

MAN ECOSTYLE

Fuel-cutting trials

MAN estimates that up to 45% of an operator's costs is diesel alone. Can something be done to improve this? Report and photography by **Craig Sheer**

Almost without exception the highest cost for any road haulier is diesel. Estimates vary as to the exact percentage of overall revenue a haulier will spend on diesel but, according to statistics recently compiled by MAN, fuel could account for up to 45% of your annual spend.

Based on a UK-based tractor covering a reasonable 140,000km per year, MAN reckons a single vehicle will consume £49,000 of diesel, 45% of a typical annual operating cost of £109,000. Despite a marked improvement in fuel economy over the years, the rising cost of diesel means that fuel spending has leapfrogged driver and insurance costs to take the top slot. Consequently, even a 1% saving in diesel use will have a noticeable affect on your bottom line, especially across a fleet.

MAN believes that its new Ecostyle

programme is the perfect way to save operators money, and they don't even have to run MAN trucks to benefit. Ecostyle has been developed in conjunction with hi-tech specialist Microlise and, as MAN's head of fleet management services David Lester explains, it is focussed on the main influence in fuel economy – the driver.

Driver behaviour

'Ecostyle is a driver reporting system which monitors safe and economic driver behaviour,' he says. 'We believe that if you get the driving style right then better fuel consumption will automatically follow and this will also relate to improved safety, plus greater vehicle efficiency, which will cut down on both repairs and maintenance costs.'

This all sounds like very good news, especially during the present operating climate, but how does MAN achieve these improvements? The answer is two-fold, starting with the discreet box of tricks installed on the vehicle recording all the operating data. This box, labelled MTU3 (Microlise Tracking Unit) is no bigger than a standard-sized radio/CD player and reads data from the truck's CAN-bus electronics. It converts the output into reports detailing how the vehicle has been driven, from harsh acceleration and hard braking to extended periods of idling or time spent running outside the engine's economy band. Data is sent wirelessly to a monitoring centre via a GPRS transponder fitted inside the truck.

This technology is not unique to

Maritime Transport

The first of our two operators needs little introduction. With 433 6x2 tractor units and even more skeletal trailers, the white and blue livery of container specialist Maritime is a familiar sight across Britain. Maritime counts a high number of MAN units within its mixed marque fleet and, as fleet director Derek Daly informs us, the company keeps a close watch on the fuel returns of all of its vehicles.

Maritime has a strict selection process when recruiting drivers with an initial driving test on a predetermined route to assess ability. Each driver has an annual appraisal with corrective action taken if issues arise in areas such as fuel economy or driving style. Daly was very keen to take part in the MAN-led process, admitting that, although Maritime takes a professional approach towards operational efficiency, there might still be room for moderate improvement. 'Although we hopefully aren't a million miles off the target already,' he says.

The company put forward four Euro 4 vehicles and their drivers for the trial: two MAN TGX 26.440 XXL tractors, one Mercedes Actros 2546 and a Scania R480 Topline. Following normal company practice each of these is run under a one vehicle/one driver policy.





R Adams & Sons

Solihull-based R Adams & Sons is the second operator in the trial. Run by brothers Andy and Mark Adams, the bulk tipper company founded in 1955 now operates 26 of its own vehicles, plus it provides daily work to another 15 sub-contractors. The firm already takes a forward-looking approach to its operation, running a high-spec fleet and trialling several trucks on a bifuel diesel-LPG mix.

The company has been a loyal MAN

customer for several years, having made the natural move to the brand from ERF with whom it had enjoyed a long relationship. Now the fleet is almost entirely MAN, comprising both Euro 3 and Euro 4 vehicles. The most recent purchases have been 440hp TGX 6x2 tractors with 19.5in lifting mid-axles for payload gains.

The brothers watch fuel economy closely, and route their vehicles so that fuelling is done almost exclusively at base so fuel use

is fully controlled. They freely admit that there's more to a good driver than good fuel consumption alone, but are keen to see any possible improvement in vehicle mpg as a way of cutting running costs.

Adams submitted two trucks and drivers for the Ecostyle trial: a 2007 TGA 26.440 XLX which has covered 271,000km, and a 2008 TGX 26.440 XLX with 143,000km already on the clock. Again the trucks are run with the same driver at all times.

the MAN-Microlise system, but the way in which the data is presented to the operator sets Ecostyle apart from its competitors. Each driver's overall performance is graded with a letter describing his or her driving style, ranging from A signifying 'Absolute Star' to G indicating 'Goodbye' (in other words the driver is costing you dear while in your employment).

Alongside the technology the second part of the scheme involves driver training by MAN, where costly and inefficient habits are identified and remedied.

To measure the effectiveness of MAN's technology ROADWAY has teamed up with two RHA member companies to measure the benefits

of Ecostyle. The trial takes place over a four-week period with each week denoting a separate stage in the process. Week one follows the installation of the MTU3 recording unit in the vehicle, which is done covertly to ensure the driver drives as normal without the knowledge that his or her performance is being monitored. On week two the driver is informed that the unit is in place and normally a slight improvement is noticed as the driver makes extra effort to impress their employer.

During week three the driver is trained by an MAN specialist who will pass on safe and economical driving tips. The result should be an improvement in mpg during the remainder of that

week with the training principles fresh in mind. The fourth and final week sees a partial levelling off in the mpg results as drivers integrate the Ecostyle training into their everyday work but retain a higher standard than before training.

Improvement

The percentage of improvement following the Ecostyle training will vary from driver to driver according to existing company training methods and individual driving styles and habits. However, with ongoing reporting from MAN Ecostyle the manufacturer assures noticeable savings over a sustained period. You can read the full details of the trial and any savings achieved in next month's ROADWAY.