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COVER
Isuzu has reinvigorated its range of trucks - and we go face to face with its head honcho. We begin on page 6.

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Regular readers may recall the cover story of Issue 5 last year (Magic at the fork in the road), which introduced an innovative take on driver training – the Commercial Professional Driver Academy (CPDA) created by the Reinhardt Group.

News of this initiative made it out to be quite promising. However, by the time I had conducted my interviews, toured the facility and written my story, I was truly blown away by what had been created – and the calibre of drivers it was creating.

I must admit, though, that it was only when I attend the graduation ceremony of the first batch of drivers that I truly understood the importance of what Rodney Houston-McMillan, Yolandi van Niekerk, Natasha van Niekerk and the rest of CPdA team have created. Nineteen drivers completed the four-phase, year-long, TETA-accredited, salaried programme – covering a total of 11-million kilometres and achieving stellar results in the process.

The programme was tough for each and every one of them (some candidates from this group dropped out along the way), but speaking to some of the graduates after the event was humbling…

“CPD has given me a life,” beamed Hendrik Thulo, who has now been employed by TransMac. “I got sick on the road and almost quit, but management was supportive. What CPD has done is good. I’m running out of words to explain how happy I am.”

Mkhululi Mazula, now at Chrome Carriers, commented: “I used to drive only small trucks and I knew nothing about these big trucks, but I saw this as an opportunity. It was a challenge, but a good challenge.”

Amos Motaung, now at TransMac, said that it was a long, but worthwhile, journey. “I was so scared the first time I arrived here. I thought the process would be simple, but I can see now that everything we learnt was useful. It means a lot to have graduated here and I wish for other drivers to achieve what I have achieved.”

Representing the TETA, Wheatus Matugane made a poignant point when he addressed the graduates: “We have a lot of drivers in South Africa, but a shortage of professional drivers. You must no longer call yourselves truck drivers; you must call yourselves professional drivers. That sets you apart from the mainstream.”

This is exactly what Houston-McMillan and the CPdA team aimed to achieve.

“When we started the academy, our intention was to rewrite the purpose of professional drivers in South Africa. The aim is for them to be the best: to be proud to be truck drivers. The people who sit here today belong here because of their attitude towards their work. We can see the difference the academy has made – the other drivers in our fleets can’t keep up with these guys; they kick ass!” Houston-McMillan commented proudly.

And rightly so; three years of planning to get the academy set up and hundreds of drivers entering each year have meant that the Academy has proved popular and is producing results.

The intake has recently been upped to ten drivers every two weeks while the number of trucks has increased from 15 to 18.

Hats off to the CPDA team and the dedicated learners who stick it out though the programme. May it keep going from strength to strength and set the standard for truck-driver education and training in the country.
DARE TO BE SCANIA

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MSAf is on a very strong wicket at the moment. Following its formation in January 2018, with the exit of General Motors from the South African market, the company has become the highest volume selling truck brand in the country.

It has once again occupied the number one position in the medium and heavy commercial vehicle segments of the South African market – that’s six years in a row now. In 2018 it achieved an overall 14,1-percent share of the truck market.

In the bakkie space, the company has also grown its share of the light commercial vehicle (LCV) segment to 14,4 percent.

While the company relaunched its bakkie range last year – changing the name from KB to D-Max in line with international convention – and added a little more luxury to some modes, MD and CEO Michael Sacke comments that buyers value the workhorse side of the range and sales in that segment continue to grow.

Now the company’s range of medium, heavy and extra-heavy trucks are in the spotlight – with a brace of updates and new additions across the board to its N-, F- and FX-Series trucks. There are even new buses and coaches in development. In all, Isuzu has eight new models in its arsenal.

What’s what, then? The range of 28 N-Series (4,2 to 8,5-t gross vehicle mass (GVM)) and 36 F-Series models (8,5 to 16,5-t GVM) has been enhanced with a selection of comfort and safety features.

The N-Series range now comes fitted with a standard heavy-duty driver’s seat. The entire N- and F-Series range also now features a key-operated central-locking system, as well as power windows.

Top of the range N- and F-Series models, equipped with automated manual transmissions (AMT), will also be fitted with a Bluetooth radio, distinguishing these models as the premium options in the range. Air-conditioning remains optional throughout.

Craig Uren, executive officer, sales, services and marketing, comments that smaller vehicles are becoming more and more popular as operators search to drive efficiencies in their businesses. “The medium commercial vehicle segment will pick up momentum and we have fine-tuned our truck range,” he comments.

While the extra-heavy commercial vehicle (EHCV) segment is often thought of as the “long-haul” segment, IMSAf does offer a range of specialised EHCVs for specific applications. As well as a cosmetic refresh across the range, IMSAf has now introduced six new models to the FX-Series range for a total of 18.

According to Jayesh Daya, commercial vehicle sales manager, this has created the variation and enabled the...
flexibility to meet customer needs. Two key models in the new range are a first for the company: a 33-t GVM tipper and concrete mixer and a 35-t GVM compactor, both based on an 8x4 configuration.

Daya is especially proud of the fact that the FYH 35-360 8x4 compactor is the first in the country – and the biggest at 23 m³ with a 27-t payload and 3:1 compaction ratio.

“This massive volume enhances productivity when calculating the daily cubic-metre volume of refuse to be moved. This compactor is designed to take waste from dumps or landfills out of town for further processing; trips of 100 to 150 km,” he explains.

Importantly, it is fitted with an Allison automatic transmission with a gearbox-driven power-take-off. This means that the compactor hydraulics can be operated while the vehicle is on the move.

It’s fitted with the 9.8-litre, six-cylinder, turbo-intercooled, common-rail diesel engine that is common to the FX-, GX- and FY-Series. This engine develops 265 kW (362 hp) power at 2 000 r/min and 1 422 Nm torque at 1 400 r/min.

As part of the product enhancement, it now features an engine-protection system that electronically reduces the amount of useable acceleration should the engine temperature rise too high.

While the worst thing one can say about IMSAf’s performance over the last few years is that it has been constant in a flat market (though we know it’s actually been exceptionally positive and is growing), the company has taken the opportunity to enhance its product range as well as its overall service offering.

“The brand is further positioning itself and planning solutions around the lifecycle of its vehicles and its customers’ businesses,” says Uren. A driver-training programme is in the process of development, for example.

Watch this space for more from IMSAf!

Jump to page 14 for an exclusive interview with IMSAf MD and CEO, Michael Sacke - ed.
n many of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa there is a real and urgent need for improved transport infrastructure. This is evident in roads, railways, ports and airports, where the limitations have negative effects on transport efficiency and costs.

The often-unquantified potential impacts on economic growth are used to justify expenditure on infrastructure by governments, but this is seldom related to commercial values, increased business and potential cost reductions.

Most of the largest developments are being initiated by a process of dazzling government officials with schemes to construct modern facilities, usually with minimal commercial or economic justification. Of course, there are always plenty of available and willing construction companies wherever there is sufficient money.

There is, however, a significant trend in the massive loans provided by China to various African countries for airports, railways, ports, roads, bridges and power stations. They are cause for concern as they are, in effect, used to pay Chinese contractors to build facilities in Africa, to be repaid by the host country from some possible future revenue. All the risk remains with the borrower, and government officials who accept these loans tend to ignore the very real potential for demands for collateral if they fail to pay.

The process complements China’s “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) strategy to build a strong position together with local alliances and create trade routes to strategic areas – of which Africa is one. The “roads” include all transport by land, sea and air – so that all roads effectively lead to China.

The World Bank is currently concerned that loans to China (the biggest borrower) are being used to fund China’s soft-loan colonial expansion plans. It is also notable that some of the biggest developments may not be commercially viable or repayable, but have a definite focus, such as the Mombasa to Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), the intended Dar es Salaam to Lakes SGR, the Benguela railway – and even Eskom (R370 billion).

Other developments not funded by China also face commercial problems, such as the Kazungula Bridge (where the customs queues are more of a delay problem than the ferries), Ngqura port (used only for transhipments) and the Tanzania lake steamer (with unknown commercial potential).

From the road-freight transport industry perspective, Fesarta’s concern is that investment is going into railways, border facilities and weighbridges – which are then badly managed and inefficient – rather than into the most important basic infrastructure, which is the roads. The condition of the roads in many areas poses challenges and adds considerable expense, but is not insurmountable.
The most intractable problem faced by commercial transporters is the inefficiency created by the official interventions on all corridors. The obstructions and congested conditions at almost all borders add 20 to 30 percent to the costs of moving goods, and it is apparent that the sole focus of the revenue authorities is on the extraction of maximum income from the cross-border trade.

It is appreciated that the focus on customs revenue is due to inadequate business tax revenues to support the governments in many of these countries. This makes for a “Catch 22” situation, as the inflated costs of critical imports (such as fuel, raw materials and equipment) are what make the businesses unprofitable and therefore reduce investment. This ultimately leads to unemployment and minimal economic growth.

Inefficiency in the cross-border systems is endemic, with most borders clogged with vehicles that take five to ten days to clear. This is primarily due to insistence on physical inspection of all vehicles, instead of the use of analytical risk-assessment techniques.

The situation is worst for multiproduct loads and containers, but extends to unnecessary obstruction of bulk loads and even empty vehicles, due to the lack of systematic routing and handling of the traffic flow.

The GPS flow analyses performed on all corridors show deteriorating performance, even in East Africa, due to lack of risk management and illogical insistence on multiple weighbridge delays on major corridors.

From mega investments to repressive regulations, the illogical mismatch of official perceptions and the realities of the commercial world are the unfortunate outcome of bureaucracy.

Throughout the region there is limited communication between the private-sector transport users and suppliers and bureaucratic government structures that are insulated from responsibility for industrial profitability.

The imminent conclusion of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement sounds impressive, but it faces extensive future obstacles before it can contribute to economic growth.

It does, however, provide further evidence that there is urgent need for increased regional transport industry representation in the corridors of power, as is the case in developed regions such as the United States (American Trucking Associations), the United Kingdom (Freight Transport Association) and the European Union (International Road Transport Union).
RUNNING OUT OF POWER

**As an economist trying to understand and forecast in South Africa, it has proven difficult to remain optimistic in recent times. In fact, many a time the question that must be asked is not if growth will return, but when...**

It is with this lens that we entered 2019, expecting a recovery in our growth, but unsure what shocks would be in store. As recent history had taught us, we were expecting something negative, yet the first outcome of the year was to prove many market analysts wrong.

The inflation outlook came out far more favourably than the forecasts for 2019. As such, the interest rate was expected to increase only once up until 2022. Once!

It was surely to be a sign of an economy that finally gave its households and consumers the space needed to breathe, take stock and begin to spend again. The same held for business.

It seemed that the trucking industry had turned a corner, and with good timing. Across each vehicle segment, growth has been more than upbeat - and with the medium commercial vehicle sector finally returning into respectable figures. Beneath the broader sales figures, discussions with industry revealed that demand was starting to pick up momentum as fleet replacement quickened.

The macroeconomic variables support this, too. After having to sweat assets longer, or adopt unconventional methods such as short-term vehicle hire to meet demand without straining capital budgets, operators should breathe a sigh of relief as new activities should propel demand. With inflation accommodative into the next three years, there is also ample opportunity to access favourable financing.

However, unexpected and widespread load shedding of the national electricity grid has cut a gloomy shadow over the economy. The government was forced to scramble to reallocate financing in the Budget speech to prop up Eskom and ensure the lights stay on. What will this mean for the transport industry? Of course, fleets do not directly rely on electricity to run, but the indirect impacts will be felt.

We traditionally measure and forecast vehicle sales by the relationship to broader capital investment. Bouts of load shedding, especially when unexpected, will undoubtedly pull any new investment decisions from the economy, as it shows the economy cannot power an expansion in demand. This will depress demand for new mining facilities (traditionally heavy users of electricity) and production in manufacturing.

The indirect effect of this is that freight demand will be slower for 2019 than many had hoped.

There are solutions for freight operators to consider. Conditions remain favourable for fleet replacement. A stable fuel price not expected to breach US$ 75 per barrel for the year and inflation remaining within the target band should signal operators to consider financing new fuel-efficient fleets that can handle tighter margins expected if the economic stagnation is to persist for a little longer. The benefit of this is that profitability will be poised to rebound once the elections pass.
If the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement enters into force later this year, it will give member states a mechanism to resolve disputes and promote trade.

AfCFTA needs 22 ratifications before it enters into force. Currently 19 of the 49 signatories have ratified it and a further nine ratifications are expected in 2019.

When it comes into force, it will not automatically dissolve and replace other regional trade agreements across the continent. The levels of regional integration between member states of regional trade agreements will remain. The AfCFTA will provide a mechanism for the settlement of disputes between states in accordance with certain rules and procedures.

As African states do not generally sue each other, the AfCFTA will introduce an alternative dispute-resolution process to facilitate consultations and negotiations, rather than a strictly judicial procedure. The agreement will do so by establishing a Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to facilitate disputes between states.

If a dispute arises, in the first instance, states will hold consultations to find an amicable resolution. Any requests for a consultation should be channelled to the other state through the DSB. These consultations will be confidential and without prejudice to the rights of the involved state.

Where consultations fail, the DSB will establish a Dispute Settlement Panel for formal resolution. The DSB (through the Panel) will then make a final and binding decision. This decision can be appealed to the Appellate Body (to be established by the DSB).

Interestingly, state parties to a dispute may mutually and voluntarily agree to refer the matter for conciliation, mediation or arbitration as alternatives to referring it to the DSB.

If the parties agree on arbitration, they will need to agree on the arbitration procedures. It is likely that the Model Law by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law will feature in many of these arbitrations.

The DSB will also keep tabs on state parties’ implementation of their (or the Appellate Body’s) rulings and recommendations. Failing compliance, the DSB may impose temporary measures including compensation and the suspension of concessions.

It appears that only state parties will have the standing to make use of the dispute settlement mechanism in terms of the AfCFTA. It remains unclear by which body a dispute can be referred from the general populace of one of the state parties, or by any other interested party should this ever be necessary.

Currently, the South African Development Community (SADC) tribunal also does not allow any private parties to bring cases to it. The mechanism to settle inter-state disputes is welcomed as it should facilitate trade between member states.

A similar approach could be adopted to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (Comesa) and the East African Community (EAC) Courts of Justice. They require the exhaustion of all local and possible internal remedies (within a state) before allowing an issue to be ventilated internationally.

We are enthusiastic about the prospects of the AfCFTA. Having such wide-ranging discretion for states to settle disputes through alternative dispute-resolution procedures, and not simply a strict judicial process, is likely to facilitate and encourage resolutions and pave the way for further partnerships between states.
THE NEXT LEVEL OF DRIVER EDUCATION

DO YOUR DRIVERS KNOW HOW TO HANDLE EMERGENCIES AND ROADSIDE BREAKDOWNS?

Not having policies and procedures in place on how to handle emergencies and roadside breakdowns can be very detrimental to a truck owner and operator. A road disaster that is incorrectly handled could severely affect the company’s image and cash flow.

If a driver does not know what to do at the site of an emergency, he or she runs the risk of saying the wrong thing, or failing to collect all the necessary information. This applies especially to long-distance operators who travel at night, very often the driver is all alone without any backup.

At the time of an emergency or roadside breakdown it is likely that the driver will be stressed. In order to correctly implement company policies and procedures it is, therefore, imperative that he or she is well trained on how to handle the situation and how to collect and record all the relevant information.

Truck operators cannot rely on the South African Police Service (SAPS) or the traffic authorities at the scene of the accident to collect and record all the necessary information. They may collect the basic details, but may not collect other information such as road condition at the time of the incident, the environmental damage, or details of witnesses. All of this is important information that could be very useful when establishing the exact facts and the cause of the incident.

Drivers should also be well trained on the legal parameters regarding the removal of his or her vehicle at the scene of an incident and how to handle a fire and load shift.

The cargo that is loaded on the vehicle at the time of the incident also needs to be protected from theft or damage and drivers need to be well versed on how to handle this situation.

Roadside vehicle breakdowns can also be very expensive if not correctly handled. During a roadside breakdown, the driver’s ability to correctly describe a problem to the workshop is a great time saver and an advantage to the technician who has to prepare and source the correct parts and tools before proceeding to the breakdown site.

If the driver has a good understanding of the mechanics of the vehicle, often the technician can explain to the driver how to carry out a temporary repair in order to get the vehicle to the workshop – again saving time and money.

Drivers should also be taught how to accurately describe the location of the vehicle, as very often many hours are wasted trying to locate a stricken vehicle.

The benefits that are gained from having good professional procedures and policies in place on how to handle emergencies and roadside breakdowns will completely outweigh the costs of establishing these procedures and the training of the driver on how to handle accidents and vehicle breakdowns.
Any public transport users hoping that either of the two biggest political parties – the ANC or the DA – will help them are like turkeys voting for Christmas. That’s sad, because the lack of decent public transport in South Africa has economic consequences that are almost as serious as the problems at Eskom.

Some numbers: South Africans have R1-trillion worth of cars and spend at least R180 billion paying them off each year. Then there’s fuel (another R200 billion), maintenance, crashes (pick a number between R100 and R200 billion) and congestion.

Nearly half of these costs relate to the journey to work, so, like Eskom, they push up the cost of doing business in South Africa. Our energy use in relation to gross domestic product is among the highest in the world.

About eight million people vote for the ANC. About four million people use minibus taxis every day, and we can safely assume that there is considerable overlap between the two groups.

When it comes to the ANC, we might as well still have the old apartheid signs “Nie blankes alleen – Non-whites only” on our trains, buses and minibus taxis.

If the ANC was serious about public transport, every city would by now have a go-everywhere transport network, running 24-hours a day, using trains, buses and minibus taxis. We would also have a monthly ticket costing no more than R600 (based on the monthly cost of a very long third-class Metrorail trip) giving unlimited travel on the system.

In 25 years, the ANC has, however, done very little to alleviate the burden faced by public transport users. It merely continues to whine about the ravages of apartheid and the injustice of millions of people being forced to travel long distances to work and back. Sadly, appeals to government to sort out public transport fall on deaf ears. As for minibus taxis, the South African National Taxi Council (which should be lobbying strongly on behalf of taxi passengers) happens to occupy the same building as the national Department of Transport in Pretoria. Few ideas have flowed between the floors of that building over the years, so don’t expect anything to change anytime soon.

Should we vote for the DA then? Its election manifesto proudly proclaims “one transport authority, one transport plan, one ticket, one timetable”. That’s mildly hypocritical.

Apart from some progress with the MyCiti and Go!George initiatives in the Western Cape, elsewhere in South Africa it has done little to use its influence to fix existing bus services.

In Gauteng, its coalition councils should by now have started coordinating the municipal bus operations of Johannesburg and Tshwane. The DA also sits on provincial portfolio committees that fail to insist on reorganising the thousands of buses operating on provincial, bus rapid transit (BRT) and Gautrain routes.

Such a step would create enough capacity to carry an extra 30 000 people each morning and afternoon – almost as much as the Gautrain, but at very little extra cost.

Political parties and so-called “watchdog” organisations should be looking into the generally bankrupt status of all subsidised public transport operators, each with their own incompetent boards of directors and mediocre management teams. We need to think about these issues when we line up to cast our votes. By failing to do so, we are setting ourselves up for a repeat of the sagas at Eskom, South African Airways, the South African National Roads Agency, Metrorail and others.
You must be glad that the trauma of the departure of General Motors from South Africa is a thing of the past.

Yes, it was a difficult, challenging time. What made things even more challenging was the cultural aspect: You cannot imagine two cultures more different than the American and Japanese.

During this period, I assume you must have spent an enormous amount of time working with your dealers. Many changes must have been required.

Yes, the dealer network is critical to us – and there has been a lot of change. Our old General Motors dealers lost Chevrolet, which was a big part of their business (in some cases half). Now we have Isuzu standalone dealers, Isuzu/Opel dealers and Isuzu dealers working with other brands.

Each of those dealers has had to change their business model in order to be sustainable. We have spent a lot of time with our dealers in order to create a sustainable network. If the distribution is weak, it affects the revenue and it impacts on the company. We’ve also had to change corporate identity within dealerships and link up to new IT systems … there has been a lot to do.

How many dealers do you have now?

We have 80 dealers in South Africa and 35 dealers in sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2018 Isuzu was the top-selling truck in the country for the first time. This was a huge achievement. You must be really chuffed.

Yes, we have been number one for six years in a row in the medium and heavy-duty segments of the market. This is a great achievement, of which we are very proud. Our truck market share is at 14 percent. We don’t really compete in the extra-heavy segment of the market; that’s generally the domain of the European truck makers.

What about bakkies?

We grew our volume in a flat market in 2018. We were up 8.7 percent compared to 2017, and we achieved a market share of 14.4 percent. We are very strong in the bottom end of this market (the workhorse segment) and our bakkies are strong in the construction, agriculture and courier segments.

Exports into sub-Saharan Africa have grown quite nicely. From a sub-Saharan African exports perspective, our sales increased by 17 percent in 2018, compared to the previous
year. So, overall, our volumes in our first year have been very satisfying indeed.

Speaking of bakkies, the KB was in the market for 40 years. That name is now gone. Why was it changed? We have commonalised the naming convention on our bakkies to D-Max. Globally, Isuzu uses D-Max and so now we do, too. Naturally, this is a big change and we have had to make customers aware that we have not changed the actual bakkie, just the name has changed.

You recently decided to consolidate your bakkie and truck plants – and now all your production facilities are located under one roof at the Struandale plant. Why? Having both Isuzu production facilities under one roof has many advantages – including driving a common team culture and the optimisation of shared resources. The changes that we have made have resulted in greater efficiencies in terms of our manufacturing support resources and an opportunity to improve the application of our lean manufacturing system. Materials are now stored closer to the truck line which reduces travel distances substantially. This improves efficiency and eliminates waste and unnecessary cost. We used the opportunity to work together with our source plant to change the way that material is packed, providing us with easier access to the correct material at the correct time.

Did you need to expand the plant to accommodate the trucks? No. we used an area that was previously used for the annual production of 20 000 passenger cars.

Have all your facilities moved to Struandale? Unfortunately not. The paint shop, for instance, is located at the old truck factory in Kempston Road. I would love to move it – but moving a paint shop is far from simple. Hopefully one day.

I believe your factory is very green? Yes, nothing leaves the facility and goes to landfill. We are very proud of this.

You are also passionate about upliftment of the community, correct? Yes, people are critical to us. We are also trying to help our community base. We sponsor the Southern Kings rugby team and Ironman Africa Championship, which is a tangible demonstration of this sentiment.

You have often spoken about the need to adapt vehicles here in South Africa. Why? The conditions in Africa are different to those in Japan and Thailand, so we need to convert our vehicles to operate in South Africa. We have changed quite a bit on our vehicles to get the durability we need in this market. Typically we find that vehicles out of Thailand are designed for better roads, so we strengthen our axles and chassis to make them more durable.

Please comment on the role and importance of Kanu Commercial Body Construction. Kanu is a subsidiary of Isuzu Motors South Africa. It is there to create solutions for our customers. A truck that leaves a line is useless; bodies, tippers, mixers, or whatever is required for an application, need to be added. Accordingly, the service of a bodybuilder is required. There are 60 or 70 bodybuilders in South Africa and Kanu is one of them. We use quite a wide range of bodybuilders. Kanu specialises in unique designs, so we use them where it isn’t just a typical run-of-the-mill dropside or van body that’s required. The idea is to grow that business. We do probably ten to 12 percent of our bodybuilding business through Kanu.

One of your competitors is promising the introduction of a hybrid truck in South Africa quite soon. Where do you stand in this regard? We have a hybrid prototype running in South Africa at the moment. The question is: where is this going to go? Are we looking at electric. hybrid, or perhaps autonomous trucks finding favour with buyers? Our parent company is working on all sorts of different solutions. We do run electric trucks in Australia and they’re being tested in Japan. We have electric capability when it comes to buses, too. Our capability is there; it’s now just a question of cost and demand.

Finally, how do you envisage the total vehicle market ending up in 2019? I think the passenger car market could slow down, while the light, medium and heavy commercial vehicle market will be flat this year.

Read more about the exciting developments Isuzu has made to its range of vehicles, on page 6 – ed.
LCV SEGMENT UNDER CHANGE

IT IS BELIEVED THAT SALES OF LIGHT COMMERCIAL VEHICLES WILL INCREASE IN THE COMING YEARS. GARETH GREATHHEAD FINDS OUT WHY THIS IS SO AND WHAT THE INDUSTRY IS DOING TO PREPARE ITSELF FOR THESE CHANGES

In South Africa, light commercial vehicles (LCVs) include everything from luxury double cabs to single-cab workhorses and vans all weighing in at less than 3 500 kg. LCVs may also be used as passenger or commercial vehicles, or a mix of the two.

Aiden Castille, general manager of marketing planning at Toyota South Africa, says that sales of LCVs account for around 30 percent of total sales in the commercial vehicle sector.

“Over the past few years, the market has remained relatively stable in line with a flat market overall. It is possible that there may have been some minor discrepancies in the types of LCVs being sold. However, because the LCV sector is all lumped into one basket, it isn’t easy to identify these trends,” says Castille.

Francois van Eeden, CMM LCV, marketing and planning at Nissan South Africa, states that the LCV market is expected to continue growing at an average of 3.5 percent per annum over the next few years.

“Some rationalisation of model availability is inevitable as low-selling imported brands will eventually leave the South African market. Increased localisation will continue growing with significant investment in local production capacity and to enable exports as well,” he notes.

Mark Handley, head of Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles, agrees that sales of LCVs are likely to increase in South Africa, but for different reasons than in Europe, where sales of LCVs with alternative drivetrains are being driven by legislation that sets strict vehicle emission standards for inner-city regions. This may be combined with weight and vehicle-dimension restrictions that dictate the use of an LCV.

Handley explains: “Here, we have an ever-increasing number of self-employed independent contractors that require LCVs. Many of these customers want a vehicle that can be used for business purposes during the week and double as a leisure vehicle on the weekend.”

WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

As with other commercial vehicle sectors, the key focus in the South African LCV market is always on bringing down total cost of ownership (TCO). Toyota has always had a strong presence in the LCV sector in South Africa and, according to Castille, much of this has to do with what he calls quality, durability and reliability.

Castille says this forms the foundation of Toyota’s success and guides everything it does. He states: “Naturally, this is closely linked to TCO over the life of the vehicle. “More recently, fleet managers have started to implement their own safety policies and there is greater awareness about the safety components being built into vehicles.

“At the very least, customers want to know how a vehicle performed in the European New Car Assessment Programme (NCAP) crash test. At the moment safety requirements are fairly basic, but we expect that technological development will lead to the implementation of systems such as autonomous breaking and crash-alert systems.”

Fastidious fleet management is something that has become the norm in the industry. “In the future, customers will expect to purchase vehicles with this technology built in,” says Castille.
At the moment, though, customer preferences are towards double cabs, automatics and diesels. “There are fewer petrol-powered vehicles available from original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), while demand for automatic transmissions has grown. The minibus-taxi market is moving from petrol to diesel,” says Van Eeden.

Van Eeden adds that, with the move from passenger vehicles into double cabs, Nissan has noticed growth of a much more sophisticated and discerning customer base. “They expect the refinement and ride quality of passenger vehicles and SUVs to be available in LCVs as well.”

TECHNOLOGY
Handley states that there is big focus on the development of the connected car at Volkswagen. He adds: “The scope of the technology is huge and the industry as a collective is still trying to understand what’s possible.” Another change related to the development of the connected vehicle is greater collaboration between experts in their respective fields to fast-track development.

“Already, Volkswagen and Ford have entered into an alliance to develop bakkie and van markets. In addition, Volkswagen has entered into a deal with software developer Microsoft.”

Partnerships may also be forged with mapping agencies and telematics providers, as this technology is crucial to vehicle autonomy.

Handley believes that it is quite likely that the commercial sector will be the first to adopt e-mobility. “Can you imagine buying an electric Ferrari? The purchase of passenger vehicles is guided by emotion, but when it comes to commercial vehicles it’s a rational choice and it’s all about cost of ownership.

“If an OEM can offer a solution with a drivetrain that saves money over the long term, it will attract commercial buyers,” states Handley.

Van Eeden suggests that Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications and web connectivity will increase.

“Under the Nissan Intelligent Mobility theme, the market can expect some Nissan LCV models to be able to integrate mobile phone telephony and associated features into the infotainment system, as well as ‘intelligent’ features such as adaptive cruise control.”

CUSTOMER SERVICE
Furthering their customer-service offering is important for both Volkswagen and Toyota. One big focus is to better understand an individual customer’s driving profile and provide solutions according to their specific application.

“We want to gain insight into who our customers are, how they are using vehicles, and how to provide solutions to optimise use of the vehicle while reducing total cost of ownership. Much of this research is being enabled by digitisation,” comments Handley.

He believes that in the next ten to 20 years vehicles will be modular, meaning that they will be able to be adapted for various purposes. For example, at the moment a business may have a number of vehicles used at different times throughout the day. This may include a minibus to collect people in the morning and a panel van to collect stock throughout the day.

“In the future, we expect to see vehicles that can be easily converted from a people carrier with seats to a panel van for transportation of goods,” says Handley.

While our market is very different from that of Europe, OEMs do expect to see an increase in the sale of LCVs in coming years. Sales may come from those wanting to transport passengers, from commercial buyers, or a combination of the two, but what is clear is that the market is preparing itself to better cater for the needs of these customers.
issan has been producing commercial vehicles – and bakkies, in particular – for more than 80 years, while on local shores the company enjoys a proud heritage of manufacturing and retailing bakkies that have become household names. It doesn’t take much to see why...

**NP200**

Before the NP200, there was the Nissan 1400 – a vehicle for which there was no equal. This little rear-wheel-drive half-tonner sold more than 275 000 units over its 37-year lifespan and, undeniably, left big shoes to fill.

When the front-wheel drive NP200 arrived on the market ten years ago – yes, this stalwart celebrates its ten-year anniversary in 2019 – it immediately found favour with the South African bakkie-buying public and quickly became a best-seller in its segment.

The key has been in retaining the same simple recipe – a reliable, simple, economical workhorse – but adapting it for the 21st century.

This means that the NP200 offers a 1.3 m³ load bay and an 800 kg payload, which is the biggest in its segment. (Its specially designed tailgate can also accommodate 300 kg for when extra-large items need to be accommodated.) Various Nissan-approved canopy and load-cover options add to its overall versatility as a workhorse.

Naturally, as a workhorse, the NP200 needs to offer a comfortable environment for its driver and passenger, who benefit from a durable, practical, no-nonsense cabin. On the High-spec derivatives, standard features include air-conditioning, a CD/MP3 audio system, electric windows, central locking with immobiliser, as well as an abundance of in-cab storage space. Safety is provided by way of anti-lock braking and airbags as standard across the range.

As these are rugged workhorses, owners of the NP200 demand reliability coupled with sufficient pulling power and economy. In this regard, Nissan offers three options – two 1.6-litre petrol engines (a 64 kW eight-valve and a 77 kW 16-valve), as well as a 1.5-litre turbodiesel that produces a significant 200 Nm torque.

Whichever option is chosen, fuel consumption will always come in on the light side – at 8.1 l/100 km on the petrol models and a mere 5.3 l/100 km with the diesel.

Best of all, like its predecessor, the NP200 remains proudly South African being built at Nissan’s Rosslyn plant outside Pretoria. It retails from just R173 500. No wonder it’s become a household name in a mere ten years.

**NP300**

Hardbody – it’s not a name one could easily forget and immediately makes one think of strength, durability and dependability. That’s exactly what the NP300 Hardbody has epitomised, whether in single- or double-cab form, or fitted with two- or four-wheel drive.

Catering to all needs, though, the NP300 is actually available in a wider variety of models. This is especially true of the workhorse single-cab models, which can be

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**IT’S IN THE GENES**

**NP200, NP300 AND NAVARA – THREE NAMES INEXTRICABLY LINKED WITH THE NISSAN BRAND AND ENGRAINED IN THE PSYCHE OF SOUTH AFRICA’S BAKKIE-BUYING PUBLIC**
The NP200 celebrates its ten-year anniversary in 2019.

speed manual gearbox coupled with shift-on-the-fly four-wheel drive and a limited-slip differential.

As the saying goes, power is nothing without control – and in this regard the NP300’s very foundations are up to the task. A closed-section, reinforced ladder-frame chassis underpins this vehicle’s claims of toughness, while stopping power on double-cab models is by way of anti-lock braking. Supplementing the NP300’s occupant safety are dual front airbags and an engine immobiliser.

For those who need even more capability there is the Agri Pack for rural operations, or the Mobile Workshop Canopy complete conversion for businesses on the move.

Priced from just R208 500, it’s also not going to break the bank.

**NAVARA**

A twin-turbo diesel 2.3-litre engine, 140 kW power, 450 Nm torque, seven-speed automatic transmission, a payload of one tonne and towing capacity up to 3 500 kg: headline figures that’ll grab attention in any company. And fittingly so, as the Navara is the latest and greatest in that 80-year line of Nissan bakkies!

With that sort of heritage behind it, the Navara – like the NP200 and NP300 Hardbody – has what it takes to fulfil its role as a dependable dual-purpose vehicle. It even boasts clever features from the fully boxed ladder-frame chassis, for improved structural rigidity and more torsional stiffness, to Nissan’s innovative Utili-Track system – which allows for any load to be positioned and secured with ease.

However, the Navara’s talents stretch a little wider than that, offering something a little more than its stablemates: a sophisticated, heavy-duty, five-link rear suspension in place of the traditional leaf springs commonly associated with these types of vehicles.

This means that the Navara combines its capability (whether off road or lugging a load) with high levels of ride comfort. Indeed, this advanced suspension system also results in the Navara maintaining its composure down whatever road its nose is pointed.

The wide array of safety systems – including the likes of Around View Monitor with Moving Object Detection, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution, Vehicle Dynamic Control, LED projector headlamps and seven airbags – and convenience features – such as push-button start, cruise control, satellite navigation, Bluetooth connectivity and dual-zone air-conditioning with rear vents – mean that, much like the Navara, the driver will not break a sweat.

It’s no wonder the Navara won the best-n-class 2016 International Pick-Up of the Year award. It has a purchase price starting from only R484 900.

All Nissan bakkies are also sold with the best-in-class Nissan Assured six-year/150 000 km mechanical warranty.
focus on transport

light brigade

should you buy this bakkie?

I

have lots of posh mates. Unlike yours truly, they never buy anything cheap. “Goedkoop is duurkoop,” one of my Afrikaans mates tells me regularly. Just in case you don’t praat die taal (speak the language), that literally means “cheap buying is expensive buying”. I also have a German mate who always warns me that I will be “buying twice” when I buy cheap (because you end up replacing the cheap item). To be frank, whenever they’re lecturing me, I nod sweetly, smile … and then hoof it off to grab a bargain.

I’m selective about my bargain-basement purchases though. I’ve never bought a vehicle because it’s cheap. In fact, I often warn friends, family members and readers against doing exactly that.

Then I got the JMC Vigus on test. It’s cheap. In fact, the cheapest Vigus in the range (a single cab 4x2) costs a mere R201 880, while the bottom-of-the-range Toyota Hilux will set you back R259 600.

Is the Vigus both cheap AND nasty? I really don’t think so. In fact, I was mighty surprised by our test vehicle (the single cab with a diesel engine, so-called “luxury” specification and four-wheel drive; it costs R299 990). Here are the reasons why ...

First of all, it is a nice-looking bakkie. Yes, we all know that looks aren’t massively important with a workhorse, but I don’t like to drive something ugly. And that’s certainly not the case with the Vigus: the exterior designers at Jiangling Motors (which produces the vehicle in China) did a good job.

The same can be said of the interior designer’s skills: the cabin is a pleasant place to be. The seats are surprisingly comfortable, the build quality is good (no shakes or rattles), the instrumentation was clear and all controls were easy to reach.

Around town, the 2.4-litre common-rail turbodiesel engine (which delivers 88 kW of power and 290 Nm of torque) does an adequate job. It is matched to a five-speed manual transmission.

Out on the highway, I had to work those gears quite hard to keep the vehicle at 120 km/h – and that was without a load… Top speed is a claimed 160 km/h (I never got there) and fuel consumption is claimed to be 8 l/100 km (I got closer to 10.5).

A 2.4-litre MPi petrol engine is also up for grabs. It delivers 95 kW of power, 201 Nm of torque and claimed fuel consumption of 10.2 l/100 km.

So, should you look at buying one? Well, the JMC team reckon that it offers a lot. “The word, ‘Vigus’, is derived from vigour, which embraces vitality, strength and the ability to endure … so it’s the perfect name for a light commercial vehicle that boasts these properties,” the promotional material proclaims.

I cannot comment on its durability; that would be utterly impossible in the space of a week. It does seem fairly robust though.

My only concern is the fact that the single cab doesn’t come with a service plan (a five-year/60 000 km plan is exclusive to double-cab models). A service plan on the single cab would be terrific for peace of mind … still, at R201 880, I think it could be a chance worth taking… ✪

find out more about the vigus

many people are uncomfortable with the idea of buying a cheap product – for good reason – and the JMC Vigus is cheap. so, should you put it on your shopping list?

Charleen Clarke weighs up the pros and cons
CHOOSE YOUR STRENGTH.

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FROM R295,000 EXCL. VAT

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FROM R375,000 EXCL. VAT
here was a time when almost all makes of double-cab bakkies were offered in South Africa with a V6 engine – usually petrol powered. Mitsubishi Colt Rodeo, Ford Ranger, Toyota Hilux and Nissan Hardbody all once offered large-capacity, naturally aspirated V6 power.

Until recently, the Hilux was the sole bastion of the V6; with its 4.0-litre, 175 kW/376 Nm, petrol engine that’s currently available in the 4x4 Raider (priced at R680 400). During 2017, Volkswagen introduced its Amarok with 3.0-litre V6 power – this one a turbodiesel producing 165 kW/550 Nm (opting for the top-line Extreme model will set you back R818 200, but there are two other lesser-spec versions available).

Now, Mercedes-Benz has followed suit, with a 3.0-litre, common-rail, direct-injection, diesel engine that produces 190 kW and 550 Nm between 1 400 and 3 200 r/min – marking it as the most powerful on sale currently. In the top Power spec, as tested, you can expect to part with R973 188 for the privilege – making it the most expensive.

However, does “most powerful” and “most expensive” equate to best? In terms of the drivetrain, yes, it’s the best available in an X-Class. With its variable-geometry turbo, the V6’s torque delivery is strong, while it revs smoothly and pushes you along with that unique woofle characteristic of a diesel V6.

Better still, the 7G-Tronic Plus transmission, specific to the X 350 d, shifts with the crispness of double-clutch box, even when you play with the steering-mounted paddles. It’s not perfect, though, as on pull-off the power is eased a bit too gently to the 4Matic permanent all-wheel drive (with low-range and rear diff lock). This makes quick getaways not so quick, until the torque band is reached. Nonetheless, Mercedes-Benz claims that it’ll sprint to 100 km/h in 7.9 seconds and top out at 205 km/h – plenty brisk for a bakkie.

Fuel consumption averaged out at 12.2 l/100 km during my week with the X 350 d, which included a lot more long-distance cruising than I’d do on an otherwise average week. Nonetheless, this was still some way off the claimed combined figure of 9.0.

As with its smaller-engined siblings, the X 350 d flows nicely with the road, but doesn’t iron out imperfections as well as expected on its five-link rear suspension. In fact, its ride is subjectively no better than most modern leaf-sprung bakkies. It still nets a payload of up to 1 001 kg and can tow up to 3 500 kg.

At close to R1 million you’d expect the X 350 d to be comprehensively spec’d but, alas, much of the equipment featured on this model is optional. The basics are there – the usual electronic driver aids, tyre-pressure monitoring, electric seats, keyless entry and start, cruise control and a reversing camera. Powerful LED headlamps are also standard on this model, as is the innovative load-securing rail system common with its lesser brethren.

However, the likes of navigation, the traffic assist and style packages, and Parktronic with a 360° camera, will all cost you a bundle more. Naturally, there is a range of Mercedes-Benz accessories made just for the X-Class – the canopy you see here will set you back just R65 147.

When compared to its only true rival – the Amarok – it’s clear that the X 350 d is certainly aimed at buyers attracted to the brand. While we’d love to conduct a direct comparison test, time previously spent with the Amarok suggests that the X-Class is probably not worth the premium. That said, we’re certainly glad to see the fraternity of V6 bakkies now featuring one with the three-pointed star on its grille. ☝️

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THE BAKKIE POWER WAR SEEMS TO BE HOTTING UP... GAVIN MYERS SPENT SOME TIME WITH THE MOST POWERFUL, MOST EXPENSIVE DOUBLE-CAB BAKKIE CURRENTLY ON SALE IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE MERCEDES-BENZ X 350 D V6

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ADDICTED TO POWER?

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HAVE TO HAVE A V6? FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE X 350 D HERE
When the going gets really tough...

you can count on KAMAZ, the 16 times Dakar winner!

Bell Equipment is proud to distribute and support Kamaz heavy duty tipper trucks in Southern Africa, giving customers the assurance of tough and reliable machinery distributed and supported by an organisation with an undeniable industry track record.

With industry leading components and quality throughout, these simple and robust Kamaz trucks are ideal for harsh applications.

Available in 6x4, 6x6 and 8x4 with cab chassis options.
In March, UD Trucks Southern Africa introduced two new additions to the range of vehicles for its South African clientele at a launch held at Sun City. In total it has launched four new models in three years, with the Kuzer and new Quester aimed at disrupting their respective sectors.

The Kuzer will act as a re-entry into the South African light-duty medium commercial vehicle segment for UD Trucks, while the new Quester improves on its predecessor with the same name, which was launched in South Africa in 2015.

At the launch, Jacques Michel, president at Volvo Group Trucks Asia and JVs Sales, said: “Our biggest focus is on customer success. If our customers are successful, we are successful. What is important is to bring solutions to their problems and create opportunities to grow and develop their businesses. These new models represent some big game changers that we are bringing to South Africa.”

The core focus in the development of the new models was empowering customers to grow their business with increased payload and reduced operational costs. This was done by modifying the vehicles, implementing built-in telematics and new technology, as well as focusing on improving driver behaviour.

Rory Schulz, marketing director at UD Trucks Southern Africa, noted: “We are offering a single Kuzer model variant at this stage – the RKb150. Our renowned Japanese technology is at the heart of vehicle. We have incorporated a world-class engine-management system, advanced fuel-injection and made this vehicle perfect for urban distribution.”

To do this, UD Trucks has designed the Kuzer to be adapted for use in a number of applications. It can operate as a small tipper at urban construction sites, or run as a small compacter.

The engine is equipped with various electronics to assist with rough and steep terrain. It has been classified in a different class to its peers, which allows the vehicle to legally exceed the 80 km/h speed restriction placed on nine-tonne vehicles.

The Kuzer has a higher average speed with a lightweight chassis and wider frame to assist with the higher speed, but also to give it the best turning circle in its class. The OEM is also focused on keeping its customers on the road and productive.

“The serviceability of a vehicle is becoming more important to ensure we are giving our customers the maximum uptime,” Schulz noted. “We are supporting this through our dealer network and our mobile workshops. Advanced on-board UD diagnostics are also available.”

The telematics comes standard with both the Kuzer and Quester with an option for clients to make use of the services. It enables the UD Trucks technicians to remotely monitor the health of the vehicle. They can also be proactive in their maintenance and determine the parts required before a UD Trucks mobile workshop services the vehicle at the client.

In addition, the telematics enables UD Trucks to assist with driver behaviour. A fuel-coaching system is on the vehicle to alert the driver of any incorrect behaviour, which can then be corrected. Better driver behaviour impacts on fuel cost – the biggest operating cost for transport operators.
To further assist with fuel efficiency, UD Trucks Southern Africa has implemented new Escot transmission technology to make shifting gears smooth and easy on both the Kuzer and Quester.

A very simple shift pattern has been installed that is similar to the one found in passenger vehicles with reverse, drive, neutral and park. The transmission is, by default, set to eco mode in which the transmission and vehicle communicate.

“We have a manual override, so the driver can go out of the default setting if necessary. However, we’ve deliberately set it in eco mode to ensure we provide our clients with the best possible fuel consumption,” Schulz said.

UD Trucks estimates that the technology can reduce fuel costs by as much as ten percent depending on the skill and behaviour of the driver. Fewer gear changes also impacts driver fatigue – another big focal point for UD Trucks in the two new models.

Schulz explained: “For driver comfort, we have gone for a big cab on the Kuzer. There are plenty of adjustments on the driver seats and we’ve improved the steering, as well as the ergonomics between the seat, steering and instrument clusters to provide better comfort for drivers.

“The door is also slightly bigger than one would expect of a vehicle in this class. This is to assist the driver, who needs to climb in and out the vehicle with multiple deliveries in a day, for example. It is quite a tough job and we want to make life as easy as possible for them.”

The Kuzer also has a dual-panel cabin for increased safety with increased visibility, better ventilation and increased collision safety to reduce driver fatigue, but also to keep the driver safe in the case of an accident.

The new Quester is fitted with very similar technology to that of the Kuzer. UD Trucks wanted the remodelled vehicle to be more fuel-efficient and lighter.

“We believe that the new Quester will answer some of the challenges being faced by our customers, who need to be more productive. The rising cost of fuel is most certainly one of the biggest challenges, especially in South Africa,” Schulz said.

“They want to burn as little fuel as possible, while carrying as much as possible. The only way we can provide them with a better payload is by making sure our vehicles are as light as possible.”

The new Quester is nearly a tonne lighter than its predecessor. The reduction of 800 kg came from parts like the truck-tractor rims and the fuel tank, which are now aluminium. With less weight, the new Quester is able to provide a higher payload.

The Quester range also offers 440 hp (328 kW) and 370 hp (276 kW) freight carriers that can double up as construction vehicles or be used in rugged terrain. In closing, Schulz noted: “We believe the new Quester will be one of the most competitive truck tractors and freight carriers in the market.”

Swanepoel concluded: “There’s a lot more to come. It is exciting times for UD Trucks and the future is very bright. Watch this space!”
ost operators would lump this in with fleet management, and that would be an end of it. However, to truly get the most from a vehicle’s tyres – to ensure they last a full service life, contribute to keeping running costs down, and maintain vehicle roadworthiness and safety – will require a dedicated approach to tyre management.

Safety Grip and Eqstra Fleet Management (EFM) are two entities that advocate and offer such a service. We asked them what tyre management is all about, and why operators are failing to maintain their tyres accordingly and therefore landing up with unsafe vehicles on the roads.

“Our experience and data tell us that South African commercial vehicle operators mostly control rather than manage their tyres,” comments Peter Simelane, national manager, tyres, for Eqstra Tyre Management, a division of EFM. “In many fleets, the operators do not consider the quality of the products they are buying, and the purchasing of tyres is driven by cost per unit instead of cost per kilometre.”

Frikkie Swart, retail sales manager at Safety Grip, says that while some transporters manage their fleets very well, most don’t manage the tyres of their fleets as well as they should. “This can cause vehicle breakdowns, which can cost transporters more than they bargained for, or the loss of innocent lives as a result of truck accidents,” he comments.

According to the tyre-management experts, many operators make basic mistakes when it comes to managing their tyres. Simelane notes that number one on the list is incorrect purchasing.

“Decisions are not driven by analysing tyre data, but by cost, supplier recommendations and personal perceptions. The second mistake is inadequate tyre maintenance – including aspects such as tyre pressure, rotation, wheel alignment and balancing,” he comments.

Simelane adds that these mistakes are driven by a lack of credible data, the incorrect attitude towards tyre management, as well as inadequate knowledge, skills and resources.

Swart agrees: “A tyre is an air vessel that can carry a certain load at a certain speed. Most operators seem to forget how much technology goes into developing these vessels, which have to be used in the most accurate way to give the most economical outcome.

“It is the small things that cause tyre costs to run through the roof... A variance of ten percent in tyre pressure could cause at least an 11-percent loss in tyre life. A valve cap
keeps the inner valve clean from dust, rust and foreign matter, which could lead to blowouts,” he continues.

What, then, should operators be doing, and how can they approach tyre management if this is not something they have done before?

Simelane advocates the collection and use of data. “Operators must start looking at the tyre as an asset and treat it as such. The best approach is to have a proper system in place to collect and process credible tyre data for informed decision-making,” he says, adding that, with the correct support and skills development, operators can create a ‘tyre culture’ for themselves.

Swart is philosophical about the issue: “Failing to plan equals planning to fail,” he asserts. “A great operator will introduce a ‘preventative maintenance programme’, which will include effective, ongoing vehicle maintenance and safety inspections that are undertaken by a trained and responsible person in the organisation.”

The same rules that apply to general fleet management and maintenance also apply to tyres: for example, identified defects must be fixed before vehicles go on the road; all maintenance, defects and repairs must be monitored; and all staff involved with the roadworthiness of vehicles must be capable and properly trained.

However, when it comes to tyres, what sort of “defects” should one look out for?

First and foremost it is important to use the correct tyres for the vehicle’s application. These tyres must then be inflated to the correct pressure (this can affect fuel consumption by as much as five percent, says Swart) and must not be mismatched in terms of make or size.

Comprehensive tyre inspections and surveys must be undertaken monthly and analysing scrap tyres with suppliers will help to establish where problems lie and what needs to be rectified.

“Operators need to be consistent. To undertake a daily survey on vehicles leaving the premises for delivery will not take more than ten minutes. That little bit of time can save them thousands, if not millions, of rand each year,” Swart comments.

“Don’t be penny wise and pound foolish – it is not always the cheap tyre that runs at the lower cost. Premium products...
n a daily basis, transport operators entrust their drivers with their vehicles and their clients' goods. More importantly, the operators trust drivers to deliver the goods on time and in a cost effective way. Key to this is monitoring driving behaviour and providing drivers with training to improve their behaviour.

However, before employing drivers it is important for transport operators to vet them thoroughly to ensure that they are actually employing qualified and experienced people who will be able to do the job well.

Michelle Baron-Williamson, CEO of Managed Integrity Evaluation (MIE), says: “Having a comprehensive overview of the company’s drivers – including verifying their identification, commercial licence, criminal record and behaviour (based on past or current job performance) – is important to proactively manage the risk to the business and its continued operations.

“This can be achieved by using advanced vetting solutions that are compliant and consent-based, which will give fleet managers the advantage of making more informed hiring decisions.”

Legislation offers a good starting point for implementing company policies around drivers. By law, drivers are required to hold a professional driving permit to transport goods and passengers for an income in South Africa. They also cannot have had their licence suspended, have been convicted of a criminal offence, or have paid an admission of guilt fine.

While most transport operators tend to conduct basic checks to ensure the person’s identity, whether they have a criminal record, as well as checking their qualification and undertaking credit checks, Baron-Williamson warns that some drivers oversell themselves.

She adds: “The reality is that we live in times of great employment pressures. We’ve also found that some candidates tend to oversell themselves, or even misrepresent information that might disqualify them for the position for which they are applying.”

She advises transport operators to consider implementing stricter controls. Employers should also consider work experience with viable references as an additional requirement, or a test drive as part of the interview process.

Baron-Williamson says: “If driver information was accessible through controlled channels, and merits gained or lost had an effect on the fleet company responsible for the driver, it would result in fleet managers becoming more vigilant in their hiring process.”

**KEEPING TABS ON DRIVERS AND VEHICLES**

After drivers have been employed, it is important to monitor their behaviour. Harsh acceleration, braking and cornering, engine revving and excessive idling are all behaviours that can increase fuel cost, put the driver at risk of an accident, or cause vehicle breakdowns.

Monitoring can be done through the use of telematics. For example, UD Trucks Southern Africa introduced built-in telematics with its newest vehicles, which also assists drivers with fuel-efficient behaviour. It alerts the driver when their behaviour is not fuel-efficient and assists them to correct this.

Independent telematics solution providers, such as Ctrack, also offer a range of services to monitor driver behaviour including in-cab recording devices.

Hein Jordt, MD of Ctrack South Africa, notes that the company provides detailed information on driver behaviour, working hours and whether vehicles are driven for business or personal use.

“It is possible to see if vehicles are being used during prohibited times, or in prohibited areas,” Jordt says. “Vehicle routes can be scheduled and optimised for efficiency, meaning they will travel fewer kilometres and get to their destinations quicker.” The telematics solution also allows transport operators to rate drivers and export reports on fuel use and hours worked.

Altron Netstar is another telematics solutions provider
that is able to assist with fleet management software. The company partnered with the Public Utility Transport Corporation (Putco), for example, to assist the bus operator to improve its service.

Altron Group CEO, Mteto Nyati, says: “Our telematics and fleet-management solutions are driving societal impact in safety and security for South Africa. “We are helping Putco to achieve great business results, but, most importantly, to improve the safety of its 350 000 passengers, who depend on the service.”

Altron provides the public-transport provider with 24-hour camera monitoring, real-time vehicle tracking and a managed maintenance service.

“The impact of the Netstar solution on our business is one of continuous improvement,” says Jack Sekwaila, head of MCC at Putco. “Our service has become more reliable and predictable simply because shifts start on time. Drivers no longer spend hours in our massive depots searching for a specific bus. We know where every bus is, every minute of the day.”

Theft of diesel and batteries has reduced significantly, and stolen buses no longer disappear across our northern borders: instead, Netstar retrieves them within an hour. Integrated, automated systems have cut down on data processing lead times and instances of human error. This, combined with improved efficiencies, is having a direct and significant impact on our bottom line.”

To meet Putco’s need for automated systems, detailed reporting and minimising of human error, Netstar implemented its fleet solution for buses and coaches, which includes tracking and recovery units, driver identification tags, emergency panic buttons and cameras on the exterior and interior of the vehicle.

Through the system, drivers are provided with route information and can communicate with the Putco contact centre. The 24-hour monitoring and management system allows service vehicles to tend to breakdowns or accidents much faster.

“The Putco rollout is a prime example of what Altron has in mind when it says that it is in the business of delivering innovation that matters,” concludes Pierre Bruwer, MD of Netstar. “Our solution is highly technical and sophisticated, but its impact is entirely focused on improving the lives of the people who deliver and rely on Putco’s services.”

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Mitoo is famous for many things. First and foremost, there’s the fact that he started his company as recently as 2005 – and it’s a massively successful undertaking today. Second, he’s famous for being passionate about the Scania brand (you’ll never see another brand of truck on the road with Time Link Cargo livery on it). Third, he’s famous for being obsessed with V8s. He is famous for a fourth reason too: he loves to accessorise his trucks.

He’s incredibly humble when it comes to the success of his company. “It’s a simple case of hard work and an obsession with customer service,” he tells FOCUS. At inception, the company operated a mere two trucks from a different manufacturer. Within a very short period of time, Time Link Cargo moved to purchasing Scania trucks only.

Mitoo says his migration to the Scania brand is something he will never regret. “From the very first meeting with Scania, it was clear that its executives understood exactly what we were looking for. We wanted a long-term relationship. We wanted to build up the business with a supplier that would partner with us. It’s a reciprocal relationship. The Scania team has always honoured all its promises, as have we. We’re very proud to be Scania ambassadors,” he explains.

What about the actual trucks? Why does he love Scania trucks so much? “It’s not just the pricing; it’s a combination of many factors. We look at anything and everything from maintenance to driver comfort, as well as performance and spares availability to financing options. We are choosing to put all our eggs into one basket based on our satisfaction with all these aspects,” he tells FOCUS.

The Scania trucks that he does buy work pretty hard. “We always have two drivers per vehicle and each vehicle does up to 34 000 km a month,” he reveals.

“When it comes to his obsession with V8s, Mitoo says that these engines make sense in his business. “A V8 is, quite simply, the most balanced engine, which suits our application. The V8 offers a mix of good fuel consumption, pulling power, carrying capacity, driver comfort and safety. In our application, the V8 simply works far better than any other engine,” he points out.

Accessorising the trucks makes good sense, too, he says. “My trucks are a branding exercise for my company. A magnificent-looking truck is a marketing tool on the road. They are my moving billboards — so it’s important for them to look good. It is vital that people see a clean, well-maintained truck with good branding. People want to deal with a company like that,” he explains.

And now road users can expect to see more and more of these glorious trucks on the road. “We have signed an offer to purchase 100 trucks. A total of 25 will be delivered this year. The same will happen for the next three years,” reveals Mitoo.

This is a tangible expression of his faith in the Scania brand and also his faith in his company’s future. “If you are directly involved in your company (as my wife, Kashmir, the company’s chief financial officer, and I are) and you understand the needs and requirements of your customers, this always bodes well,” he concludes, as humble as ever.
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WITHOUT TRUCKS, SOUTH AFRICA STOPS!
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Bakers and Mercedes-Benz are like good cheese and fine wine – a classy combination; they both go well together and get better with age. Their more than 40-year relationship is testament to that.

"Without question, Bakers is one of the most loyal customers we have in South Africa," says Maretha Gerber, head of Mercedes-Benz Trucks at Daimler Trucks & Buses Southern Africa (DTBSA). "It is a privilege to hand over 77 new Actros with Euro-5 emission technology. This represents a phenomenal leap and a benchmark for the industry," she comments.

The 77 rigs are split 80/20 between 6x4 and 4x2 configuration. While they’ll cover most national long-distance routes, some might operate on cross-border routes. The 4x2s are reserved for lighter line-haul loads.

Abdul Tayob, chief executive at Bakers SA Limited, explains that there were numerous reasons behind the decision to go the Euro-5 route.

"Despite the challenges of fuel quality in South Africa, DTBSA has managed to meet our needs. One reason we chose these vehicles is the minimum three-percent nett fuel economy improvement (including AdBlue consumption). Euro 5 represents an extensive reduction in carbon emissions, which is also important to us."

Gerber adds that choosing Euro-5 vehicles speaks to the Bakers core value of dedication: “Bakers has taken a leap of faith in the knowledge that a Euro-5 vehicle produces 90 percent fewer emissions than the South African minimum-standard of Euro 2.”

Improved safety, productivity and driver comfort were also driving factors.

"Reduced trip times and driver fatigue means greater productivity. With the push of a few buttons, the truck does all the hard work for the driver; it’s a magic technology," Tayob asserts.

Gerber agrees that the improved technology in the latest-generation Actros affords greater safety, economy and total cost of ownership. However, she says, the two parties are not stopping there.

"In the future we will conduct a digitisation pilot project with Bakers to further improve uptime utilising Fleetboard. Driver performance is central to this. If drivers are happy, safe and comfortable – then the rest of the road users will be, too," she comments.

For the moment, though, Tayob remains enamoured with the new fleet members. "This is a superb machine; in my mind it’s the best truck in the world," he smiles.

Even “the best trucks in the world” need some after-sales care, and this is where Bakers turns to Garden City Motors (the Pietermaritzburg-based dealership with which it’s had a longstanding relationship) for complete outsourced maintenance. All the trucks have a 60 000 km service interval and are on competitive maintenance plans and extended driveline warranties.

With a fleet-replacement policy of 800 000 to one-million kilometres (before moving to second-tier, medium-distance operation to around 1.1-million kilometres), these Euro-5 Actros have a long journey ahead of them as ambassadors for the relationship between Bakers and Mercedes-Benz. It will be a low-emission, fuel efficient journey.

Now that’s classy. Break out the cheese and wine! 

**BAKERS SA LIMITED AND MERCEDES-BENZ SOUTH AFRICA HAVE A RELATIONSHIP THAT STRETCHES BACK MORE THAN 40 YEARS. WITH MORE THAN 650 UNITS IN THE CURRENT BAKERS TRANSPORT FLEET, THE TWO PARTIES HAVE JUST CELEBRATED THE LATEST ADDITION OF 77 EURO-5 ACTROS PRIME MOVERS. GAVIN MYERS JOINED THE CELEBRATION**
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he digitisation of the shopping experience has led to a disruption of the retail landscape as we know it. Now, more than ever before, customers are demanding delivery solutions that suit their lifestyle needs – and at no extra cost.

For retailers, undertaking to provide last-mile delivery is very complex in today’s market, and requires changes and improvements to be made by all players in the field. Competition is fierce, and if retailers can’t “up their game” and deliver customers their goods in a convenient, personal and speedy manner, then they will simply cease to remain relevant.

As a result, retailers are having to revamp their supply chain and, more specifically, their last-mile delivery, to ensure that all these new expectations are met. So, how do increased customer demands reshape last-mile delivery?

**SPEED**

When e-commerce was first starting out, next-day delivery seemed like a far-off dream. However, in this day and age, next-day delivery is not only fully established, but it’s now not enough. In today’s market, customers want their goods as soon as possible.

With retail giants such as Amazon rolling out same-day delivery, customers now expect no less from all retailers in the industry. According to a study conducted by McKinsey, 25 percent of customers are willing to pay significantly more for same-day or instant delivery – and this number is likely to increase.

Of course, keeping up with this unprecedented pace comes at a cost. While industry giants have the means to provide same-day or instant delivery, it may not be feasible for smaller businesses that will now have to creatively orchestrate their delivery logistics to ensure they remain profitable and don’t fall behind the competition.

**VEHICLE**

The boom in e-commerce has most retailers struggling to manage. These days, the sheer number of deliveries that must be made – on the same day – is stacking up fast. Smaller retailers must find a method to deliver all goods on time, while also delivering a stellar service – or fall behind to established industry giants.

However, recent talk of alternative vehicles (such as drones and autonomous cars) on the horizon has most retailers taking a huge sigh of relief. Their ability to eliminate the regular hassles faced by fleet managers is astounding. Hassles such as driver shortages, driver’s rights, vehicle capacity, vehicle maintenance, and so on, can be thrown out the window, as with alternative vehicles these issues simply don’t apply.

As much as 60 percent of customers have indicated that they are in favour of, or indifferent to, drone delivery. Of course, these vehicles are still being developed and still have a long way to go, but as public opinion regarding these vehicles continues to improve, so will their capabilities.

With their ability to carry more, run 24-hours a day without breaks, and arrive at set times, it’s clear that these vehicles
will quickly dominate last-mile delivery in the future. And it’s all due to increased customer demand.

VISIBILITY
Unpredictable demands and customers’ desire for transparency is affecting the delivery industry, especially when it comes to the last mile. This means it’s extremely important to maintain a flexible and agile last-mile delivery system to maintain success. This can be achieved with end-to-end visibility.

With end-to-end visibility, logistics managers are able to track goods at every single point of the supply chain and discover and manage potential issues and delays in real time, in order to be able to manage them effectively. Logistics managers are also able to provide customers with real-time updates on the location of their goods, and an accurate estimated time of arrival.

CONCLUSION
These are only some of the ways customer demands are reshaping last-mile delivery. As the industry evolves, customer demands and expectations will increase. Retailers will need to find ways to meet these – or risk falling behind.

At the rate last-mile delivery is changing, maintaining an agile and flexible supply chain is key for companies to accomplish their goals, deliver more goods and maintain customer satisfaction.

Retailers and logistics providers must, therefore, be open to new methods that will help them manage all customer expectations in order to stay on top.

Inbal Axelrod is the co-founder and CMO at MyRouteOnline, a multiple-stop route planner that helps make businesses more efficient through route optimisation. With the optimised route, individuals can arrive at all planned destinations at the expected time, avoid backtracking and time-wasting, meaning more customers can be pleased, while saving time and money along the way.
**GAS IS THE WAY TO GO**

**RUNNING VEHICLES ON ALTERNATIVE FUELS IS BECOMING MORE COMMON THE WORLD OVER. A SOUTH AFRICAN ENTITY NOW OFFERS A SUITABLE SOLUTION TO THE LOCAL MARKET – WITH SAVINGS IN FUEL CONSUMPTION AND EMISSIONS**

Tetra4, a subsidiary of Renergen, listed on the JSE Alt-X, is developing a unique gas field in Virginia, in the Free State, where methane gas, produced from microbes underground, is being harnessed for the South African market as an alternative fuel to diesel and liquified petroleum gas (LPG).

Tetra4 currently supplies ten dedicated natural gas (NG) buses to a company in Virginia, in addition to a major South African conglomerate with compressed natural gas (CNG) for 15 heavy-duty trucks in the form of diesel dual fuel (DDF).

A further 50 trucks on DDF liquid natural gas (LNG) will be supplied when full production comes online. Tetra4 has also concluded an offtake agreement with a promising fuel distribution company for 100 fuel delivery trucks running on DDF.

NG is versatile in that it can either be used to fuel dedicated NG or DDF systems for long-haul transport. In the case of DDF, a specialised conversion kit is added to the standard diesel engine and the truck operates on a mixture of diesel and NG – or seamlessly reverts back to diesel if NG is unavailable.

High-quality NG is used to prevent issues such as engine knock (pre-ignition). This is where Tetra4’s NG is in a class of its own as a premium fuel. The gas contains methane (94 percent) and nitrogen (six percent) making it one of the cleanest and most consistent natural gases, not only in South Africa, but worldwide.

Tetra4 is currently dispensing NG as CNG, but construction will shortly commence on a state-of-the-art liquefaction plant where LNG will be produced and distributed nationally to the transport industry. LNG has a considerably larger storage capacity, than that of CNG.

Typically, a 600-litre CNG tank at 200 bars will hold the equivalent of 130 litres of diesel, whereas a 600-litre LNG tank will hold 332 diesel litre equivalent (DLE). A truck filled with LNG will travel almost three times further than it would on CNG, a huge advantage for long-distance hauling.

Significant reductions in carbon dioxide, NOx and particulate emissions are some environmental benefits of NG over diesel. Fuel savings are very important to the transport industry, and this is where Tetra4’s NG can significantly assist haulage companies in improving profitability.

NG relates to a direct 25-percent fuel saving for dedicated LNG trucks. Trucks fitted with DDF systems can expect 12 to 18 percent fuel cost savings with a pay-back period of 12 months (mileage dependent).

To make NG more accessible to the transport industry, Tetra4 supplies, installs and maintains fuel storage and dispensing equipment at “client-owned depots”. The company will be embarking on a roll-out of filling stations on the N1 and N3 highways with additional routes as demand increases.

Diesel substitution with alternative fuels is a growing global phenomenon, with electric engines years away from being feasible for heavy-duty trucks. Tetra4 will provide a versatile fuel source capable of meeting the energy needs for the South African transport industry, through LNG.

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LNG as a transport fuel is not only less expensive than diesel on a diesel litre equivalent, but also lowers carbon dioxide NOx, SOx and particulate emissions, and increases vehicle efficiencies.

LNG as a substitute for diesel for heavy vehicle transport is rapidly growing worldwide, as ever-increasing legislation demands a cleaner environment. LNG from Tetra4 only contains methane as a fuel source, making it the premium fuel for heavy duty truck engines.

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Tetra4 (Pty) Ltd, is a vertically integrated gas producer, a subsidiary of Renergen Limited, an integrated alternative and renewable energy business listed on the JSE’s Alt-X.
Logging is defined as the cutting, skidding, bucking and then loading of logs onto trucks. According to Forestry South Africa, the sector employs approximately 150,000 people and contributes 0.6 percent (or R31 billion) to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country. This equates to approximately 11.1 percent of our agricultural GDP and 5.1 percent of South Africa’s manufacturing GDP (not far off that of automotive manufacturing). When all is said and done, this amounts to an export value of over R28.8 billion annually.

In South Africa, approximately 0.4 percent of our country’s landmass is covered by natural forests, while timber plantations cover 1.2 million hectares. Trees are considered renewable, because new trees can be planted to replace those that have been harvested.

Our plantations, along with the natural forests, play a role in curbing climate change. As such, plantations are harvested in cycles with only nine percent of the total being harvested each year.

Wood is also carbon neutral: this means that the tree absorbs more CO₂ in its lifetime than is released when the tree is harvested, transported and processed. As such, wood is seen as a sustainable alternative to concrete and steel in construction. Similarly, using paper bags contributes far less to climate change than plastic.

The timber industry is tasked as a custodian of our few natural forests and 25 percent of the country’s remaining natural forests are conserved on forestry-owned land. The industry is responsible for protecting these areas against invasive species and other biological threats.

Transport in Forestry
The forestry industry makes use of a mix of vehicles to get the logs from the point of harvest to an on-site depot and finally to the mill and onwards. Francois Oberholzer, operations manager at Forestry South Africa, says: “Due to the specialist nature and challenges associated with hauling of raw timber, most plantation owners make use of outsourced transport.”

He explains: “Sometimes, even two ‘transporters’ may be contracted depending on the location and accessibility of the plantation. One may operate the heavy equipment, such as a skid steer, to pull trees from where they are harvested to the depot, where they can be collected by the logging trucks.”

Alternatively, if there are steep roads or areas where it may be difficult to manoeuvre, a transporter may choose to use a mix of vehicles. This may include the use of smaller trucks to transport the logs to a more suitable location for collection.

One of the biggest challenges for the industry is working with a raw material. Oberholzer says: “Transporting timber isn’t like transporting bags of cement where the weight of the product is known.”

The weight of logs varies greatly depending on the age and species of the tree, as well as how much time has passed since it was harvested. Green timber is a lot heavier than timber that has been drying for some time.

Generally, plantations are situated in areas with a high

STEP INTO THE WOODS
STEEP ASCENTS, SHARP ROCKS, SHALE, MUD, DUST AND SAND ARE JUST SOME OF THE OBSTACLES VEHICLES OPERATING IN THE FORESTRY INDUSTRY ENCOUNTER DAILY. WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE INDUSTRY AND WHAT ROLE DOES VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY PLAY? GARTH GREATHHEAD FINDS OUT
Transporting timber isn’t like transporting bags of cement, where the weight of the product is known.

Annual rainfall and, while beneficial to the trees, rain is a challenge for transporters. “Strategic stocks need to be planned in advance to ensure a consistent flow of ‘stock’ when it is raining. This is because the many sand roads on plantations can become unpassable with rain,” advises Oberholzer.

Oberholzer says that transporters in forestry do not have the same flexibility of load when compared to the more run of the mill type of transport. “Our trailers are specially designed to carry logs and possibly sugar cane, but not much else. In addition, because of this limitation, any opportunity to maximise efficiency through back-haul is lost.”

**Technology**

Oberholzer says that 92 of the vehicles registered under the performance-based standard (PBS) specification in South Africa belong to transporters in forestry.

“This brings massive focus to transport operations and has revolutionised the way timber is transported,” asserts Oberholzer. Through the implementation of this programme, the industry has been able to improve safety, increase efficiency and decrease its impact on road infrastructure.

Trailers must be durable and lightweight to maximise the payload, while securing maximum return on investment. Loujie van der Merwe, marketing co-ordinator at Afrit, says: “Customer feedback regarding issues or challenges on the ground are discussed and recorded. These are then taken up with our research and development, or design teams to find solutions and alternatives in product design that bridge these challenges.”

Although on-board weighing systems are not required, these do help to optimise legal loads for transport. “In the long run, hauling full-capacity loads will save fuel, and could reduce other business-related expenses over time.

“On-board weighing systems also cut out the risk of overloading which may result in a fine and downtime at weigh bridges in order to unload and repack.”

“More recently, seasonal work has increased demand for multipurpose trailers, and therefore sugarcane trailers and timber trailers are designed to be easily converted from one to the other. This eliminates the need to purchase a second vehicle while the existing unit goes unused until the next season of use,” explains Van der Merwe.

It’s plain to see that without efficient, reliable and safe transport the forestry industry would not have gained the level of respect it enjoys. Self-regulation, as well as advancements made in the transport of timber, have enabled the industry to overcome many challenges while increasing profitability and sustainability.

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Tyre Pressure Control
Ieter van Zyl, owner of Roodepoort Auto Diagnostic, explains that diagnostic tools are essential in order to understand, maintain and repair modern vehicles. In addition, many service and repair procedures can be performed only with a diagnostic device.

"Modern vehicles have complex modules and sensors which all work on the controller area network (CAN Bus) protocol, whereby binary code is sent between the many sensors and the engine control unit (ECU). These communicate with each other just as a central nervous system does in our bodies," explains Van Zyl.

Van Zyl explains that Obd scanners can help an organisation save money by preventing breakdowns and keeping as much work as possible in house. "Diagnostic tools can retrieve stored data in the form of a fault code, as well as live data about how efficiently an engine is performing."

For example, when it comes to servicing, many diesel engines have diesel particle filters that require active regeneration services, which can be undertaken in house with the right tools. On the other hand, if there is a fault with something like the oxygen or lambda sensors, this will be flagged.

If these issues are not identified, the engine will continue to run rich, wasting fuel and polluting the environment. "Diagnostic tools therefore supply information that can reveal potential problems and prevent expensive repairs or breakdowns down the line," says Van Zyl.

Other parameters that are monitored include ignition timing, fuel-injector performance, working pressure of high- and low-pressure fuel pumps, engine revolutions, air and coolant temperature, crankshaft position and speed.

Before diagnostic tools and software became available, only basic mechanical tests could be performed. There was also a lot of guesswork involved in diagnosing a problem and making an accurate diagnosis was often a case of trial and error.

Van Zyl says: "Today, every system can be monitored, recorded and compared. The computer will also tag each data point to see where there is an abnormality so that the technician can look for problems in a specific system."

**WHAT TO CONSIDER**

Diagnostic software and devices must be compatible with the vehicle mix in order to work optimally. Before investing thousands of rand in diagnostic equipment, it is therefore important to undertake some research, consult others in the industry with similar needs to the operation, and exercise due diligence by shopping around.

It is important to remember that training is an essential part of getting the maximum value from the investment. Van Zyl adds: ‘When purchasing these products it is usually a case of ‘you get what you pay for’. Systems range from those used by original equipment manufacturers to cheap Chinese imports with limited functionality.’

Other suggested steps to take before buying a diagnostic tool include comparing pricing for the technology’s annual software updates, comparing warranties, analysing potential replacement costs and, finally, taking note of the extent of the technical support that will be provided.

In conclusion, diagnostic tools have the capacity to save transporters money through the early identification and rectification of events, as and when they occur. They also simplify the repair process and provide peace of mind for managers, drivers and technicians.
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Trucks you can trust.
Botswana has made railway development a priority. While discussions around developing the Trans-Kalahari Railway Line (TKRL) have been taking place for some time, the country has started taking more concrete steps. Botswana Railways signed a memorandum of understand (MoU) with the Namibian national railway, TransNamib, in January and issued tenders for wagons and locomotives in February.

The TKRL aims to serve two purposes: it will link Botswana with Namibian ports on the Atlantic coast with a railway that will run from Mmamabula to Walvis Bay, as well as from Mmamabula to Lephalale, Limpopo, through a new proposed route to transport coal. The development of the TKRL will be a joint venture by Namibia and Botswana and will cost an estimated US$ 9.5 billion (R137 billion). It is set to complement the existing Trans-Kalahari Corridor (TKC), which links Botswana to the port of Walvis Bay via a 1,900-km route that runs through Windhoek, Namibia, Gaborone, Botswana, and Johannesburg.

The three countries established this route to work towards deeper regional integration. The TKC reportedly cuts out 400 km from the traditional trade routes through southern Namibia to South Africa.

Part of the MoU includes introducing a coal terminal and associated loading facilities at the Namibia-Botswana corridor, which will assist other landlocked Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries like Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

An additional direct route to South Africa is also planned. Logistics Update Africa quotes CEO of Botswana Railways Leonard Makwinhja: “With the ongoing developments of coal mining in the country, the project is becoming more critical.”

The route would need around 60 locomotives and 2,000 wagons to move the coal to Lephalale. In February, Botswana Railways issued a tender for the purchase or leasing of coal wagons and locomotives with bids closing mid-March. This is only one of a number of programmes planned by Transnet and Botswana Railways to unlock the estimated 212-billion tonnes of coal reserves in Botswana.

The direct route will reportedly transport 80-million tonnes of coal to South Africa per annum for domestic use or export. This was agreed in a MoU signed at the Mining Indaba in Cape Town in February.

Some of the programmes are already under way, like the upgrade of the existing railway line from Lephalale to Pyramid South in Pretoria, which will work to unlock both the Waterberg and Botswana coal reserves.

Plans are also in place to upgrade the electrical infrastructure on the coal heavy-haul system and to build a second tunnel at Overvaal in Mpumalanga.

African News Agency (ANA) quotes the chairperson of Botswana Railways, Adolph Hirschfeld: “The railway link from Botswana to South Africa is one of the strategic initiatives that will transform the economy of the SADC region.”

Transnet chairperson Popo Molefe in turn said, as quoted
by ANA: “We will ensure that the South African railway system is capacitated to support the unlocking of both the Waterberg and Botswana coal reserves.”

While these planned routes might assist the region with making coal available, this move towards rail does challenge the road transport industry. If the planned 1 500-km Zimbabwean rail project materialises, it could be an even bigger challenge for road-transport operators.

Zimbabwe has an ambitious goal of becoming the transport and logistics hub for the SADC region with the help of an extensive rail network. In 2016, a MoU was signed with Mozambique and Botswana to build a railway at an estimated cost of US$ 600 million (R8.5 billion), which will link Francistown in Botswana with Bulawayo in Zimbabwe and the port of Technobanne in Mozambique.

Each country is expected to contribute US$ 200 million (R2.8 billion) to the project. When complete, it is expected to move up to 12-million tonnes of goods per year through the three countries. In addition, the project aims to revive some of the Zimbabwean public-transport system by also transporting people.

Both the Zimbabwean rail project and TKRL form part of a bigger vision by Southern African Railways Association (SARA) of restoring railways in the region, and winning back some of the cross-border transport opportunities now mostly dominated by the heavy commercial vehicle sector.

Bongani Nkosi, in an article for The Star, quotes SARA chairperson Stephenson Ngubane, who says: “In southern Africa, we’re looking at rail network expansion so that we reach more areas and that the bulk traffic currently on road comes back to rail.”

Although Ngubane notes that the aim is not to cripple the road-freight industry, this shift will undoubtedly have a big impact, particularly on smaller transport operators.

Part of the motivation is to preserve the roads in the region. Nkosi quotes Ngubane: “We believe that the use of more rail will preserve our roads. Motorists suffer because these trucks create big potholes. Also, roads are expensive to maintain and trucks have more accidents.”

The railway link from Botswana to South Africa is one of the strategic initiatives that will transform the economy of the SADC region.

According to SARA executive director Babe Botana, rail has lost traffic over the years because of a lack of maintenance of infrastructure. Nkosi quotes him as saying: “We’ve realised that over the years there’s been lack of maintenance of the rail infrastructure. There’s been a lot of vandalism, particularly of the signalling and communication infrastructure. We’re now looking at how best to deal with that issue.”

In addition to the Zimbabwean railway project and TKRL, there is also a planned 146-km route between Lothair, Mpumalanga, and Swaziland, with even more to come. Nkosi quotes Zeph Ndlovu, GM at Transnet Freight Rail: “When it comes to railway, we believe we should expand our spread beyond the SADC region – and go right across the African continent.”
Scania to pioneer full-length autonomous buses in Sweden

Scania and Nobina, the largest public-transport operator in the Nordic countries, will start trials of autonomous buses on regular routes in the Stockholm area in 2020.

“The technology is now sufficiently mature to initiate trials in actual bus operations on public roads, making the project one of the first of its kind in Europe with buses this size,” explains Karin Rådström, head of buses and coaches at Scania. “The project will provide a wealth of information in the further development of large autonomous buses before a full-scale introduction.”

The trials will be conducted in two stages, initially without passengers before welcoming commuters onboard. Safety being a top priority throughout the trials, the buses will have a safety-driver to monitor operations and assist passengers.

The two Scania Citywide LF electric buses will connect the rapidly expanding new residential area of Barkarby, approximately 20 km from downtown Stockholm, with a nearby metro station.

The buses will be in service along a new dedicated five-kilometre route with four stops. Initially, approximately one kilometre is planned to be driven autonomously. During the second phase of the trials, it is expected that around 300 passengers will make daily use of this service.

Busworld South East Asia took place in Jakarta last month and it was interesting to discover that one of its exhibitors runs the longest bus rapid transit (BRT) system in the world.

The company in question, TransJakarta, boasts a BRT system measuring 251 km in length. It serves 663 000 passengers a day, who travel across 155 routes (as recently as 2015, a mere 41 routes were on offer). About 189.8-million passengers used the service of TransJakarta last year.

Back in 2015, TransJakarta operated 605 buses; that’s risen to 1 500 and should soon double to 3 000. While the number of routes and buses has changed over the years, the fare hasn’t: it has remained Rp 3 500 (about R3.56) since day one. How we wish that the same held true here.
Van Drivers Break the Law (and Maybe Their Necks Too)

More than half of van drivers in the United Kingdom (UK) have admitted to making calls behind the wheel without using a hands-free device. This is the finding of a research study by Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles. According to the study, van drivers in the UK spend an average of 35 minutes on the phone each day in their vehicles, making an average of seven calls a day. One in ten spend two hours on the phone while driving during the working day.

Since March 2017, driving while using a device – including making calls, texting, taking selfies or posting on social media – has carried a fine of £200 (about R3 800) and a six penalty-point licence endorsement.

Goodyear Focuses on Autonomous Transport

Goodyear is getting up to some seriously cool things! For instance, it has teamed up with Arizona-based Local Motors to conduct tyre testing with an Olli, the brand name of an eight-passenger autonomous shuttle. Local Motors has also selected Goodyear tyres for exclusive fitment on its Olli vehicles.

“Our work on autonomous vehicle projects, such as the Olli, is another mile marker on our journey to future mobility solutions. We learn through pilot programs with leading start-ups, transferring advanced vehicle and ride-sharing data into truly usable and connected information to improve operating performance and benefit customers,” says Chris Helsel, Goodyear’s chief technology officer.

Additionally, in Luxembourg, where it operates one of its two global innovation centres, Goodyear is outfitting three autonomous shuttle buses. The vehicles, operated by bus company Sales-Lentz, will shuttle up to 14 passengers per ride on a variety of local routes.

On the three shuttles, Goodyear tyres are equipped with sensors to collect operational data in the real-world application, which Goodyear engineers and data scientists can use to map predictive maintenance in the UK. Being caught twice can result in the licence being revoked.

However, many van drivers are risking breaking the law by not having a hands-free kit in their vans (23 percent) or failing to use the technology even if their vehicle is fully equipped (33 percent). Just over a quarter (27 percent) said their vehicle was fitted with a hands-free device and they always use it to make phone calls while driving.

I wonder what the equivalent statistics would be in South Africa. Judging by the number of idiots I see on their mobile phones on our roads each day, I suspect that the situation could be even more dire here.
FIRST VOLVO E-TRUCKS DELIVERED TO CUSTOMERS

Last year, I drove Volvo’s new electric trucks and now the first units have been delivered to customers! The vehicles in question are a refuse truck, which was delivered to waste and recycling company Renova, and a distribution truck, which went to the logistics company DB Schenker and partner haulier TGM, operating in Sweden.

The Volvo FL Electric trucks are part of a pre-series developed in collaboration with selected customers. Series production of the Volvo FL Electric and its powerful sibling, the Volvo FE Electric, will commence with a limited number of trucks for the European markets in the second half of 2019.

The drivers who will operate the electric trucks have had the opportunity to test-drive them prior to delivery, as part of the operator training. “The drivers were particularly impressed with the responsive driveline, delivering fast and seamless acceleration, and the low noise level,” says Roger Alm, president Volvo Trucks.

“We will continue to develop our electrified offering. At the same time, we are steadily reducing the environmental and climate impact of our diesel and gas-powered trucks, primarily through energy-efficient drivelines,” he adds.

NISSAN PUTS I2V TECHNOLOGY TO THE TEST

Nissan is testing Invisible-to-Visible (I2V) technology, which helps drivers “see the invisible” – such as what’s farther down the road, behind a building or around the corner.

I first discovered this technology at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January this year, and it’s hugely cool and impressive stuff. Currently being tested at Grandrive, Nissan’s proving ground in Yokosuka, Japan, I2V is a technology that merges the real and virtual worlds.

It combines information from sensors outside and inside the vehicle with data from the cloud, thus helping drivers to “see the invisible”. The test vehicle is based on Nissan’s NV350 Caravan.

I2V also connects drivers and passengers to the Metaverse, a virtual world where people can interact through avatars. Family, friends or others in a remote location can appear inside the car as three-dimensional, augmented-reality avatars to provide company or assistance. Doesn’t it sound amazing? I would love to experience it first-hand!
While Europe’s first-ever CO₂ targets for trucks have been regulated by the European Parliament, the European Automobile Manufacturers’ Association (ACEA) has revealed that there is a severe lack of recharging and refuelling infrastructure suitable for electric and other alternatively powered trucks across the European Union (EU).

In terms of the regulations, CO₂ emissions must be reduced by 15 percent by 2025 and 30 percent by 2030. According to ACEA, the baseline for the targets is still unknown (which is somewhat odd).

According to ACEA, in other to meet these CO₂ targets, at least 6 000 high-power charging points for electric trucks (DC >500 kW) will be needed along EU motorways by 2025/30. In addition, another 20 000 “regular” charging points suitable for trucks are required – bringing the total to 26 000.

“The shocking fact is that there is not one single public charging point for long-haul trucks available today,” ACEA secretary general Erik Jonnaert tells FOCUS. “What is more, a standard for the required high-power plugs doesn’t exist yet.”

Although high-power charging points are being rolled out for electric passenger cars along motorways, heavy-duty trucks cannot use this infrastructure, because of their much higher power and energy demand. Then, of course, there is the many parking spots they would need for charging along all major routes in Europe.

Similarly, hydrogen filling stations for cars are not suitable for trucks, given that the pressure storage is too small to meet truck demand. Some 1 000 truck-specific hydrogen stations will be needed by 2025/30, but less than ten are available across the entire EU today – and none of those are suitable for long-haul trucks.

Truck-specific public filling stations for compressed natural gas (CNG) and liquefied natural gas (LNG) are currently present in some EU member states, but their distribution is still very patchy across Europe and the number of stations remains low. So, right now, things are looking horribly messy in Europe.
TEST, DON’T GUESS – A NEW VEHICLE FLUIDS TEST SYSTEM

Best known for its ATE brand, Alfred Teves Brake Systems has introduced to South Africa the Fluid RX Diagnostics Six-spot Fleet Test Card. The card is designed to aid in testing the condition of various automotive lubricants.

These include engine oil of both diesel and petrol motors; manual, automatic and continuously variable transmission fluids; differential and transfer-case oil; power-steering fluid and brake fluid.

Although all these fluids contain additives that prolong their life, these additives eventually deplete and the fluid begins to degrade.

The degraded fluids affect lubrication and can clog passageways, increasing friction, heat and wear – often leading to lower efficiency, acid build up and corrosion, increased maintenance and operating costs, as well as shorter component life.

With the Fluid RX Diagnostics Six-spot Fleet Test Card, the extent of additive depletion and level of sludge or debris build up in a lubricant can be easily measured. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) approved diagnostic chart shows how each fluid appears at various stages of depletion, with an easy to understand interpretation of the readings obtained in minutes.

TWO IN A ROW FOR HINO SHELLY BEACH

Hino Shelly Beach, a member of the Halfway Group, has won the 2018 Hino Truck Dealer of the Year award for the second consecutive year – and the company is planning to make it three in a row in 2019.

“Our philosophy is to make sure every single customer is happy, and then awards such as Dealer of the Year will follow,” says Gansen Chetty, team leader at the dealership.

“We were also very proud to be runners-up in the truck section of the Toyota Financial Services Awards,” he adds. “Our major project in 2018 was setting up a Grade A Certificate of Fitness roadworthy testing facility, and I am pleased to say we are now being certified. When this phase is completed, we will be able to offer an important, additional benefit to our customers.”

Chetty says his team is virtually unchanged from the combination that won the 2017 Dealer of the Year award, except for two additional technicians, who had come through the ranks in the company, further strengthening the service department.

“I am transparent with the team members about all aspects of our business and believe in ‘walking the talk’ with them by having daily meetings with the parts and service staff and getting together once a week with the sales team.

“We know that there is always room for improvement, and we encourage all our staff to continue to come up with suggestions to further improve the services they offer to our customers. To this end, we have ongoing training programmes that involve all our staff. Going forward, we will continue to be different, but in better ways.

“We owe everything to our customers and always strive for 100-percent ratings from them in the quarterly Comparative Customer Experience surveys.

“We are fortunate in having a devoted and professional team at the Hino South Africa head office in Sandton, who provide us with excellent support. In addition, we have the full backing of the Halfway Group, especially from the chairman, George Baikie, and the financial director, Rob Newton,” Chetty concludes.
Barloworld Group has announced a strategic decision to merge its Automotive and Logistics divisions – a move that, it says, will leverage the assets and capabilities of the two divisions.

“The new change brings about the opportunity to strengthen the Group’s core capabilities, while optimising its existing portfolio to ensure sustained value creation, drive intergroup synergies and provide integrated solutions offerings,” the company states.

Vehicle telematics and tracking services provider, Ctrack, has introduced Ctrack Iris, a high-quality, customisable video-monitoring solution that is ideal for anything from rental and fleet vehicles to light deliveries, heavy commercials, general machinery and buses.

The new video solution from Ctrack combined with a tracking device can improve vehicle route optimisation, increase load frequency and hasten turnaround times. The number of side or back cameras used can be specified by individual customers. Video footage can be recorded in eight quality settings up to 1080p, while live, real-time video streaming can be viewed on mobile devices.

Apart from the cameras, the solution is further equipped with rear-door triggers, a lockable video device, two-way communication system, fatigue and advanced driver-assistance system monitoring, and an on-board/reverse screen. GPS, Wi-Fi, 3G and accelerometer modules can also be included.

Ctrack Iris is supported by web-based, desktop software and a password-protected mobile application. These platforms provide geofence and point-of-interest information, live tracking and video and dashboard event management.

The new integrated division will be led by Kamogelo Mmutlana, the CEO of the Logistics Division. Mmutlana proved his leadership in turning around the Logistics Division. He has senior business executive experience in industrial, automotive and food services, among others.

Charl Groenewald will take over the Logistics division as chief executive, reporting to Mmutlana. Groenewald is a seasoned and well-rounded executive with well over 24 years of experience within Barloworld Equipment.

With Ctrack Iris, fleet owners can also reduce the number of insurance claims they submit, and settle the claims they do submit much faster. Iris can also be used to lower fuel consumption and improve vehicle maintenance through better driving, while also reducing diesel and goods-in-transit theft.

By monitoring crew activities, it is possible to improve and enforce company processes and procedures and reduce theft, pilferage and stock damage.

“Ctrack supplies monitoring equipment that is made with high-quality components. Its video unit models are best in class, which results in minimum downtime and system maintenance. Ultimately, Ctrack Iris is a sustainable, long-term video tracking solution of the highest order,” comments Hein Jordt, MD of Ctrack.
SCA INTRODUCES INTERMODAL TIPPER BINS

Specialised Container Agencies (SCA), a supplier of niche-market container products, has developed an intermodal side-tipper bin designed for use in both road and rail transport applications, which removes the need for investment in double handling of cargo.

“In areas that are not fully serviced by rail, the intermodal side tipper can be loaded onto trucks for closed-loop, short-haul transport by road. The trucks carry the tipper bin, containing bulk material, to the railhead. This means cargo can be received at non-rail serviced facilities, for example on mines, terminals and ports,” explains Ken Mouritzen, director of SCA.

The intermodal side-tipper bins can be easily handled onto trucks and container rail wagons by a container handler. They have been designed for rapid and efficient off-loading of materials from both trucks and rail wagons, using specially designed hydraulic tipping cylinders.

“SCA’s intermodal tipper bins ensure quick, safe and cost-efficient bulk handling in rail and road applications. What’s notable is that this intermodal side-tipper bin system increases payload on rail wagons from 54 to 60 metric tonnes. A single tipper bin is able to hold 30 metric tonnes for road transport,” Mouritzen notes.

He adds that, for the transporter, benefits of using intermodal side-tipper bins are lower operating costs, minimal cargo loss and product integrity during transport (thanks to weather-proof tarpaulins). Advantages also include cost-efficient, easy handling of bulk; improved safety for drivers, vehicles and cargo; as well as reduced insurance premiums.

The bins are designed to be stacked two-high for storage.

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SALES REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2019

Note: For the time being, Mercedes-Benz SA (MBSA) will only report aggregated sales data. The MBSA commercial vehicle market split volumes are estimates based on historical trends and forecasting techniques.

### Light Commercial Vehicles < 3 501 kg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fiat Chrysler Automobiles South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ford Motor Company</td>
<td>2 622</td>
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<tr>
<td>GWM</td>
<td>1 456</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hyundai Automotive SA</td>
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<td>JMC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kia South Africa</td>
<td>1 137</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mahindra</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mazda South Africa</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mercedes-Benz SA – estimate</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mitsubishi</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nissan</td>
<td>1 044</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peugeot Citroën South Africa</td>
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<td>Renault</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suzuki Auto</td>
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<td>5 339</td>
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Total: 14 123

### Medium Commercial Vehicles 3 501 – 8 500 kg

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<td>Mercedes-Benz SA – estimate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peugeot Citroën South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerstar</td>
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<td>Tata</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toyota</td>
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<tr>
<td>VECV South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volkswagen SA</td>
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Total: 662

### Heavy Commercial Vehicles 8 501 – 16 500 kg

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<td>FAW</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Toyota</td>
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<td>VECV South Africa</td>
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<tr>
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Total: 385

### Extra-Heavy Commercial Vehicles > 16 500 kg

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<tr>
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<td>Iveco</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mercedes-Benz SA – estimate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerstar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tata</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volvo Group Southern Africa</td>
<td>321</td>
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Total: 1 007

### Buses > 8 500 kg

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<tbody>
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<td>Scania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tata</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volvo Group Southern Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 74

*Source: National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa (Naamsa).*
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MARCOPOLLO LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

MARCOPOLLO SOUTH AFRICA RECENTLY LAUNCHED ITS NEW-GENERATION TORINO, ANDARE AND PARADISO BUSES AND COACHES – AS WELL AS A PROJECT THAT IS A FIRST FOR MARCOPOLLO ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD... GAUVIN MYERS FINDS OUT MORE

Judging by the number of guests at the launch – there were about 500, most of which were operators, while many were from other African countries – Marcopolo has grown in leaps and bounds in the 23 years it has been present on the continent. During that time, more than 5 500 buses have been built in South Africa and supplied to right-hand-drive African markets. The left-hand-drive markets of Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya are supported from here as well.

Judging by the reactions of those operators when the new Torino commuter, Andare FL semi-lux and Paradiso G7 FL coach were revealed, there’s a lot of love for Marcopolo products on this continent...

Key features of the new Torino and Andare FL (both of which are built locally) include striking new front and rear domes with new head- and tail lights; new bonnets and dashes; new material colours; and on the Torino new parcel shelves and aluminium side panels. The Paradiso G7 FL continues to be imported from Brazil before being mounted onto local chassis.

Changes to this new-generation coach are substantial and include striking new front and rear domes with new head- and tail lights; new bonnets and dashes; new material colours; and on the Torino new parcel shelves and aluminium side panels. The Paradiso G7 FL continues to be imported from Brazil before being mounted onto local chassis.

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"Over the years, we have localised and designed these models for Africa, with specific structural elements to cope with the conditions in these markets," comments Mikel Ecenarro, general manager of Marcopolo South Africa.

"We believe these new vehicles are a game changer. Operators want the latest models to give their passengers the best experience; the novelties we bring to the market are always welcome. We believe these new models will help us increase our market share," he adds.

Ecenarro points out that Marcopolo has the goal of becoming the “preferred bus bodybuilder in Africa”. This will, however require more than just new product, which is why the company has announced it is moving from being a product developer that sells an operator an asset, to a solution provider that is a long-term partner...

With this, the company has launched the Marcopolo Services (MPS) business unit. The first of its kind in the world for Marcopolo, MPS seeks to create extra services that add value throughout the 15- to 20-year lifecycle of the bus for the operator. The main idea behind it is to leave everything to do with the vehicle’s body to Marcopolo, so operators can focus on their core business.

"An operator’s business is not to take care of buses. We want to join forces with them as a partner that will cover everything related to the vehicle’s body with the original Marcopolo stamp. We really believe that this will add value to the market: operators should focus more on running their businesses and less on worrying about their assets," Ecenarro comments.

Should the project prove to be successful, there’s a chance it may be expanded to other global markets in which Marcopolo plays. Judging by the brand’s success in Africa, there’s little doubt it will be. ☞
**SOUTH AFRICA'S PREMIER OCCUPATIONAL RISK MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE**

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The disappointment in South African’s BRT systems was realised as early as 2016 when the Cape Town MyCiTi service made headlines for the R52-million deficit it faced for the 2016/17 financial year. The same year, the city spent and estimated R278 million subsidising the service.

In 2017, Sipho Mabena, in an article for *Times Live*, quoted then transport minister Joe Maswanganyi: “We are acknowledging as the Department of Transport (DoT) that there are challenges with BRT systems.” At that point, around R5 billion has been spent on implementing BRT systems in the three Gauteng metros.

Possibly the biggest challenge is the lack of urban density, which translates to fewer commuters travelling longer distances. MyCiTi, arguably the most successful South African BRT system, moves around 75,000 passengers a day, or around 3,750 passengers an hour if operating for 20 hours a day.

Colombia sees 45,000 commuters per hour per direction. Although the Latin American BRT systems acted as a blueprint for local services, the outcome couldn’t be more different.

During a 2018 Transport Forum event, Ibrahim Seedat, public transport policies director at the DoT, noted: “Tshwane should never have launched its BRT system in 2014. You cannot launch a bus service if you are projecting 8,000 passengers a day. They’re running at 3,000 to 4,000 commuters, which isn’t even a taxi service.”

The cost of operating a BRT system is the second challenge. Roger Behrens, associate professor in the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Cape Town, notes: “Probably the biggest challenge is operating cost. Far from eliminating or significantly reducing operating subsidies, as was hoped a decade ago, the BRT services that have reached implementation have required considerable operating subsidies.”

The Latin American systems operate without any subsidy. It was hoped that local services would have a similar outcome. However, in 2015, the cost recovery was only 30 percent for Rea Vaya and 40 percent for MyCiTi. Some of the subsidies were paid by national grants, but others were the responsibility of the metropolitan municipalities, which placed a tremendous strain on budgets.

Despite the unrealised vision, some argue that the money is the less important question. Instead, government should be considering the return on investment of the BRT systems.

Gary Hayes, transport researcher at the Centre for Transport Development at the University of Pretoria, and...
subsidising of public transport according to behrens. There are also economic arguments to support the reduced congestion and a better, healthier environment. transport, better mobility for children and non-car users, larger contribution to the good functioning of a city.”

“However the time may be right to rethink our approach to mass transit in South Africa, including how we plan, design and fund it.”

Venter explains: “It is not possible for government to make BRT ‘profitable’ in the sense that the systems are able to cover their own costs from user fares. The spatial patterns of our cities in South Africa are such that all our public transport systems operate under difficult conditions, including long travel distances and very little use during off-peak periods.

“As a result, buses are not used very effectively. Cost recovery shouldn’t necessarily be the goal of public transport systems – at least not those that are to make a larger contribution to the good functioning of a city.”

Subsidised transport often translates in more affordable transport, better mobility for children and non-car users, reduced congestion and a better, healthier environment. There are also economic arguments to support the subsidising of public transport according to Behrens.

“These include to address market failure and provide uneconomical services that are essential for the functioning of the city economy; to promote equity and welfare; and to create the so-called ‘Mohring effect’, which argues that the more users there are, the more useful the system is,” he says.

Venter argues that if the goal is to provide subsidy-free transport, we would have to rely on the informal minibus-taxi industry, which comes with reduced safety and user satisfaction.

“The key question is thus not whether we should be subsidising BRT, but if we are getting enough benefit for what we are spending,” he notes. “I believe BRT systems are part of the solution of the future, but several things should be done to improve their benefits.”

The BRT systems are already built and can’t be completely abandoned. Instead, it is important for government to consider alternatives to revive interest in the concept and raise money. The first approach might be to increase fares, but this would be a mistake as Hayes and Venter point out.

“Cities have relatively little room for growing revenues by raising fares. A 2017 study showed that BRT demand in Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Tshwane is very fare sensitive. Higher fares would also further curtail BRT use by the poorest passengers, who are already underrepresented, thus further limiting its impact on social equity and poverty,” they say.

Instead, government can think of creative ways to attract more passengers. First of which would be to increase population density near the BRT corridors. Hayes and Venter explain: “Densities around BRT corridors can be improved by accelerating the co-location of housing and BRT routes, such as is already happening to a limited extent in Johannesburg’s Corridors of Freedom initiative.”

They further point out that the current systems should be integrated with other existing public transport systems including minibus taxis and e-hailing services like Uber. A good approach to this is introducing a common cashless fare system for easy transfer.

“Inelligent integration of (upgraded) minibus taxis into the public network could greatly expand the number of people benefiting from the upgrading of public transport,” Hayes and Venter explain. “Some cities, such as Cape Town, are already exploring minibus integration into a ‘hybrid BRT model’ as a way of reducing operating costs to keep the city’s contribution within the four-percent cap.”

The time may be right to rethink our approach to mass transit in South Africa.

This hybrid system might be easier to implement than most cities suspect. “While undoubtedly requiring quality-of-service improvements, minibus-taxi services offer considerable benefits with respect to demand responsiveness and service viability that should not be lost,” Behrens notes.

“Current research done by PhD student Chris Plano suggests that a complementary hybrid system can be created without extensive revision of the existent minibus-taxi business model and at reasonable cost to the public sector,” he adds.

There might not be an alternative for the minibus-taxi industry, as it will soon face disruptive technologies. “E-hailing initiatives in the paratransit sector are mushrooming across sub-Saharan Africa (for example Kenya’s BuuPass) and further afield ‘mobility-as-a-service’ solutions are also emerging rapidly,” Behrens explains.

With a more integrated system, the buses and minibuses can both be provided with dedicated lanes to improve service reliability and operating speed. This will make the services even more appealing.

Behrens also calls for a revision and update such as the 2007 Public Transport Strategy “so that city authorities have more flexibility and better guidance on how to reform their public transport networks”.

Hayes and Venter suggest alternative transport-related revenue sources such as charging for congestion and parking levies. Although unpopular, these alternatives can help motivate residents to opt for public transport and generate more funding to subsidise existing public transport services. F
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