



Choosing the right Commercial Vehicle

A management guide from Alphabet

Asking the right questions and talking to experts will help you to make an informed decision when acquiring your new CVs. Buying a van can be very complicated and there are multiple elements which you need to take in to consideration to get it right first time.

Governing legislation

You will need to take into account and anticipate future legislation affecting where vans can operate. For instance the potential introduction of more clean air zones across our UK cities and the potential changes to what road tax for vans will be based on in the future. This will have a profound effect and will make selecting the right mix of vehicle, body type, payload, specification and powertrain more significant than ever.

Rudimentary considerations

Irrespective of whether you expect clean air legislation to have a significant impact on your van fleet in years to come, the basic considerations around van choice are governed by what your van is typically going to be needed for: i.e. what its load is, where its load

will be delivered and the distances it needs to travel.

- What is the size / weight of the typical load?
- Do you need to carry the load all the time?
- Do you need to specify internal or external racking or install special equipment or workspace in the vehicle?
- What kind of security is needed?
- How will the load be accessed, for example will you need side doors, or a tail-lift?
- Will the van need to carry one or more passengers?

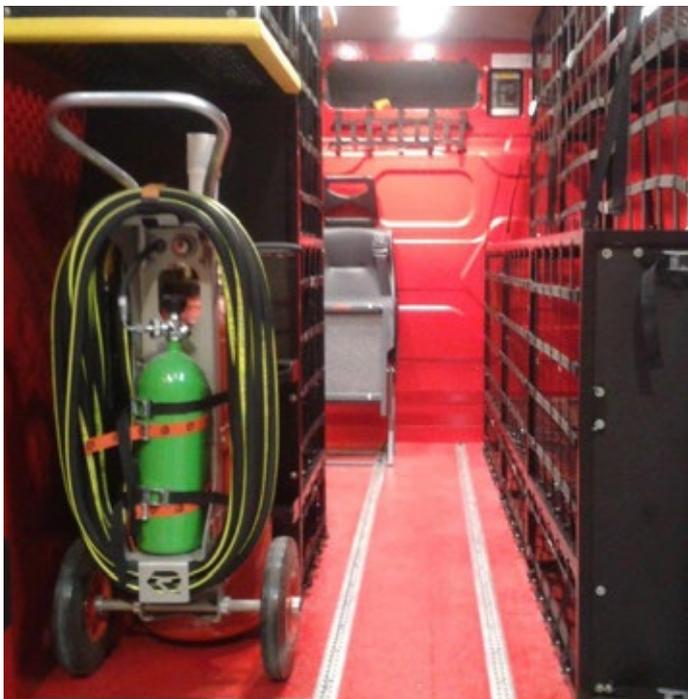
These questions will help you to understand your business in more detail and will enable you to make an informed decision on factors such as body style, overall size, fuel type and interior/exterior fit out.



Body style

Broadly, the type of body you need – panel, flatbed, drop-side, tipper, etc. is dictated by the van's intended role. Even so, there are many permutations. Does the role involve crews working at height? Will the vehicles operate in public open spaces such as parks, where extra safety features such as anti-under-run skirts are needed?

Panel vans are by far the most widely-used CVs and of course they come in a wide variety of styles. It is always tempting to opt for a general-purpose medium, small or car-derived van but a more specialised choice is more appropriate in many situations. For instance, a micro van with cargo access doors to both sides and the rear is ideal for making deliveries in narrow streets. Where vans will spend much of their time in a clean air zone, opting for plug-in vehicles may be a better option due to the whole life savings on fuel and congestion/emission charges.



Choosing the right size of van is one of the most important elements of the decision. If you know you will only need a large-capacity van occasionally, it will almost certainly be more cost-effective to run a smaller vehicle every day and hire something bigger as and when needed. Smaller vans may also be cheaper to tax in the future under a graduated VED scheme which is currently being looked at by the government. However, this could lead to some operators choosing vans which are too small for their operations, leading vehicles having to make two trips instead of one, which would increase fuel costs and emissions.

Payload

The Euro 6 emissions standard (EU6) which is now in force, means that extra engine technology for controlling diesel NOx emissions, plus a full tank of AdBlue, can eat up between 30kg and 60kg of what would have been previously a vehicle's payload headroom.

This extra weight is often a real issue for CV operators. Fortunately, sophisticated new internal fitting systems offering ultra-light materials and modular designs are now coming on to the market. Although they are more expensive than conventional racking, their strength and versatility means they can be used in two or three successive vehicles over a nine or 10-year lifespan. A forward-thinking funder will finance the racking along with the vehicle, which spreads the cost over the contract period of the vehicle. With re-use and the extra payload, such a solution should more than pay for itself over time.

Fuel

Diesel engines have long been the default choice for vans due to their power characteristics and superior fuel economy compared with petrol. Now, however, diesel faces growing resistance, especially from city authorities, because of its effects on air quality. This is certainly something you will need to bear in mind if your operation involves a high proportion of city driving.

All new vehicles sold in the EU since September 2015 have had to comply with EU6, therefore, new vans acquired between now and 2020 should not be affected by the proposed Low Emission Zones. On the other hand, operators who choose very low-emission vans are likely to benefit from a range of national and local government incentives for businesses to think twice before acquiring diesels.

Low-emission vehicles will pay less (or nothing) to enter clean air and congestion charging zones. They will be offered time-saving perks such as using Electric Vehicle (EV) only traffic lanes like the one due to open into Nottingham. If your journeys involve a large number of city centre mileages, consider the pros and cons of pure electric and plug-in hybrid vans. Similarly, petrol vans may see a revival on urban fleets since they do not need additional exhaust system features such as AdBlue or particulate traps to meet EU6.



Acquiring your vehicle

Once you have analysed what the vehicle will predominantly be used for, as well as the basic size and body style of vehicle you need and the most appropriate fuel type, you'll need to produce a detailed specification before you finally order the vehicles. There is also the key question of how you should finance them.

Conversions and how to fund them are substantial topics and we have produced two further guides to assist you:

- A Guide to the elements of specifying CVs successfully
- A Guide to Funding the Conversions of your CVs

Both guides demonstrate that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience out there to help you with crucial decisions around choosing vehicles. Between them, there is probably no problem or challenge that most leading manufacturers, conversion specialists and leasing companies have not encountered and successfully overcome.

Talk to a range of prospective suppliers to get a feel for how well they understand your needs. Allow enough time to find the best funder for your vans: you should be looking for specialist expertise in financing commercial vehicles backed up by strong relationships with converters and other suppliers (e.g. service and repair, breakdown, screens and tyres) critical to keeping your vehicles on the road at all times. Don't forget to ask your drivers for their ideas for improving efficiency and safety too. Their experience and insight is invaluable, after all they are

the ones who spend the most amount of time in the vehicles. Getting it right for them is as important as getting it right for the journeys the vehicle will make and the payload it will carry.

When you have collated what seems to be the right specification on paper, and agreed on the best funding options with your selected supplier, it is well worth going one more mile and arranging a site meeting with the converter and other key parties (such as the leasing company if you're ordering a few vans at once) as a final reality check. If everyone's done their homework there shouldn't be any surprises but, if there are, catching them at this stage will save a lot of time, money and effort later.

With that out of the way, you should be good to go ahead with acquiring your new vehicles.

Alphabet's Commercial Vehicle Service

Commercial vehicle experience counts. Whatever your requirements, our flexible, comprehensive approach will deliver a solution to suit your CV needs. Working closely with our partner conversion companies, we will deliver even the most complex fleet mix on time and to the right specifications, from coachwork and internal and external fit-out to complete bodybuilding projects.

If you require funding, we will tailor the optimum finance solution for you, matching the funding to the vehicles' operating patterns and the nature of your business.

If you have any questions please contact us on 0370 50 50 100

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