



Specifying Commercial Vehicles

A management guide from Alphabet

Making the right choices about van specifications can significantly affect the efficiency and profitability of your business.

Start with the optimum choice of vehicle and chassis

Panel, box, Luton, pickup, double-cab; choosing the basic body-type, make and model of van sets the scene for everything that follows. Think about what the vehicle needs to carry and passenger related safety when carrying those items. It's so important that it is well worth the effort to bring together a cross section of stakeholders including your conversion partner, manufacturer, leasing company, branch managers and drivers - even at this early stage. Seemingly insignificant differences between similar models often turn out to have a significant impact on costs or operation later on. Variations in manufacturers' lead times can affect your plans, as can finding out about impending changes to technical specs.

Use a detailed commercial vehicle 'fact-find' document to select the best manufacturer options based on your business's performance and payload parameters. It's a common mistake to over-specify payloads or engine sizes based on maximum anticipated loads rather than selecting for normal usage and hiring larger vehicles if and when required.

Think about if the vehicle is flexible enough to adapt if your daily work changes. The more experience you bring to bear on all these issues from the start, the more likelihood of getting vehicle choice right first time.

Refrain from automatically going for diesel

Diesel has been the default choice of CV fuel for so long that it's easy to forget that there is a growing number of reasons for looking into alternatives. With a number of UK cities looking into tougher air-quality restrictions in the near future, petrol or even electric power may be the best option for units working mainly or exclusively on urban routes. The



arrival of more-efficient petrol engines has significantly narrowed the fuel economy gap with diesels, which now have to cede space and payload weight to NOx-reducing systems – the exhaust technology and a full tank of AdBlue can eat up between 30kg and 60kg of payload headroom. Plug-in vans are starting to catch on quickly, with whole fleets of them operating in London. Going electric has to be a commercial decision, of course, and working with your leasing company to measure EVs' capability and cost-effectiveness using information on daily mileages and fuel consumption will highlight any roles suitable for EVs based on usage and Whole Life Costs. You need to think about what you carry, its weight and which routes/roads you travel on.

Involve your vehicle converter at an early stage

Getting everyone around the table early on to thrash out conversion options and issues is as valuable as putting heads together to select vehicles. When you start getting into the detail, questions and choices start piling up thick and fast. Bring in the converter and perhaps one or two drivers. Then everyone can pitch in with their own expertise to refine the specification. This is a good moment to pick people's brains. With their wide base of customers, converters and manufacturers, your lease company's CV specialists often have a good view of impending local and national regulatory changes such as the need to fit side guards and Class VI ('cyclops') front blind-spot mirrors to units working in some local authority-run public spaces.



Keep abreast of Type Approval

Since the rules were relaxed in 2013, the majority of internal modifications do not require Type Approval. Around 20% of conversions still do, though, of which around one in four will need sign-off by a VOSA inspector. If you partner with a reputable leasing company, which works closely with well-chosen conversion companies, the process should be handled on your behalf. That will ensure the vehicle undergoes correct processes and the certificates required to achieve Type Approval are received. It is certainly not an area where anything should be left open to doubt since a delay due to an unanticipated need for a Whole Vehicle Type Approval certificate is likely to be long and costly.

Make the most of the branding opportunity

It is often said that more than 3,000 people an hour see a sign-written vehicle operating in a busy area. Your vans are mobile advertising hoardings for your business. The quality of their livery leaves a lasting impression of what your brand is all about. Equally, poor livery can damage your business's credibility in the eyes of customers and potential clients. Don't allow the choice of finish to become an afterthought. Paint, laser-cut vinyl and vinyl wrapping all have their pros and cons. A relatively new option is Paint Replacement Wrapping: a micro-thin whole body covering printed in your company's exact colour that is completely removable when the vehicle is de-fleeted. Whether you intend to apply simple logos and phone numbers or full vehicle wraps, livery is as much a part of an CV specification as the body and equipment.

Utilise your driver and their knowledge

Lastly, do take advantage of your drivers' hands-on knowledge and experience. Give them a voice in the design of load space layout and choice of fittings and special equipment. Listen to what they have to say about budget-driven specification constraints: they can often tell from experience whether a suggested change will turn out to be a worthwhile money-saver or a false economy.

Also think about how drivers will get to know the vehicles when they arrive. They need to be walked through the new features before hitting the road, which can be a headache for managers when there are a lot of drivers.

Cloud computing is providing a solution via 'virtual handover' videos made by suppliers for specific batches of van. Accessed via an email link or even a quick response code placed in the vehicle, the videos cover cab controls, fuelling, safety features and using any on-board special equipment.



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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