FleetCheck

Whitepaper

Five tips to help your drivers reduce fleet fuel costs

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Introduction

The volatility of fuel prices is a matter of serious concern to private motorists and businesses alike. With fuel typically representing around 30% of a fleet's operating costs, and 25-35% of a van's whole life costs, fuel spend hits your bottom line hard. However, according to industry mouthpiece, FleetNews, the right approach to fuel management can deliver savings of up to 25%. Your drivers are the key to unlocking these savings, so what steps can you take to help them drive down fuel costs?

1 - Give them the best vehicle for the job

Whilst older vans may still have life left in them, there are significant fuel savings to be made by replacing them with newer, more economical models. The most efficient Euro 6 compliant vans can now deliver between 45 and 70 mpg on the combined cycle depending on their size and specification. However, it's important to remember that real-world consumption is often 15% lower than these official figures.

Replacing older vans also gives an opportunity to review the range of vans in your fleet. You might find that there are more appropriate models for the various tasks your fleet undertakes. According to figures in a report by the Department of Transport's Energy Savings Trust, van downsizing could result in savings of 20% over a typical replacement cycle. However, a note of caution. Choosing a model with too little power can lead to inefficiencies in fuel economy as the vehicle strains to carry its cargo. Finally, bear in mind that driving a new vehicle is more likely to lead to better (and more economical) driving behaviour as we are all more likely to take care of something that is new and valuable.

2 – Ensure their vans are maintained with fuel efficiency in mind

Even the newest van will achieve better economy if it is maintained in the most fuel-efficient manner. As tyres account for 20% of a vehicle's overall fuel consumption, they are an obvious place to start. Regular checking of tyre pressure is essential as even small reductions in optimal pressure will increase fuel consumption. Tyre safety campaigners TyreSafe report that underinflation of just 6 psi can result in a 3% rise in fuel consumption. Choosing more energy-efficient tyres

will have an even greater effect on fuel economy. According to the RAC, fuel savings of 7.5% can be made by choosing the most fuel-efficient tyres.

Less well-known is that using lower-viscosity engine oils can also reduce fuel consumption by enabling the engine to work more efficiently. Research published by Geotab reports that savings of 2% in fuel can be made.

Finally, reducing a van's overall weight can make significant fuel savings. As a rule of thumb, a 10% reduction in weight will improve fuel economy by 6%. Simple steps to reduce weight include removing equipment and roof bars that are carried around unnecessarily and ensuring that any internal racking is as lightweight as possible.

3 - Train them in fuel-efficient driving

Giving your drivers the most fuel-efficient vans possible gives them a head-start on achieving the best fuel economy for your business. But once they are behind the wheel, further savings are dependent on how they drive that van.

Drivers who complete training in fuel-efficient driving are often surprised to find out just how much fuel they can save by adopting very simple techniques. For example, it's not difficult to remember to accelerate and brake smoothly, change gear as soon as possible and avoid idling for long periods. But the savings are real. They should also be aware of the importance of reducing speed on the open road. For example, at 70 mph a vehicle is using 8% more fuel than at 60 mph. Reducing the speed still further to 50 mph will deliver another 15% of fuel economy. The mandatory fitting of speed limiters in all new European vehicles from summer 2022, although controversial, will ultimately ensure more fuel-efficient driving styles.

4 - Monitor their fuel consumption

The Energy Savings Trust reports that immediately after training, drivers can typically achieve a 15% reduction in their fuel consumption. Based on a van covering 30,000 miles a year at 30 mpg with diesel costing 170p a litre, that represents an impressive saving of over £1200 a year. However, training fade is inevitable so it's important to keep drivers engaged with eco-driving.

Gathering and analysing data on individual drivers' fuel consumption is a very effective way to do just that. When drivers know that their fuel usage is being monitored, it hugely increases a sense of accountability for their ongoing behaviour behind the wheel. Whether this data is gathered through a telematics system, fuel card usage or a manual system, each vehicle's fuel usage, economy and mileage should be monitored. Trends and anomalies can be identified, including possible fuel theft, and acted upon.

The data can be used to implement incentive schemes such as fuel usage league tables, possibly with rewards for the most efficient drivers. It will also help identify the least efficient drivers or vehicles and offer opportunities to explore the reasons for this. Is it a problem with a vehicle that needs investigating or does a driver need further help and advice?

5 - Optimise their routes

Finally, as the saying goes, the most expensive mile you ever drive is the one you don't need to. Optimising route planning is therefore an important part of reducing overall fuel spend. Although this has traditionally been a manual process, based on GPS and online maps, fleets are increasingly turning to automated route optimisation software. This saves time spent on planning, avoids human error, and ensures the most economical routes based on real-time traffic conditions. It's especially useful for planning journeys that involve multiple stops and incorporating any last-minute changes.

Conclusion

As you well know, keeping control is the key. The old adage is true, you can't manage what you can't measure. If you don't implement the correct tools to define and track your fuel you can't know if you are being successful in minimising the cost.

Once you have these measures in place you can be sure you are on the right road to success and may save up to 10-15 per cent on annual fuel costs.