

Alphabet

FLEETWORLD

AlphaCity
editorial coverage
Nov 2016 / Nov 2017



BMW 116d AlphaCity

FOLLOWING the expansion of the office-based team and the subsequent upswing in demand for pool car access, Fleet World signed a contract with Alphabet for an AlphaCity Corporate CarSharing vehicle in early October.

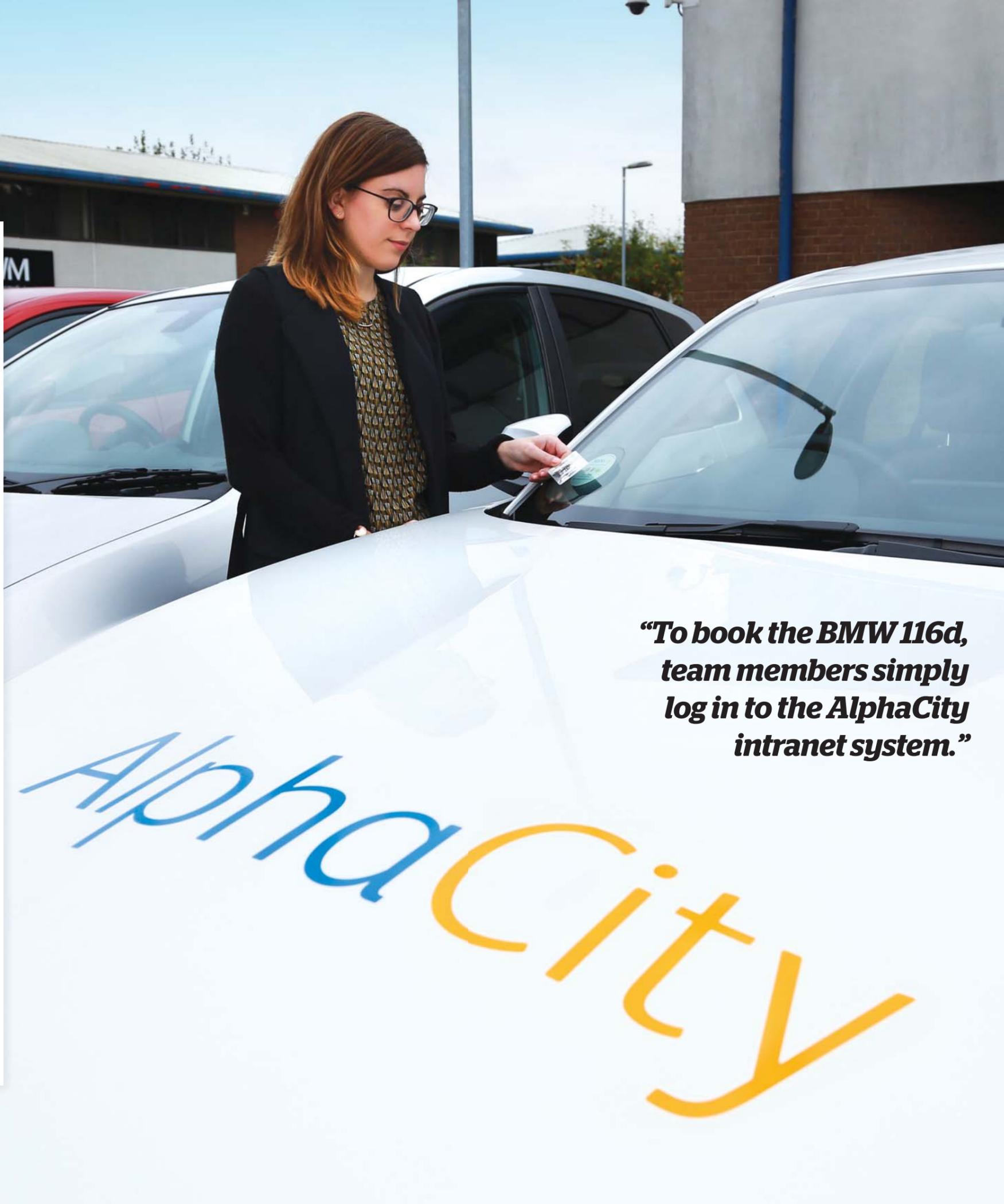
The vehicle was delivered to our offices by car sharing and eMobility manager Daniel St Claire and car sharing and eMobility executive Mike Bristow, who gave a short presentation on how to use the booking system and the capabilities of the software. Ahead of the visit, each qualifying team member registered with AlphaCity by providing their personal details, driving licence number and a memorable four-digit PIN. Upon arrival, Bristow and St Claire presented each team member with their personalised credit card-sized Membership Card containing an embedded ICC chip.

To book the vehicle, team members simply log in to the AlphaCity intranet system using their registered email and password. From here, the user can see a complete overview of the availability of the vehicle for the coming weeks or months. When an available slot is selected, the booking is confirmed by email and can be cross-referenced with the user's Outlook calendar for easy overview. It is not possible for these bookings to be overridden by another user by mistake, and a booking can only be cancelled by the driver that made the reservation for added security.

As there is currently only one AlphaCity car on our fleet, the potential for 'no show' bookings is something the team are keen to avoid. Bristow explained that a reminder text message is sent 15 minutes before the start of the reservation period, and that the booking is automatically cancelled if the user has not entered the vehicle 30 minutes after the hire start time. The car is then made immediately available, reducing downtime and avoiding the frustration of a vehicle standing empty because of an unneeded booking.

Vehicle access is keyless, and St Claire demonstrated how to unlock the vehicle at the start of a booking by holding the Membership Card over a small ICC chip reader on the windscreen. Once inside, the driver punches their PIN into the central infotainment screen to confirm their identity, and is required to answer a series of short quality control questions about the interior and exterior of the vehicle, with serious concerns relayed directly to the AlphaCity help centre. Once satisfied with the vehicle the rental period is activated, and with a press of the Start button the user is ready to take to the road.

Katie Beck



“To book the BMW 116d, team members simply log in to the AlphaCity intranet system.”



our fleet

Land Rover Discovery Sport 2.0 TD4 HSE Luxury 180hp Auto



IT feels like Christmas has come early with the arrival of our new Land Rover Discovery Sport long term.

If I was still putting pen to paper for Santa, then many of the key features of the baby Disco would be on my list: seven-seat versatility with a fairly compact footprint, a premium badge, competitive pricing and strong driving dynamics.

And although it's nearly two years since the model was launched, we've benefited from the time gap. For fleets, the appeal of the Discovery Sport, which replaced the Freelander, was slightly blunted at launch as it was only available with the 2.2-litre SD4 diesel engine. This has now been replaced with a 2.0-litre, four-cylinder Ingenium diesel covering two outputs: the 148bhp E-Capability (Land Rover's badging for its most economical models) and the 178bhp model on test here.

With 129g/km and combined mpg of

57.7, the lower-powered engine is the most economical for company car drivers but it's not available with seven seats, so it loses what it gains in my eyes.

Instead we've got the 178bhp version with its 139g/km and 53.3mpg; competitive enough figures when you take into account its four-wheel drive capabilities - which come as standard across the range - and a 1,884kg kerb weight.

Our test model also comes in HSE Luxury trim, which features a wealth of kit that we look forward to testing over the next six months.

Natalie Middleton

the figures

OTR PRICE
£43,400

POWER
180hp @ 4,000rpm

TORQUE
317lbft @ 1,750rpm

0-62mph
8.4 seconds

TOP SPEED
117mph

COMBINED MPG
53.3mpg

CO₂
139g/km (19% BIK)

Alphacity BMW116d

I have to admit, I was a little sceptical about relying upon a key card, controlled remotely, when you're potentially 150 miles from the office, in the middle of nowhere and really don't want to be stranded. But a month into our time with the AlphaCity BMW has convinced me (and the rest of the team in the office) that this is the way forward.

Having experienced one little glitch early on, which I'm ashamed to say was down to OE (operator error) on my part, it's been pretty much plain sailing. The online booking system is easy enough for even the most technophobic employee to navigate around and as

long as the instructions and the right process is followed...ahem... it's simply a brilliant way to keep staff - who would otherwise be using their own cars. The car's connectivity is great too.

Luke Wikner



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our fleet

Audi Q2 S line 1.4 TFSI CoD S-tronic



AUDI had a busy 2016 with model launches and, while you could argue that it's evolutionary in its design, sales growth among the UK's biggest brands is hard to argue with. The Q2 crossover, its only all-new nameplate last year, is a reminder that Ingolstadt can do 'different' when it wants to.

Smaller than the A3, larger than the A1, and taller than both, with straight-edged boxiness that an original Quattro would envy (guess what its head designer has in the garage) and a range starting at just over £20,000, it's an Audi aimed at a younger customer base than the brand's average. Tech-savvy young urban families with a taste for bold colours and striking design. People like me, I guess.

There are some interesting whole-life cost stories amongst the Q2 line-up, so we've not opted for the usual diesel engine. Ours has a 148bhp turbocharged 1.4-litre petrol with a seven-speed S tronic transmission; at low loads it'll shut off two of its cylinders, or 'coast' with the engine decoupled to save fuel. Factors which - at 123g/km - make this an interesting alternative to the equivalent 2.0-litre TDI, while undercutting 1.6-litre TDI.

Early impressions are good; in S line spec and with a few options ticked, it hardly feels like a cut-down option, and it's an agile, lively little car to drive. It'll be interesting to see how it fares with family-hauling and motorway-cruising months ahead.

Alex Grant

Alphacity BMW 116d



IT'S early days for our AlphaCity car and, like a lot of businesses taking their first steps as customers, we're getting used to the change in regime that it's brought compared to grey fleet miles or hiring a car for ad-hoc meetings. Not everything has been plain sailing.

For the most part, that's been a case of familiarising ourselves with the way it works. Bookings are first come, first served, via a web portal. It's relatively straightforward to use, and there's no key to lose between trips as it unlocks via each driver's key card and starts with a push button, costs are then charged to whichever part of the business is using the car. So the concept works well.

Actually, the biggest problem we've faced so far has been

its popularity. We've got three editorial and commercial teams sharing the BMW and, as there is only one pool car at the office, the inevitable clashes have caused some re-arranging of meetings. It's an extra component to pre-plan.

Some have also found the keyless access tricky. Alphabet offers a 24-hour call centre service and we can get advice whenever we want about it, but using the card is generally straightforward. It's just the same as when keys changed from those you poke in the ignition to remote ones. Everyone, with years of experience of doing it one way, just got spooked by the new technology. So I think it won't take too long before the process becomes ingrained and natural with the card system.

Logan van der Poel-Treacy

Land Rover Discovery Sport 2.0 TD4 HSE Luxury 180hp Auto



OUR long-term Discovery Sport has settled in well over the winter months. Its boot capacity of up to 1,698 litres has been put to good use over the festive season along with its seven-seater capabilities, which are much better than those of the Freelander.

With the colder conditions seen in recent weeks, the heated front windscreen has proved a godsend although the wires can make it harder to see when driving straight into lower winter sun - this is few and far between though and the fast demisting is appreciated. So are the heated seats, which come with three temperature levels and the option of whether to heat the seat back, squabs or both - given the current weather conditions, I'm yet to try the cooling option though.

I'm also really happy with the choice of the higher-powered 178bhp diesel for our test model - its moderately higher emissions and reduced fuel economy are worth the payoff in terms of performance. However, on the downside four-wheel drive is offered as standard on both engines; a fact that might deter some fleet buyers. Yet this is a highly refined and well performing engine with good low-down torque. It's also notably quiet and smooth at speed.

My only issue so far has been, as you would expect, a DFP filter warning after about 10 days of mainly urban driving but a quick trip along the dual carriageway soon dispelled that.

One thing I'm yet to try though despite the favourable cold conditions is the Discovery Sport's extensive offroad skills - and there's plenty to report back on here.

Natalie Middleton

Mazda CX-3 1.5d SE-L Nav

ABSENCE, I'm told, makes the heart grow fonder. I've come to appreciate that these last few weeks - a short break in Ireland and the use of another car has reminded me, late into our time with the CX-3, just how strong a product it is.

Call me frivolous, but some of that is down to a pair of buttons on the dashboard. Some of the Fleet World team have argued that heated seats are a luxury, but I disagree. Plunging temperatures and those bracing few minutes before the blowers start moving warm air around the cabin sufficiently are the moments where anything without heated seats starts to feel a bit lacking. For someone like me, with a short trip to work, they're a necessity. So kudos to Mazda for including them on a compact crossover.

Also, I can totally understand the downsizing argument. Our CX-3 is a little shorter overall than a conventional C-segment hatch, but loses almost nothing. From the driver's seat, it's got the confidence and visibility of something bigger. And what it lacks in litre capacity - which isn't much - it makes up for in terms of its versatile load space. It's a hugely appealing all-rounder.

Anne Dopson

Skoda Superb SE L Executive Greenline III Estate

IT is rare that I am as reluctant as I am to see a car return at the end of its time with us. After over 9,000 miles, I'm in no hurry to see the Superb estate go. Its comfort and space are practically unrivalled in a car at this price. As a long distance cruiser with space for five adults, it is hard to beat with one aboard, or filled with passengers and luggage.

The last month has brought about a rare need - to lift the bonnet. First there was a warning displayed on the small screen in front of the driver, suggesting that I check the oil level. That's a rare occurrence these days and I thought to myself that not every fleet driver would know how to do it. It took a little persuasion to unseat the dipstick, but it showed that oil was indeed needed. The warning has now disappeared, but was fairly quickly followed by another indicating that AdBlue, the additive needed for many Euro 6 compliant diesels, also needed replenishing.

So far, I have yet to see an AdBlue dispenser on a fuel forecourt, other than those with commercial vehicle pumps. That means a trip to the dealer, garage shop or accessory shop. I bought a 10-litre top-up pack from Halfords, which comes with a screw-on spout designed to fit inside the AdBlue filler neck, located next to the fuel filler, to avoid spillage. It takes time and patience to complete as well as a little weight lifting, but does permit completely spill-free filling.

Given my mileage, I managed to cover around 8,500 miles before the warning appeared. It's one not to ignore too. If you let AdBlue reserves drop to very low levels, the car will eventually immobilise itself after further warnings. AdBlue is cheaper than the fix that would be needed.

John Kendall



Mini Clubman One D

It seems pretty churlish when you have a car like MINI's Clubman One D - which would otherwise be a perfect fit for my lifestyle - to complain about the colour. This is, after all, a completely subjective thing, but to my mind, the Blazing Red of our long-termer does the car no visual favours whatsoever. It's metallic but you wouldn't really know it, unless in blazing sunlight and is definitely the poor relation compared to the Volcanic Orange available.

Colour foibles aside... what a great car. After a few discussions in the office here, we've concluded that it's easily one of the best of the MINI stable to drive, offering composure when it needs to but still retaining the sharp steering and nimble feel of its (slightly) smaller siblings. And on the subject of size, you only have to look at an original Mini compared to the models that came out around 2002 and then again at the 2012 updated models, to see that MINIs are becoming rather maxi.

This was no bad thing on a New Year's adventure to the Brecon Beacons recently, when the - admittedly still not huge - boot came into play. In fact, one of the best features of the new Clubman is the centre-split rear doors, which can be activated from the key-fob. This may smack of laziness but when your hands are invariably filled with stuff to fill the boot with, these things matter. One of the door hinges was a little sticky at one point but WD-40 soon sorted that out.

And the Clubman's comfort extends to the front seats as well - beautifully wrapped in grey tweed-type material (it's far nicer than it sounds), and possessed of the very best and quickest heated seats I've ever encountered. High up in Wales in early January is rarely warm but these made getting back in the MINI an absolute pleasure.

In fact, the whole experience of running the Clubman One D is a pleasure. The engine is still practically brand new, so the 72.4mpg that's claimed might be hard to achieve at present but I'll be doing my best for future reports. And as for the car's connectivity - why can't all manufacturers make a phone/sat-nav interface as intuitive as BMW and MINI...? More on that next time...

Luke Wikner



Ensto Chago Station



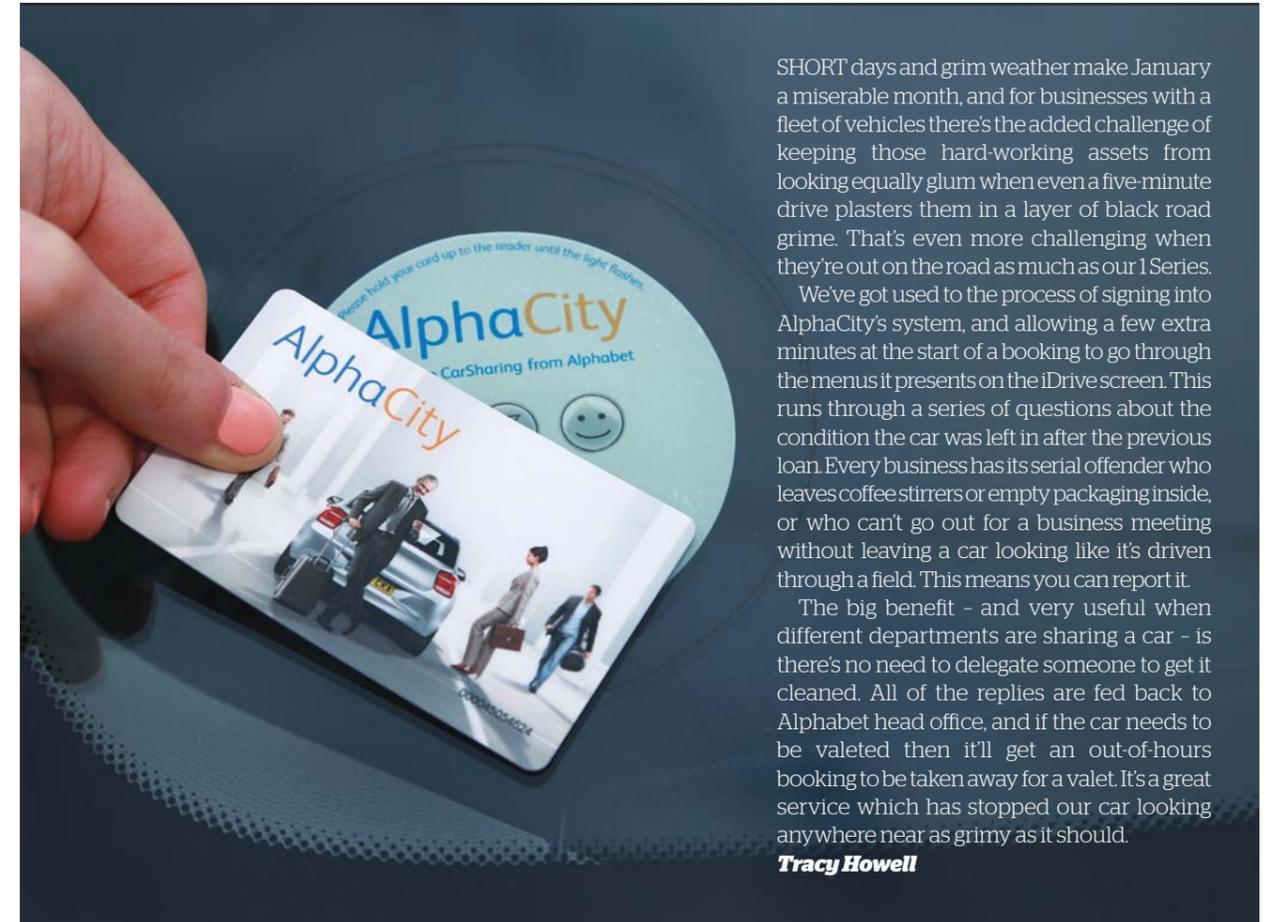
WE'VE had a full 12 months with our charging point on site now, and it's a genuine asset. A stop-off that's enabled us to accommodate two long-term electric cars and a series of short-term loans spanning plug-in hybrids and everything from the smallest superminis to a Tesla Model S.

It makes a huge difference, whether that's removing the need to trail a cable into the loading bay to use a plug socket, or make a trip to a public charger for a short top-up. Being able to open it with the RFID keyfob - or via the web portal - on arrival, plug in and leave it running has enabled much easier usage of EVs and could soon allow us to have an electric pool car too.

Of course, this is now a move that's even easier to justify. Given that there's more than two years to claim a 100% first-year allowance on charging equipment for companies with electric vehicles on fleet, now is absolutely the time to make that jump.

Alex Grant

AlphaCity BMW 116d



SHORT days and grim weather make January a miserable month, and for businesses with a fleet of vehicles there's the added challenge of keeping those hard-working assets from looking equally glum when even a five-minute drive plasters them in a layer of black road grime. That's even more challenging when they're out on the road as much as our 1 Series.

We've got used to the process of signing into AlphaCity's system, and allowing a few extra minutes at the start of a booking to go through the menus it presents on the iDrive screen. This runs through a series of questions about the condition the car was left in after the previous loan. Every business has its serial offender who leaves coffee stirrers or empty packaging inside, or who can't go out for a business meeting without leaving a car looking like it's driven through a field. This means you can report it.

The big benefit - and very useful when different departments are sharing a car - is there's no need to delegate someone to get it cleaned. All of the replies are fed back to Alphabet head office, and if the car needs to be valeted then it'll get an out-of-hours booking to be taken away for a valet. It's a great service which has stopped our car looking anywhere near as grimy as it should.

Tracy Howell

Mazda CX-3 1.5d SE-L Nav

Time flies! We're rapidly approaching the end of our year with the CX-3, and I'm finding myself considering what might suit me as a replacement. This will be a very hard act to follow.

There's yet to be a moment where I've found it's unsuitable for my needs. It's a thoroughly accomplished motorway car, which is a good start, with great seats, excellent ride quality and an engine which seems to run on thin air. Small cars have become increasingly sophisticated over the years, this one travels better than some bigger models I've had in the past.

But it still has the advantages of being small. Space is at a premium at the Fleet World office and, when we've got a full house for meetings, it's useful to know there's always a slot big enough to accommodate the Mazda. It's been a genuinely handy all-rounder, really. Never challenging to tuck into small parallel spaces, but also never too small to carry everything I need inside. The CX-3 is competing for a slice of a segment that's growing rapidly in Europe, and it's not hard to see why it's been so popular.

Anne Dopson



Audi Q2 S line 14 TFSI CoD S-tronic



"IT'S really nice in here," my Dad commented from the passenger seat of our Q2. "How much does one of these cost?" For all the changes that have affected the way we choose a new car, there's never been a substitute for the old 'bums-on-seats' test. And the Q2 scores well.

Great cabins are an Audi forte. Most of the Q2's is shared with the A3, though without the intricate rocket booster air vents, and there's a feeling of precision engineering throughout. None of this would feel out of place in a car costing twice as much.

The £1,600 'Virtual Cockpit' digital instrument cluster, an option fitted to our car, is high on the wow factor too. While it's not an essential, I've got used to having the navigation just below my line of sight, or having a route overview to glance at on the journey home. It's a much more logical place to show this sort of information than the middle of the dashboard - sadly the often-redundant central infotainment display doesn't fold away when it's not needed.

Less logical is the volume control knob, which is in front of the gearstick. I assume it's so it's within easy reach of the driver, but I've lost track of the number of times people have given the passenger-side climate control knob a twist instead.

Not that such details put my parents off. A 200-mile round trip in the Q2 had them in an Audi dealer looking into getting their own, and discovering that the A3 feels every bit as pleasant when you're behind the wheel. They'll have a Sportback in the same spec by the time you read this, sold almost entirely on being impressed by the cabin of its sibling. But it really is very nice inside the Q2.

Alex Grant

MINI Clubman One D

LAST month, we touched upon the intuitive entertainment system and the last 30 days have done nothing to diminish my admiration for its user-friendly controls. Everything from the way you can easily find phone contacts without faffing and pressing lots of buttons, to a sat nav system that's similarly easy to use, makes driving the Clubman to an unfamiliar destination on unfamiliar roads as relaxing as possible.

If we were nitpicking, the controls for quickly flicking through the menu mean the uninitiated have to take their eyes off the road, but it's a minor gripe in an otherwise very well thought out package.

Also, on the - admittedly minor, but slightly annoying nonetheless - issue of the sticking rear door last month, it's got stuck again. Perhaps my WD-40 plan was not as permanent as I initially thought, and it probably wouldn't be such an issue if the Clubman's boot aperture wasn't so shallow, for loading and unloading.

It says something about a car though if these are the most negative things to note, and it seems to attract compliments wherever it goes.

Luke Wikner



Mazda CX-3 1.5d SE-L Nav

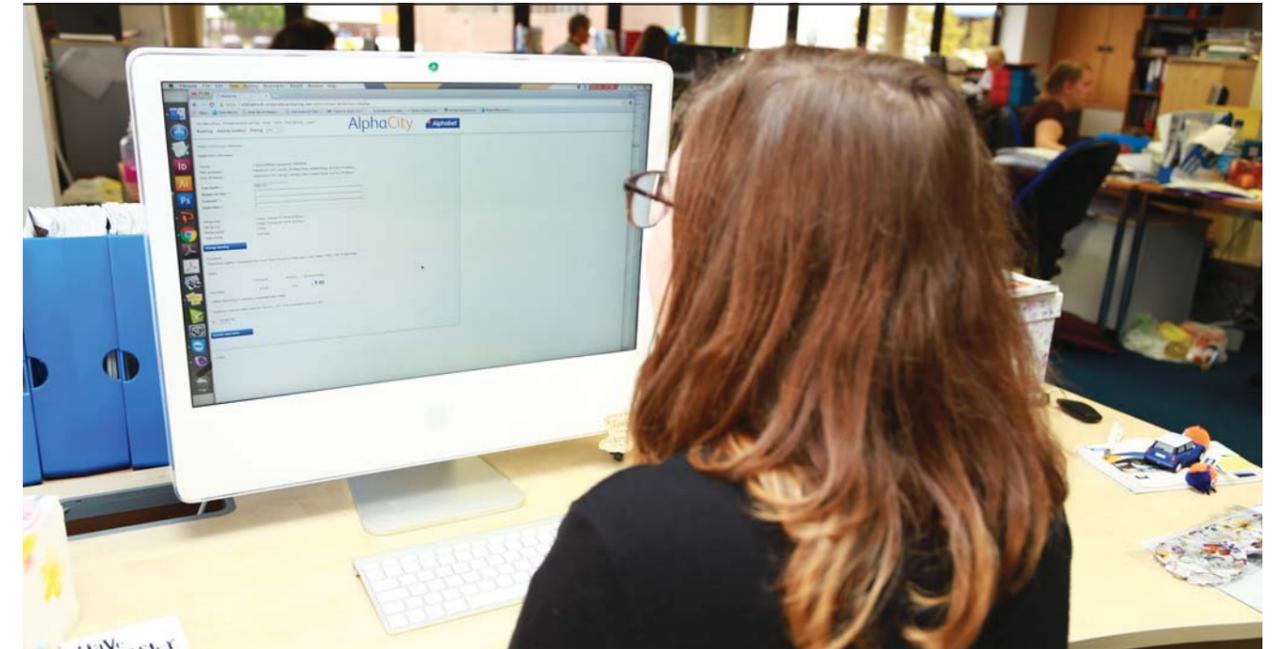
OUR CX-3 celebrated its first birthday with a trip to local dealer Brayley Mazda in Harpenden this month. Not that we really had a chance to notice it had gone.

Scheduled in during a day of back-to-back meetings, they collected the car, carried out the service and inspection for us, cleaned it and delivered it back to the Fleet World office in St Albans ready for me to drive home. Seamless, convenient and affordable, it's the sort of going-the-extra-mile customer service you'd expect from a premium brand, and perfect for those weeks where you just can't spare the time out.

Anne Dopson



AlphaCity BMW 116d



HAVING gone through the rigmarole of hiking over to the local rental office to hire a car for business trips, it has been far more convenient to have the AlphaCity BMW on hand at our business HQ, as you'd expect.

Booking a trip through the online portal is mercifully simple, with only a few steps required. There are pros and cons to having a formal booking system - you can't vaguely book the car for a trip after lunch with your office manager - but at least your colleague can't claim to have booked it out first.

And the system does work best if you are clear on exactly when you are going to need the car and you book the right time slot.

Using the car itself has largely been relatively straightforward.

Once, a colleague did manage to lock three staff members in the AlphaCity car, but in the main it's not been difficult. Once, while out on a trip, I have had trouble locking the car using the card, which wasn't ideal as I'd stowed a laptop and camera in it. The call centre was quick to reset the card and car, however, and solved the problem. Had I been pushed for time that would have felt like a faff when I could have just used a standard set of car keys.

The AlphaCity livery is not subtle, so if that kind of thing bothers you that could be a drawback. But if you're looking to set up a company car alternative with a straightforward booking and admin system then AlphaCity is well worth a try.

Jonathon Harker

SEAT Ateca SE 16 TDI Ecomotive

I LL admit that I am sucker for a Sport mode. The Ateca has a rotary controller beside the handbrake that offers Normal, Eco and Sport settings, along with a personal setting that lets you mix and match.

This controller effects the engine response, steering and air conditioning output. However while my natural tendency would be to go straight for Sport, that's not been the case with the SEAT.

Yes it makes a slight difference to the engine response, but we're talking about a 115hp diesel here, so it's all relative. What is more noticeable is the artificial weight that it adds to the steering, though there is no more feel on offer.

Having tried it on a variety of roads, when cruising or pushing on, I've settled on the Sport setting for the engine, but have reverted to Normal for the steering, as it is plenty heavy enough and actually nicer to use.

In other news I continue to be amazed by the volume of the boot, which manages to be much bigger than some in the class without having a detrimental effect on rear seat occupants. Indeed with 9000 miles under its wheels, the Ateca is proving a



comfortable long distance car for those in the front and the rear.

Now well run-in, we're achieving around 50mpg most of the time. The only slight concern is a fairly small fuel tank that has me looking for a filling station after little more than 400 miles.

Dan Gilkes

Audi Q2 S line 1.4 TFSI CoD S-tronic

I'VE always thought the measure of a good car is its ability to be so easy to live with that, even after an early start and a day full of meetings and public transport, you're always relieved to be back behind the wheel for the journey home. Over the course of a busy six weeks, the Q2 has repeatedly proved an easy companion.

That's high praise for a relatively small car. Though it loses boot space and rear legroom compared to an A3, it's as grown up to drive. The S line's bucket seats are excellent, the driving position is very comfortable, and there's barely any noise from the petrol engine. I've also got adaptive cruise control and an S-tronic dual-clutch transmission, which takes the effort out of crawling traffic.

Plus it's got Apple CarPlay, which is so intuitive to use that I'd class it as a must-have, placing hands-free calling and very accurate traffic data in easy reach. Unfortunately, in this case, that's all controlled via the rotary knob on the centre instead of the touchscreen, which doesn't make much sense. It'd be good to have both options - but nobody's perfect, and I'm wanting little else.

Alex Grant



Alphacity BMW 116d

CONFESSION time; I'm not a car enthusiast. I'm much keener on two wheels than four, and I'm not a fan of driving unless I absolutely have to. As I'm familiar with my own car, that's tended to be what I've used when meetings have required me to drive. All of which probably puts me into the same bracket as many of AlphaCity's customers.

It's a fairly straightforward system to use; book online, pick the slots you need the car for, and it stops other departments from running off with the keys. That latter point is a potential downside to having a traditional pool car with a key that can get lost somewhere in the office, or taken home accidentally. It also sends you a text message, 15 minutes before the loan starts, to remind you that you've booked the car.

But it's also very strict. There's a window at the start of the booking where you can collect the car, after which it lapses and becomes available again, and you have to get it back to base before the end of the loan too. Given how unpredictable the traffic is around the office in St Albans, I've had to plan an earlier-than-usual trip to collect the car for meetings to avoid losing my slot. A necessary evil for businesses with AlphaCity cars which are always on the move, but it's a behaviour adjustment for people like me who are used to a car - or bike - on demand.

Mark Sutton, editor, Cycling Industry News



MINI Clubman One D

A FEW months into our tenure and I still think this is probably the most complete car in the MINI range...large enough to be comfortable (there's masses of headroom) and small enough to be nimble and practical around urban streets and the inevitable urban parking headaches.

Hopping out of the Clubman and into the Mazda CX-3 on our fleet, reveals quite a difference in character between two cars that probably have similar potential customers. The Mazda feels incredibly refined and brilliantly built. The MINI by contrast, although equally well put together, feels a little less like it's trying to divorce you from the outside world. The engine idles quite audibly and the low-slung driving position adds to the impression that MINI would like its customers to have fun. That those driving dynamics also come with 60+mpg and low BiK levels is a bonus.

Luke Wikner



Mazda CX-3 1.5d SE-L Nav

AFTER a year at the Fleet World office, our Mazda CX-3 has departed, leaving a compact crossover-shaped hole on the Dopson driveway. I'm really sorry to see it go.

I admit I had some reservations about downsizing from the CX-5 when it arrived last year - particularly as ours was a high-spec model. But they're concerns I let go of almost instantly because, while it's not as big as its sibling, it's got all the space, comfort and performance I need. It also has heated seats, though wrapped in cloth rather than the CX-5's lovely cream leather.

It continued to impress. Fuel economy shaped up to be between 55 and 60mpg on the motorway, with a little effort, and it feels as sure-footed as a bigger hatchback or crossover once it's up to speed. The controls are logically laid out, the plastics are high quality, and I've had no problems with Mazda's infotainment screen - it's really easy to use, and I've had no need to consult the instruction manual to get my head around it.

This is becoming a part of the market where most manufacturers are scrabbling to have an offering, and with all the right ingredients to suit small or large families, urban drivers or those with motorway needs, I can see why. With the CX-3, Mazda has done a great job stealing a march on this segment, and two years into its life cycle it's still a very appealing offer.

Anne Dopson



Fiat Tipo Station Wagon 1.6 MultiJet II 120 Lounge

FIAT is enjoying a renaissance in the UK, with a raft of new products and a renewed focus on fleet.

We've just named FCA as Most Improved Fleet Manufacturer at the Fleet World Honours thanks to the improved back office support and range of products, including the core Tipo lower-medium challenger. And to see if the vehicles can match up to the improved service offering from FCA, we're running a Tipo Station Wagon in top-spec Lounge trim powered by the familiar 1.6 MultiJet diesel engine.

First impressions are good - the Tipo is a solid looking car, although the hatchback styling probably works a little better than the estate. However, that extra 20cm of bodywork aft of the rear wheels does create a big boot area - at 550 litres it has 110 more than the hatchback. Fold the seats down and you can carry loads of up to 1.8 metres long and there's a low sill to ease loading. Useful for job-need drivers.

This is not at the expense of rear seat room either, with plenty of room for three adults across the rear seat bench. It all adds up to a practical proposition.

Where the Tipo really scores is in terms of value for money - at just shy of £19,350 our test car comes with pretty much everything a travelling businessperson could need. Standard on Lounge trim is climate control, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear view camera and auto lights and wipers, while the satellite navigation system employs TomTom Live services such as HD Traffic and the clever average speed function when in speed camera

zones. The only option fitted to our test car is a coat of metallic grey paint at £550.

Fiat is sensible enough to know that it won't be competing for the hearts of user-choosers with the Tipo - instead concentrating on the car's efficiency and practicality virtues. On first impression it seems that Fiat has got the practicality box ticked, and on paper the diesel's 98g/km CO₂ emissions and claimed 76.3mpg fuel economy impress.

Julian Kirk



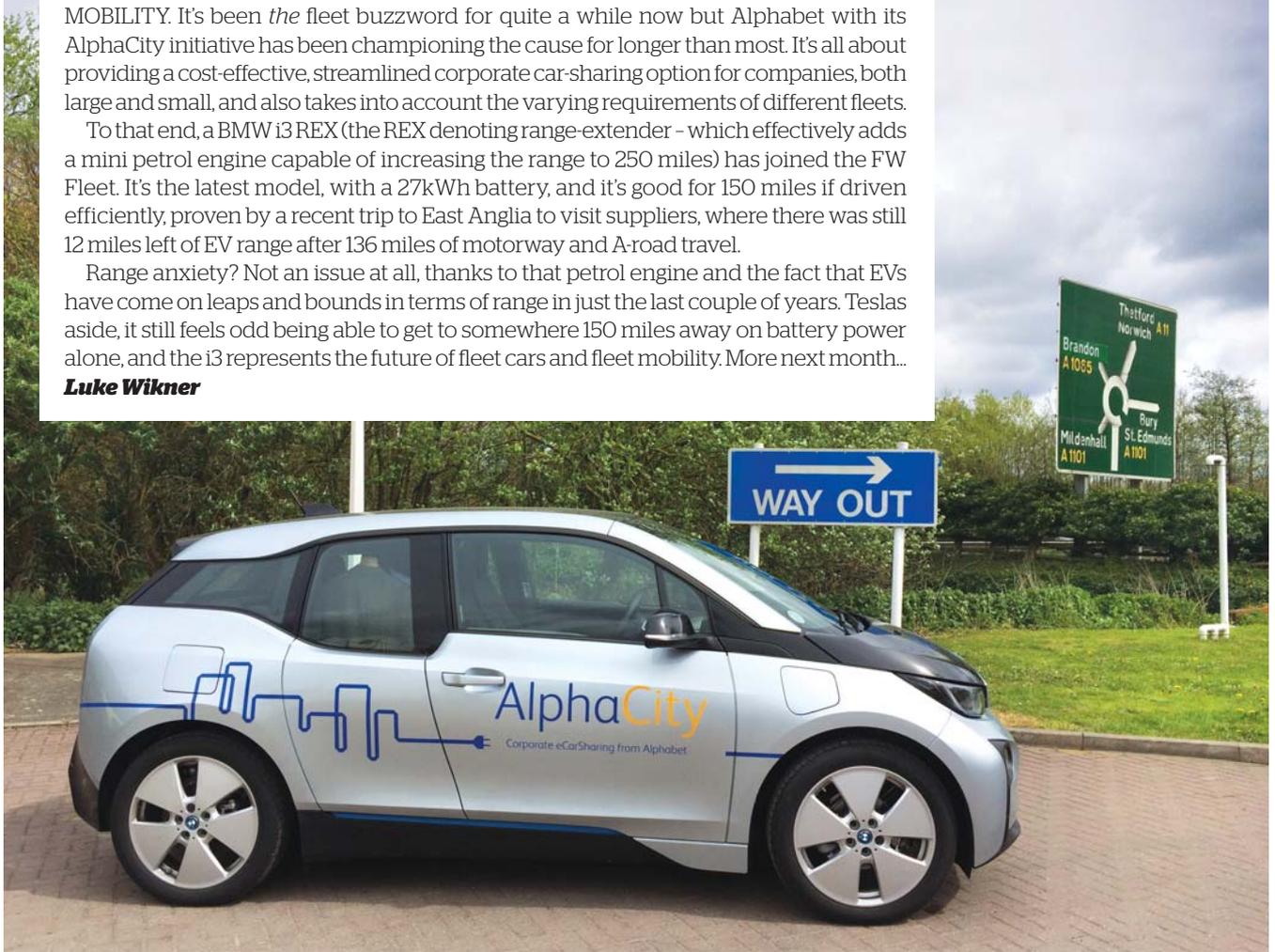
AlphaCity BMW i3 REX 94Ah

MOBILITY. It's been *the* fleet buzzword for quite a while now but Alphabet with its AlphaCity initiative has been championing the cause for longer than most. It's all about providing a cost-effective, streamlined corporate car-sharing option for companies, both large and small, and also takes into account the varying requirements of different fleets.

To that end, a BMW i3 REX (the REX denoting range-extender - which effectively adds a mini petrol engine capable of increasing the range to 250 miles) has joined the FW Fleet. It's the latest model, with a 27kWh battery, and it's good for 150 miles if driven efficiently, proven by a recent trip to East Anglia to visit suppliers, where there was still 12 miles left of EV range after 136 miles of motorway and A-road travel.

Range anxiety? Not an issue at all, thanks to that petrol engine and the fact that EVs have come on leaps and bounds in terms of range in just the last couple of years. Teslas aside, it still feels odd being able to get to somewhere 150 miles away on battery power alone, and the i3 represents the future of fleet cars and fleet mobility. More next month...

Luke Wikner



Fiat Tipo Station 1.6 MultiJet Lounge

WHILE it's the lucrative crossover segments that manufacturers are keen to get into at the moment, even in fleet, there's still no substitute for having a good C-segment hatchback and estate offering in your range. And the Tipo shows you can get an awful lot of car for not much money these days.

Our diesel-powered Lounge version comes in at less than £20,000, towards the bottom end of the pricing for most equivalent crossovers. This doesn't put you in leather seats or buy lashings of aluminium accented soft-touch plastic, but it does bundle all the essentials for a life on the road into a genuinely practical estate car. Job need and user-choser fleets, take note.

It doesn't feel like corners have been cut here either, it's neatly designed, the seats are comfortable, the boot is large and there's plenty of room in the back too. Pick holes if you will in the shiny plastic on the door cards, or with its small navigation screen, but it says a lot that finding faults comes down to small details. Unless you're desperate for the driving position and car park presence of a compact crossover, there's really no reason to feel short-changed.

Anne Dopson



our fleet

AlphaCity BMW i3 REX 94Ah

Corporate golf days. 'Tis the season for the great, the good and the part-time golfers in fleet to dust off their clubs and engage in a bit of networking at the 19th hole. For us though, our first golfing excursion of 2017 was to Wentworth with Alphabet, for the BMW PGA Championship. Some of our readers were probably there too as we were directed to VIP parking for BMW Group vehicles, where a sea of blue and white badges and MINIs were lining the fairways.

We arrived, silently in our i3, four-up, having opted for the low-carbon-footprint driving option, because the trains were a bit too much of a faff and let's face it, sometimes a car is absolutely the best mobility option. We didn't even need to recharge, as the i3 laughs in the face of range anxiety and the morning after at our offices, we were reminded about a great touch in the AlphaCity programme whereby your vehicle is periodically mobile-valeted to keep it looking fresh - the timing of which could not have been more perfect. Brilliant!

Luke Wikner



Land Rover Discovery Sport 2.0 TD4 HSE Luxury 180hp Auto

WE wave goodbye to our Land Rover Discovery Sport six months after the model joined our long-term fleet, having confirmed what a well-rounded and practical seven-seater SUV it is. Worlds apart from the Freelander it replaces, the Discovery Sport brings a flavour of its Discovery bigger brother in a compact package.

Over the last six months we've made the most of its seven-seat flexibility - the seats can be raised or folded away in a jiffy - but what I've really appreciated is just how compact a footprint you get despite those extra seven seats or the resultant boot space when not in use. I've also appreciated the 178bhp 2.0-litre TD4 Ingenium engine, with its 139g/km and 53.3mpg - although it does only come with four-wheel drive as standard, which may be a downside for fleet buyers, it's a smooth, punchy and on the whole refined engine while the nine-speed auto offers fast performance with just the odd hesitation on down changes. And

although the ride on the Discovery Sport is a little firm at lower speeds, overall it offers a highly relaxing, comfortable drive.

We have had a couple of issues with the car. A fault warning on our first test model led to its return to Land Rover - although we benefited from being given the updated Discovery Sport instead, with extra safety kit and technology including a vastly improved infotainment system. And although the second model had to go into the dealers due to issues with the diesel particulate filter, I was extremely impressed by the service I received, which reinforced the model's prestige appeal.

And that's the key to the Discovery Sport - highly capacious off-road skills (that we hardly made use of) with relaxing on-road presence and the flexibility of a large boot or seven-seat layout but with a prestige badge and excellent manufacturer / dealership service to boot.

Natalie Middleton



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Peugeot 3008 Allure 1.2 PureTech 130



the figures	
OTR PRICE	£24,295
POWER	131bhp@5,500rpm
TORQUE	167lbs-ft@1,750rpm
0-62mph	10.8 seconds
TOP SPEED	117mph
COMBINED MPG	55.4mpg
CO₂	117g/km

“This is one of the best cars I have driven in years...”

THERE were a number of concerns I had about running our new Peugeot 3008. One was its tiny petrol engine, another was that it might not be big enough for the Moody family and associated dogs and also, as the mid spec Allure version, would it be a bit bare spec-wise?

Usually you would tease the answers to these questions out over a number of months, having put the car through very thorough, rigorous testing. But I'm not going to.

That's because within a day or so of taking delivery of the 3008, the results were patently obvious: this is one of the best cars I have driven in years. The 3008 has exceeded my expectations more than almost any car I can think of in recent history, irrespective of price or brand.

For a car that costs less than £25,000 (the only options on this test car are metallic paint (£525) and Panoramic Opening Glass Roof (£990), it is remarkable value for money. It looks incredibly stylish, the cabin quality is at a level no other manu-

facturers at this price point (and plenty considerably more expensive) are operating at, and while it is not a massive car, there is plenty of space for the Moody brood. There is also lots of equipment as standard, and the addition of Apple CarPlay enhances that.

The 130bhp 1.2-litre turbocharged petrol engine is just - just - about powerful enough, and you have to make sure you are in the perfect gear to ensure this. Fortunately, the wonderfully snicky, short-throw gear lever ensures this is not a chore.

Over time, I am sure that some foibles will present themselves, and they might calm my enthusiasm down a bit, but unless they are surprisingly drastic and currently unforeseen there can be no doubt in my mind already that the 3008 is one of the best cars on sale today. Peugeot cars have been steadily improving for some time, but the 3008 proves that everyone else now has some serious catching up to do.

Steve Moody

Alphacity BMW 320d

EVEN without the press demos, the staff car park at Fleet World is pretty diverse. Our potential 'grey fleet' spans everything from nearly-new family cars to hot hatches and convertibles, the oldest of which are almost 30 years old. Not totally unsuitable for work use, but not ideal for it either.

I'm on the road a lot at the moment, and until recently that's meant using my own car when (as was often the case) there hasn't been something else available. As an end-user there are plenty of advantages to doing this - it's familiar to drive, I don't have to worry about someone else having the keys, and I don't have to pick it up from the office. Moving to our AlphaCity car had a lot to live up to.

How have I found it? For the most part, fairly straightforward. It's easy to book and simple to get into the car using my membership card, which also means I don't have to unlock the office and switch off an alarm to collect a key. That said, not having a key can be a headache at times, as the back doors unlock separately and the whole car locks itself when you get out.

Otherwise, the user experience is no more complicated than borrowing a standard 3 Series - great to drive, spacious, quiet, fuel-efficient and a well-rounded alternative to putting business miles on one of our own, diverse fleet of cars.

Darren Brett



Kia Optima Sportswagon 1.7 CRDi GT-Line S auto



I'VE been spending a few days driving one of the Kia's newest rivals - the perfect opportunity to see how our Optima stands up to the challenge of the new Vauxhall Insignia Sports Tourer.

Both are the product of a new approach by their respective makers - their cars have got to look good and be crammed with kit if they are to fight back against the dominance of the German premium brands in the fleet sector.

Both the Optima and the Insignia have adopted that pared back styling which marks the premium brands out - sleek, lacking in ostentation and almost under the radar in their approach. It's the same story inside - both the volume players here have raised their game significantly in terms of the cabin layout and ambience, use of materials and the level of equipment fitted.

And this is where the two volume cars make their

mark - in top-spec Elite Nav auto trim, the Vauxhall matches our Kia in GT-Line S specification with pretty much every comfort and convenience factor you could want - heated seats all round, DAB radio, sat-nav... the list goes on (although I would have thought that parking sensors would be fitted as standard on a car as long as the Vauxhall - they're a £460 optional extra).

Both are also big cars, the Insignia being slightly longer and offering a little extra boot space - 560 litres with the rear seats in place compared to 540 in the Kia. However, with the rear seats folded down, the Kia has the edge - 1,686 litres compared to 1,665. The Insignia has a fraction more rear legroom, but the Kia has more than enough space to ensure adults sit comfortably in the back.

As a family car, both have plenty to recommend, but for me the styling of the Kia just sneaks things in its favour.

Julian Kirk

SEAT Leon ST FR Technology 14 TFSi

AS a singer in a band you tend to travel fairly light. All you really need is a microphone after all, though my wife might question why I also haul around a PA, mic stands and a tonematch mixer. Either way, singers don't usually require roadie assistance.

Recently though I ended up looking after the drummer's performance kit for a few days, as of course I had a van on test. However by the time the drums were needed again, the van had gone back. Not a problem I thought, I've got an estate car at my disposal.

I must confess to being slightly disappointed the first time I lifted the tailgate on the Leon, at least until I realised there was a lower setting for the boot floor, that comes as part of the £205 Storage Pack. The SEAT's rear seats are equally easy to drop, with catches in the boot walls, raising the available capacity from 687 litres to a much more voluminous 1470 litres.

The ST is definitely more Sports Tourer than Serious Truck, but it can haul a surprising amount of luggage when required, taking the full drum kit with ease. There was even room for my mic.

Dan Gilkes



BMW 520d M Sport

I'D love to write about how the 5 Series has driven this month, but it has been to the dealership – the service department specifically. It's nothing major, but it is worth writing about.

The first sign was an error message telling me that the emergency call button wasn't working. I called BMW head office, who tried to remotely reset it, but that didn't work. Next, on the way back from Southampton, the sat nav decided that it would take me up the country. Fortunately I knew where I was going.

A call to Chandlers Brighton (the first of many, it turned out) and the car was to be fixed and picked up before a trip to Heathrow. Upon collection, the service staff assured me it HAD been fixed. Although it hadn't, because when I got to Heathrow the sat nav was telling me I was in Lewes and the emergency call still wasn't working.

Another call to Chandlers and the car was re-booked in – only this time they diagnosed that a new part was needed and instead of being done that day as promised, it would be two weeks, so a rental car was arranged. In the meantime, voice control had also decided to down tools, while the 'Comfort Access' system decided that locking the car wasn't for it.

Upon collection, I was told that it was all fixed, but again it all wasn't. The emergency call system is still faulty and the comfort locking feature is still absent. I know these are minor irritations – almost 'first world problems' – but they are also not things you expect.

This column has reminded me that another call is due to the dealership to book the car in again. Hopefully this time it won't require multiple follow-up calls to ask for news.

John Challen



Skoda Kodiaq 1.4 TSI Edition

WITH the popularity of petrol on the rise as drivers seemingly turn their back on diesels, recent weeks have seen a number of announcements from both the Skoda and Volkswagen camps of new petrol engine variants added to selected line-ups.

This includes, for some models, the 148bhp 1.4 TSI with ACT (Active Cylinder Technology) that our Skoda Kodiaq long-term comes with. With 44.8mpg and 143g/km, it's a worthy engine to consider and performs surprisingly well despite its diminutive size and the heft of the Kodiaq, leading a number of passengers to refuse to believe it's a 1.4-litre. Meanwhile the ACT technology helps drive economy under light load.

But it did cause a bit of a kerfuffle the first time I went to fill up and found a large sticker inside the fuel flap saying it takes super unleaded with minimum 95 RON octane rating. As there's no super unleaded at my local Morrisons and no details of the octane ratings on the pumps, I ended up doing a 13-mile round trip to fill up and was left a bit stumped what to do in the future.

Thankfully we looked into it and found that the terminology for unleaded gradings varies significantly and that in some countries – excluding the UK – you can buy 91 RON fuel, which is classed as 'regular unleaded'. Closer inspection of the pump revealed a BSEN228 rating – the British Standard for 95 RON fuel – and I've been happily filling up since.

Forgetting about the question of whether the super unleaded would bring about improvements in performance or efficiency, it does mean I save between 5p and 10p a litre depending on where I refuel.

But it's an important note for fleet drivers and just one area to factor in when it comes to any possible switch to petrols.

Natalie Middleton



SEAT Leon ST FR Tech 1.4 TFSI ACT

IT's interesting how many manufacturers are keen for us to try petrol engines in long term fleet vehicles at present. Certainly the Volkswagen Group's 1.4 TFSI has become a popular choice in place of the firm's 1.6-litre diesel.

With more than 5,500 miles on the clock, our Leon ST is still returning over 48mpg, which is impressive given its ability to rapidly cover the miles. However it does have a relatively small 50-litre tank.

The downside is you're looking for fuel every 400 miles, the upside is that it costs less than £50 a time.

Dan Gilkes



Alphacity

BMW i3 REX



FOR all the technology on board, and the typical car-sharing obstacles that it's managed to overcome, there are some aspects of pool cars that you can't always escape.

The AlphaCity system is embedded into the infotainment screen in our i3; it requires each driver to go through a set of questions about the condition and cleanliness of the car at the start of the loan. So, in turn, you're helping to monitor who treats it properly, and who isn't, as well as flagging up the need for repairs or maintenance.

Our car rarely sits still during the week, passed as it is between the different titles sharing the Fleet World office. One of whom has clipped the mirror, removing a slither of piano black paint, and several successive loaners hadn't spotted the damage. That's made it quite hard to trace – though it turns out this happened at the start of a journey, after going through the sign-in process, and was forgotten when it was returned to the office.

It's been a relatively easy fix, albeit one that's meant two trips to our local BMW dealership, Barons in Borehamwood to put right. There's no substitute for a busy, forgetful mind.

Alex Grant

Kia Optima Sportswagon 1.7 CRDi GT-Line S auto

WE've been impressed with how easy our Kia is to live with, and are enjoying all the many gadgets fitted as standard, but how does the Optima stack up from a financial perspective?

Our top-spec model has a P11D value of £30,540 and CAP estimates it will be worth £10,225 after three years and 60,000 miles on the fleet, during which time it will have cost £2,168 in service, maintenance and repair.

Rivals? A Ford Mondeo 2.0 TDCi Titanium X Pack Powershift, priced at £30,830, will be worth £9,400 and the SMR bill will be £2,211. Trumping them both, though, is the Skoda Superb 2.0 TDI 190 SE L Executive DSG – more expensive at the front-end (£31,215), but an RV value of £11,000 gives less cash lost over the same period. SMR is cheaper too, at £1,968.

Julian Kirk



Peugeot 3008 Allure 1.2 PureTech 130

I'VE never been much of a fan of the small steering wheel that Peugeot uses on its cars these days. My reasoning is that I don't want my family hatchback to feel like a go-kart.

But having spent a lot of time in the 3008, I'm coming round to it. It requires a lot less arm flailing when parking, and I think it's more comfortable on long journeys too: if you hold your arms out quite close together and then do the same but with your arms further apart you'll feel it is much more natural with them closer. This effect is matched in the 3008, and when you hop in another car with a 'normal' size of wheel it seems as though you piloting Gertie the Steam Engine.

One other thing: after the very intermittent fault with the infotainment system, Peugeot got in touch and said our car is an early model and as it's a hardworking press car, hadn't had the software upgrade newer versions have had which solve the issue. So if you're having this problem on any 3008s, just book them in for a quick trip to the dealer.

Steve Moody



Alphacity BMW 320d

WHILE it wouldn't be entirely unfair to criticise some brands of over-niching their model ranges, that occasionally bewildering breadth of choice can be plus. Not only for drivers wanting a lifestyle choice, but for businesses needing a car to suit a specific need.

The pool car is a difficult box to tick; a one-size-fits-all vehicle, which often has to cater for one department frequently needing space for large items, through to another which just wants something small to get them into city-centre appointments. Having a broad selection at your disposal is, at times, an asset.

AlphaCity's vehicle selection comes from the smorgasbord that is the BMW and MINI product offering (though with a few obvious omissions). That's a selection spanning everything from superminis to executive SUVs, and covering diesel, petrol and plug-in variants to suit whatever your business might need.

Even within a relatively small business such as ours, those needs can be diverse. Our 320d saloon fits most journeys that Fleet World and sister title Torque can put it through. The only drawback we've found is colleagues at Cycling Industry News have needed the more flexible load area of an estate for moving bikes - tricky items to get into an i3, though they do fit. Perhaps we need a shared bike rack?

But that's something we'll look at next time we come around to replacing our mini fleet. Regular updates on how everyone is getting on should help shape an idea of what we need, and I'm confident there'll be a solution somewhere within the smorgasbord that'll suit.

Alex Grant



Fiat Tipo Station Wagon 1.6 MultiJet II Lounge

IT seems strange to be saying this so far into our time with the Tipo, but I've finally had an opportunity to fill our Station Wagon to the rafters. And I feel like I've discovered a new talent.

With the rear bench upright, there's a massive 550-litre boot beneath the load cover, according to the brochure. That's around half a cabin-sized bag away from the massive new Insignia Sports Tourer. Fold the rear seats, and you can close the tailgate over a 1.8-metre box - the Vauxhall beats it by 25cm. High functionality for what's still a small car, and perfect for job-need drivers.

Luke Wikner



BMW 520d M Sport

AS Touring versions of the new BMW 5 Series start to appear around the UK, it raises the question of which is the better car. Having not yet got behind the wheel of the load-lugger, it might be that the saloon is better, but the estate is better to live with. I say this as a father of three children who often have a lot of belongings to take with them on a day out. While YE66 RXX's boot is large - don't worry, it's plenty big enough for the golf clubs and trolley, for example - sometimes, you just need a bit more.

John Challen



Renault Mégane Sport Tourer GT-Line dCi 110

THE modern estate car, as stylish as it might be in 'sport wagon' guise, has suffered heavily at the hands of the ubiquitous crossover. An alternative with similar load-moving capacity and fuel economy, but a little more kerbside appeal. So, as our Mégane has been sharing a driveway and recent Center Parcs trip with the Grant Family Kadjar, I've been assessing how Renault's in-house rivals compare.

I'm often told SUVs are too big and heavy - actually the Mégane is slightly longer and 80kg heavier than its sibling. It's also deceptively large inside, despite the raked rear

window, with a tailgate hollowed out to maximise load volume, which is around 10% larger than the Kadjar's. Boot floor dimensions are almost identical, but with less lifting involved in the Mégane. That height is bad for heavy bags, but useful for when getting toddlers into ISOFIX seats.

So both make great load-haulers but, if it's outright capacity you need, the Mégane is the better option - just. For those without small children, the crossover-vs-estate argument has become something that can be left to personal taste.

Alex Grant



our fleet

Skoda Kodiaq 1.4 TSI Edition

COMING from a car brand renowned for its generosity on specification lists, the Kodiaq doesn't disappoint and, mid-way through our long-term trial, we've had plenty of time to get to grips with the equipment on board our top-spec model.

This includes the wireless phone charging, which is an optional extra on other trims but comes as standard on the Edition. It doesn't actually work on my phone as it's not Qi-enabled but worked a dream on my husband's Samsung S7 - so simple to use it's unbelievable and certainly enough of a blessing to push me to get a new phone.

I'm in two minds over the Front Assist feature though. This uses long-range radar technology to detect possible collisions into the back of other cars, warn the driver with a visible and audio alert and brake the car if necessary - in the right place and the right time, this technology could bring invaluable benefits but on a recent holiday in Somerset it kept activating on bends on country roads with hedges and scaring the life out of me. I've since checked the settings and it was set up for 'late' warnings too.



I'm also a little baffled still as to why the top-spec model is only fitted with rear parking sensors, not front ones, despite their presence on the more recently launched SE Technology trim.

But I've made good use of the built-in umbrellas hidden in the recesses in both front doors, giving rise to smug Mary Poppins-esque moments on rainy days, and I'm also grateful for the presence of the pop-up door damage protectors although at least four passengers have taken them for flimsy trim - something Skoda is far from known for. I do wish the driver who left a small dent in the Skoda's driver-side front door at a supermarket car park one Saturday had had them fitted on their car too though...

Natalie Middleton

AlphaCity BMW i3 REX

WHETHER it's empty A-roads or the backdrop of a perfect sunset, the gloss of a car advert rarely reflects the sort of real-world conditions they face after leaving the showroom. The i3, which I'd seen purely as a luxurious and BMW-esque take on electric mobility, has proved in six months that it's a rather talented pool car too.

Still an impactful design four years after launch, it pulled a crowd when it arrived at the office and the novelty never wore off. Despite some reservations about electric driving, it's unchallenging to use, easy to park and spacious enough inside for its myriad uses across the company. In many cases, it's been a first exposure to electric driving, and it's set a high benchmark.

Granted, it's not compromise free. While most miles have been battery-powered, the tiny fuel tank means it's not suited to long trips on the range-extender. However, with ultra low emission zones looming and little clarity on the future, it feels a fairly safe choice. While it won't get the traffic-free city-slicking of BMW's ad campaigns, it's a good fit across business needs.

Claire Warman



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All that matters in the world of fleet

February 2017

Interview

Paolo D'Ettore
of Nissan



Car sharing

Why leasing companies are embracing
different mobility solutions

AlphaCity

Driven

Citroën C3
Audi A5 // Q2
VW Crafter

Spotlight

Ford unveils
latest Fiesta
to fleets

Fleet focus

Looking at the
German fleet
market



Sharing is caring

Leasing companies are already embracing car-sharing and manufacturers are also getting involved, while future expansion is expected, as **Steve Banner** finds out.

Growing urbanisation, continued developments in connectivity and the use of smartphones plus a willingness to contemplate use of an asset rather than outright acquisition are all combining to trigger a major expansion in free-floating car-sharing. So says Thomas Beermann, chief executive officer at Daimler car-sharing offshoot car2go Europe.

"The sector is already booming," he reports. "A car2go vehicle is rented on average every 1.3 seconds, we've got

over 2m users and the trend is upwards.

"A recent study by Frost & Sullivan predicts that the total number of car-sharing users worldwide will increase more than five-fold from 7.9m currently to 36.7m by 2025," Beermann adds. "Car-sharing reduces the number of vehicles and traffic congestion in cities, frees up valuable parking space and improves air quality."

Odds are that a high percentage of those shared cars will be electric he says, given mounting pressure to drive

down NOx and particulate emissions in urban areas. He points out that car2go already operates a total of 1,300 battery-driven Smart fortwos in Stuttgart, Amsterdam and Madrid.

Leasing and rental companies get involved

While much of the demand for car-sharing is and will be driven by the needs of private users, fleet operators cottoned on to its benefits sometime ago. Major rental and leasing companies worldwide

"A recent study by Frost & Sullivan predicts that the total number of car-sharing users worldwide will increase more than five-fold from 7.9m currently to 36.7m by 2025."

have been busy putting together packages to meet their requirements.

Last April saw Avis Budget subsidiary Zipcar launch a new car-sharing service for fleets in the USA called Local Motion by Zipcar. It allows authorised employees to access available vehicles by tapping a card reader mounted inside the windscreen with their RFID badge.

Vehicles do not have to be booked in advance. If the user would prefer to pre-book, however, then this can be done via the Local Motion web site or by means of an iOS or Android app. The vehicles are tracked using GPS.

Zipcar believes Local Motion is likely to appeal to public sector as well as corporate fleets. It cites statistics from the USA's Federal Highway Administration, which show that the country's government agencies operate a whopping 3.7m vehicles between them, which cost \$21bn (€20bn) a year to maintain.

Shaving even a fraction of a percentage point off this total through car sharing would spell a significant and doubtless-welcome saving for taxpayers.

Zipcar is now present in a number of markets outside the USA including Spain, France, Austria, Germany and Belgium. It first became involved in the fleet market back in 2009 when it launched Fast Fleet, a fleet management service that allowed companies to benefit from its car-sharing programme.

Among the key global leasing companies, LeasePlan launched SwopCar just over a year ago having piloted a car-sharing service in Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

"We developed it in order to meet the growing demand for driver mobility solutions beyond the traditional lease product," says LeasePlan chief commercial officer, Nick Salkeld. "Allowing a company's employees to take and share a SwopCar as and when required means that vehicle utilisation is maximised, carbon emissions are reduced and the need for parking spaces is diminished."

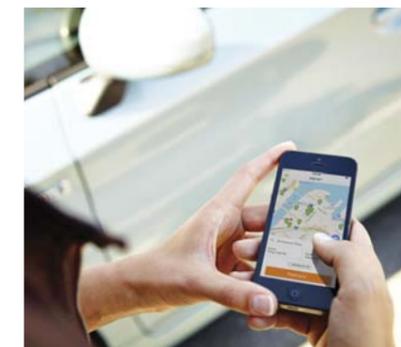
Online and smartphone access

Eligible employees can access an online reservation platform and smartphone app to check vehicle availability and plan their trip accordingly.

Cleaning, refuelling and maintenance are taken care of by LeasePlan's network of service providers which addresses some of the concerns felt by fleet managers familiar with the problems often associated with traditional pool cars. All too many of them have ended up dirty both inside and out, with no fuel in them when the next user wants to drive them, and way overdue for a service because nobody has taken responsibility for them; and their precise whereabouts may sometimes be a mystery too.

By contrast, SwopCars are tracked, and managers have no need to worry about issues such as key management or mileage reimbursement, says LeasePlan. Usage reports are generated which detail CO₂ emissions and the data provided allows the cost of providing SwopCars to be calculated and passed on to the department or employee concerned.

Last year saw UK users of BMW-owned Alphabet's AlphaCity car-sharing platform cover well over 1 million miles with an average of 33 drivers for each vehicle. Average journey length there and back was 93km.



Sharing is caring...



Sharing and saving

Last year saw UK users of BMW-owned Alphabet's AlphaCity car-sharing platform cover over 1 million miles.

→ **Cost savings**

It has put one high-profile local authority – the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead in the UK – on the way to achieving a £100,000 (€117,000) annual saving on its staff travel costs as well as a 90% reduction in the time required for pool car administration.

“This is no longer a niche solution but one which is being used and appreciated every day by a significant number of people for business travel,” contends Alphabet head of corporate mobility, Nick Butler. “Employees love the low-emission, business-specification vehicles being available on demand while businesses benefit from a more cost-effective and efficient way to address the challenges associated with taxi costs, rental vehicles, pool car management and grey fleet.”

Finding an approach that deals with grey fleet risks – including employees using elderly, polluting and badly maintained vehicles they own on company business – may be the clinching factor in favour of car sharing so far as many worried fleet managers are concerned.

Car manufacturers, rental companies and independent lessors are not the only businesses moving into car sharing. Owned by Orange, and responsible for over 110,000 vehicles operated by 5,000 clients, fleet management specialist Ocean is doing so too.

Its approach is slightly unusual in that it is offering two levels of service; a price-driven one using an online reservation and management system and a more-expensive alternative using smartphone technology.

Car sharing is not a phenomenon confined solely to North America and Western Europe. Its proponents point out that it is spreading worldwide.

Global markets

Zipcar is active in Turkey while last year saw Arval launch a car-sharing scheme in Shanghai, China in conjunction with local partner BA-SHI. Starting off with 30 Chinese-built electric Roewe e50s and five hybrid Roewe 550s and initially aimed at the private lease market under the U-LIN CarSharing banner, it is being rolled out to corporate customers through Arval Jiuotong.

Car sharing is of particular relevance to China, says Arval given its growing road congestion and significant urban air pollution. Last April saw car2go open for business in Chongqing.

Entering the car-sharing market is something of a novelty for businesses that have been more used to promoting traditional daily rental or leasing deals. Among car-sharing's advantages are its flexibility – you can hand the vehicle back the minute you have finished with it – and fleet clients are looking for more flexibility so far as established leasing packages are concerned in an increasingly-uncertain world.

Flexible rental

Arval has for sometime been offering Mid-Term Rental in selected countries including the Netherlands and Spain. It allows clients to lease a car for from one to 24 months.

Not to be outdone, LeasePlan has been busy rolling out FlexiPlan. It too covers periods of from one to 24 months with no early termination fees if the client's mobility needs suddenly change, says the lessor.

“We want to be the one-stop-shop for all vehicle-related mobility requirements, from hours to years,” Salkeld says.

Staying with the theme of flexibility, in addition to car-sharing ALD offers something called ‘switch’ – a flexible agreement which allows the driver to get behind the wheel of a small, low-emission vehicle most of the time but switch to something

bigger (an MPV for instance) whenever a bit more space is needed.

It was available in Belgium and the Netherlands at the time of writing.

Other flexible deals on offer include 7 Wheel Lease (combines a three-wheel scooter with a car) and 6 Wheel Lease (combines a two-wheel electric scooter with a car). Both are on offer in the Netherlands and 7 Wheel Lease is offered in Belgium too.

Many of the major daily rental fleets offer long-term rental packages and the lines between such packages and short-term leasing are becoming increasingly blurred.

Hertz has set up Minilease in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, with average rental periods of a month or more. Operating through almost 60 locations, it now accounts for 30% of the company's Benelux fleet.

Minilease XL is aimed at corporate users while Private Minilease is targeted at individuals.

Manufacturers join in

Vehicle manufacturers are moving into the sector too. With an eye to plugging the gap between short-term rental and long-term leasing, Smart is offering Smart Ready to Rent, with rental periods going up to three months.

The desire for flexibility looks set to continue unabated, says LeasePlan with companies facing all the mobility challenges associated with, for example, project-based activities, season-dependent workloads and uncertain capacity forecasts. Global uncertainty is being exacerbated by Brexit, a new president in the White House and the upheaval that could be created by the outcome of elections in France, Germany and the Netherlands later this year among other developments.

“As our clients organisations are required to be increasingly flexible in an ever-changing environment, we want to provide solutions that respond to those changes,” says Salkeld; a philosophy that all leasing and rental companies and vehicle manufacturers must now embrace.