Solutions celebrates 10 years of growth

MANHEIM Aftersales Solutions, one of the UK's leading developers of aftersales software designed to maximise revenues from dealership aftersales departments, is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

The total number of dealers throughout the country deploying Manheim Aftersales Solutions' revenue-generating products for the management of their aftersales operations now exceeds 600, representing 32 different vehicle manufacturers.

The growing list of dealerships that have extended their relationship with Manheim Aftersales Solutions in recent months include Macrae and Dick, Ness Motors, the Sandiccliffe Group and the Wayside Group.

Tim Baumfield, managing director, Manheim Aftersales Solutions, said: 'Ten years ago we had an idea that could help maximise revenues from a dealership's aftersales operations and we have enjoyed year-on-year growth ever since.'

'In the current tough retail climate dealers are looking to maximise revenues from all areas of their businesses and aftersales is no exception. We have developed a fantastic piece of software that manages many aspects of aftersales activity and importantly is able to interface with the dealer management systems that are the lifeblood of all dealerships.'

Manheim Aftersales Solutions helps dealers to effectively promote, manage and improve revenue from servicing and aftersales activities. To enhance its value the aftersales software has been developed to interface with the majority of the major dealer management systems.

[General motor industry news](#)

Vehicle blind spots cost drivers £437m in crashes a year

MORE than 6% of crashes on UK roads are the result of 'lane change' manoeuvres, causing vehicle damage in excess of £437 million each year, according to new research by Accident Exchange.

The accident management company's study of more than 50,000 accidents between 2009 and June 2011 also shows the number of 'lane change' collisions have risen by 48% in just two years.

In the majority of cases, the 'at fault' driver changes lanes without indicating and collides with another vehicle. Poor rear or side visibility and driving 'without due care and attention' are cited as the typical causes.

The new Accident Exchange data suggests annual lane change accidents now top 152,000. The average cost of each accident is approximately £2,876 in repairs, which excludes the financial impact on emergency services and the lost labour hours from dealing with garages and insurance companies.

Department for Transport figures show that failing to check for another vehicle is the most frequently reported contributory crash factor (38%). Poor all-around visibility from large door pillars can make matters more difficult still, says Accident Exchange.

In the majority of incidents, the 'at fault' party moved from the right to the left, striking the driver's side of the innocent motorist's car.

'The sharp rise in drivers seemingly unaware of the presence of another vehicle in an adjacent lane is pretty startling,' said Lee Woodley of Accident Exchange.

‘Today’s cars are packed with ‘active’ safety equipment, but for some vehicles strengthened frames can mean reduced visibility and larger blind-spots. Older cars tend to have slimmer pillars which don’t obscure the driver’s view to the side or rear as much. This is certainly part of the problem.’

In 2005, the Driving Standards Agency, which regulates driving tests, took the step of banning the new Mini Convertible because examiners complained about its poor rear visibility.

Last year, *Which? Car* compiled a list of the best and worst cars for visibility in which the Smart ForTwo Coupe came top, and the Porsche Boxster came last.

Drivers should use ‘shades’ to combat driving dazzle

LOW level autumn and winter sunshine is a major hazard for drivers, particularly if they have dirty or scratched windscreens, according to Bristol-based National Mobile Windscreens.

The sudden glare will have a dazzling effect on motorists and briefly impair their vision, especially if they wear spectacles or are older drivers whose eyes may not react as quickly to changes in light intensity.

However, Martyn Bennett, sales and marketing director at National Mobile Windscreens, said that simple measures could be taken to minimise the danger.

‘Drivers should ensure that their windscreens are thoroughly cleaned with an effective cleaner to remove traffic fumes, grease and dust, and check that the finish is not smeared,’ he said.

‘They should also check that windscreen wiper blades are clean and not damaged, and that the washer bottle is full with a quality windscreen cleaner.

‘Drivers should also clean the inside of the glass because air conditioning can build up a film of traffic fumes and smoke, which increases the problem of glare, and clear rear view mirrors at the same time.’

It is important for drivers to check the condition of the windscreen because scratches and stone chips on the glass could intensify the problem.

‘If you are dazzled you can always slow down, but remember that any vehicles behind you may also be blinded, so extra care needs to be taken,’ said Bennett.

‘Similarly if you are being dazzled by sunshine through your rear view mirrors you can easily adjust them, but oncoming drivers will also be dazzled so again extra care is needed.

‘Sun visors and anti-dazzle strips in the car are a help but drivers should keep a pair of good quality sunglasses ready to wear when necessary.’

EST reveals the realities of going electric

THE Energy Saving Trust has launched a new video guide that aims to take a no-holds-barred look at the realities of electric vehicles.

The Trust is also piloting a ‘Smarter Driving’ programme to help electric vehicle drivers maximise the range of their cars.

The ‘*Living with an Electric Car*’ series is presented by electric vehicle enthusiast Robert Llewellyn, and highlights the benefits and opportunities of investing in electric vehicles. The videos provide information for both individuals and business users, which can help to educate them about the practicalities of living with an electric vehicle.

The Trust aims to show that electric vehicles can not only help to reduce carbon emissions, but they can offer a cost effective solution as well. Llewellyn covers everything from how to charge the car, and the financial realities of owning one, to the electric driving experience itself.

Research conducted by the Trust suggests that the range of an electric vehicle can be significantly increased if the driver uses more efficient driving techniques.

The 'Smarter Driving' pilot programme highlighted that driving more effectively could save energy and increase an electric vehicle's range by an average of 20%. During the training sessions, drivers are shown the energy consumed before and after training, so they can immediately see their improvement.

'Over the last few years there has been much debate about the viability of the electric car and the part they play in today's carbon conscious society,' said Philip Sellwood, Trust chief executive. 'It's obvious that there is a huge benefit in terms of cutting emissions on the road, but it is also clear that they can make economic sense for some organisations and individuals.'

£1,500: the price paid for a missed service

A NEW study reveals that drivers who put off having their car serviced to save cash could be costing themselves more money in the long run.

Research commissioned by Kwik-Fit shows that a full service history on a car could increase its value by 26%. With the average used car selling for £5,500, the findings indicate that a fully stamped service book could be worth up to £1,500 - over £10 billion to the used car market annually.

In fact Kwik-Fit has found that for a third (34%) of drivers, the stamp is literally priceless as they say they would not buy any car unless it had a full service history.

With 2010 seeing the lowest number of used cars sold in a decade - 6.7 million cars - and buyers driving a hard bargain, having no service history will make selling a car at a decent price even harder.

David White, customer services director at Kwik-Fit, said: 'It's accepted that a fully stamped service book will increase the re-sale value of a car but this research has been able to put a figure on it: £1,500 is a significant number and makes a big difference to the value of a car when an owner comes to sell.'

'For a more expensive car 26% will equate to a very big number indeed. Motorists with one or two stamps missing should bear in mind that some services will still carry a premium over none at all, particularly if they've been carried out more recently.'

'It's not just about the end value though, motorists who get their car serviced according to the manufacturer's recommendations will be rewarded with greater efficiency, better performance and lower on-going running costs.'

People on the move

Zimmerman to lead Peugeot in the UK

TIM Zimmerman has been appointed managing director of Peugeot UK in succession to Jon Goodman who, it has already been announced (*Digest: September 1*), is moving to Paris next month to take on the worldwide role of director of media relations for PSA Peugeot Citroën.

Born in Reading and raised in North Devon, Zimmerman (47) is currently general manager of Peugeot's operations in China and returns to the UK after 14 years away.

His career started with Peugeot in Coventry in September 1986 and since then he has held various roles in the UK and Europe including fleet, leasing and used vehicle director for Peugeot France, marketing and commercial director of Banque PSA Finance and managing director of Peugeot Netherlands before moving to China.

Zimmerman rejoins the UK subsidiary as the company prepares to launch the world's first diesel electric hybrid- the 3008 HYbrid4.

Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles appoints new director

VOLKSWAGEN Commercial Vehicles has appointed a new director, Alex Smith (37), who will take up the role on November 1, replacing Simon Elliott who recently accepted a new position as managing director of Volkswagen Group Ireland.

Smith is currently head of retail operations for Volkswagen Passenger Cars. He has a 16-year career in the motor industry behind him and joined the Volkswagen Group four years ago. His previous roles include a spell as head of group parts operations where he was responsible for the trade parts specialists' network. Prior to that, Smith worked for Ford and Kia with responsibility for operations, fleet, aftersales, planning and marketing.

Digest circulation is restricted to nominated e-mail recipients only. Unauthorised forwarding and copying is in breach of the copyright agreement between the client and the publishers. Therefore, the publishers reserve the right to cancel any agreement.

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