

eCourier calls for electric van improvements

London-based same-day logistics firm eCourier is calling on manufacturers to step-up electric vehicle development as it aims to switch over to an 'all-green' fleet.

Over the past 18 months, the company, which runs a mixed fleet of 350 LCVs, has been investigating various ways of reducing fleet emissions.

eCourier has been trialling GEM eLXDs and MEGA multi-trucks on delivery routes in central London for nine months, but with mixed results.

Founder Jay Bregman, says: "One way to reduce carbon emissions is to address vehicle fleets. After trialling various electric vans we've found that battery life is not up to standard and essentially we can't get a full day's work out of one."

He adds: "While the manufacturer's claim of 'up to 100 miles on a charge' is strictly true, it's impossible to get near that three-figure mark in the real world. Some of our drivers are doing between 80 and 125 miles a day, so battery life is still an issue in the stop/start urban environment."

"The trucks we've tried have lacked the durability of conventional diesel-powered trucks. They [electric LCVs] just aren't commercially viable yet."

Conversely, Bregman believes that despite the shortcomings, electric commercial vehicles still have an important role to play. "We use them on shuttle runs between branches using a predetermined route and in that respect they are fantastic; but using them to make ad-hoc deliveries is still not viable, hence why we're urging manufacturers to come forward."

Neither manufacturer was available for comment.



MT Awards: book now!

Tables are selling fast for this year's Motor Transport Awards, so those considering attending should book soon to avoid disappointment.

MT editor Justin Stanton (pictured) says: "Despite the economic gloom, the Awards are proving as popular as ever. It is the industry's only night out this year – your only chance to network with peers, rivals, customers, suppliers, stakeholders and the 60 different finalists."

The Awards take place at a black-tie dinner on 1 July at London's Grosvenor House Hotel. Go to www.mtawards.co.uk to book.

Fatal digger accident and runaway trailer incident prompt TC to revoke company's licence

Munro & Sons loses O-licence

By Dominic Perry

A waste haulage firm that caused a fatal accident when a digger fell off one of its trucks and smashed into a car has been put out of business by Scottish TC Joan Aitken.

Ainess, Ross-shire-based Munro & Sons (Highland) had previously been fined £30,000 for health and safety offences for the 2006 accident where a 30-tonne digger rolled off the back of its low-loader trailer and "squashed" a car being driven by Julia Mackay (MT 24 April 2008). Mackay was left severely injured and passenger 24-year-old Christina Fraser

was so badly injured that she later died.

At the court case after the accident, it was revealed that the truck was overloaded and that the chains used to secure the digger – which had a faulty handbrake – were not strong enough to restrain the load.

Since then the company has been involved in another serious accident where a drawbar trailer became detached from its prime-mover and careered down the A9 trunk road at Slochd near Inverness.

A Volkswagen car then ploughed into the unlit trailer

leaving its driver with serious injuries. Subsequent investigation revealed that the trailer coupling was worn and a lack of maintenance, combined with a missing safety indicator, had led to the trailer becoming detached.

It was also revealed at the Inverness public inquiry that the firm's vehicles had attracted 28 serious prohibitions since 2005; Aitken concluded that there was a "systemic failing within this family business".

Revoking the firm's O-licence she said it had "put business before safety".

Aitken added: "I balance against what positive scrapings I can make, that the negative is overwhelming and that I cannot risk letting this operator continue in goods vehicle operation. There can be no more victims."

She disqualified former director Pamela Munro from holding an O-licence for two years and current directors David and William Munro for a period of seven years.

A spokesman for the firm says that it has not yet received the official decision, however, it intends to appeal.

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What makes a perfect partner?

Honesty, quality and responsiveness are the top qualities UK businesses look for in logistics partners, a survey commissioned by Bibby Distribution has revealed.

Despite current economic conditions, cost-effectiveness was ranked as the sixth most important quality.

Other characteristics that were deemed important included flexibility and an understanding of customers' needs, while innovation and

creativity were ranked the least important attributes.

Paul Byrne, corporate development manager at Bibby, says the survey was a worthwhile process. "Overall, we found the way we do business fits quite well with what customers want.

"What we need to do is shout louder about our capabilities, as those firms we don't currently do business with, are unaware of what we can offer."

Business Post profit up 23%

Business Post Group's preliminary results for the year ending 31 March 2009 reveal a 7.6% rise in turnover to £386m, from £359m in 2008, while pre-tax profit rose 23% to £17.5m, from £14.2m.

Despite lower revenue in the firm's parcel division, profit increased on the back of reduced operating costs. During the period there were three depot closures and 150 redundancies, most of which were office based.

"We have again made good progress in the year, despite the challenging trading environment in the second half," says Guy Buswell, Business Post chief executive. "Our business model and strategy, underpinned by a strong balance sheet, are proving resilient in the current economic climate."