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IN BRIEF

2006 - A RECORD YEAR

According to EurotaxGlass's, more than 120 all-new car ranges will be launched in the UK in 2006 - almost double the previous record tally of 66 during 2005.

DIESEL TAX LOOPHOLE

ALD Automotive reports that less than a third of businesses have brought forward company car replacement cycles to beat the closure of the diesel tax loophole at the end of the year.

RMI CAUTIOUS

The RMI supports the reduction of congestion, but Sue Robinson, director of the National Franchised Dealer Association, said: 'While the RMI supports reducing congestion, we do question whether this is the right way to go about it and will be calling for proper consultation before these plans are implemented.'

PLAN FOR THE WORST

The DfT has urged local authorities to plan for sufficient salt to tackle conditions equivalent to the worst winter that they have experienced in the past decade. The Meteorological Office has made a long-range forecast that this winter has a 65 per cent probability of being harder than normal, with the strong possibility of a prolonged cold spell from December through to the end of February.

MORE CONGESTION SCHEMES...

Transport Secretary, Alistair Darling has announced the first local authorities to be given funding to explore innovative ways to tackle local congestion using demand management. Local authorities in seven areas across the country will share £7 million of the £18m Transport Innovation Fund that was announced in July 2005 to support preliminary scheme development by transport authorities between 2005/6 and 2007/8.

The seven areas are:

- Bristol City Council, Bath and North East Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council
- Cambridgeshire
- Durham County Council (for Durham City)
- Greater Manchester
- Shropshire County Council (for Shrewsbury)
- Tyne and Wear
- West Midlands conurbation

The Department for Transport will have another bidding round for the remaining funding in 2006.

... MORE CONGESTION CHARGING CONCERNS

Congestion charging scheme will be an administrative nightmare unless Government works closely with fleet industry, warns Masterlease. Kim Noble, head of service delivery at Masterlease, said: 'We're concerned that the Government's plans to give £7 million to seven areas to develop their own congestion and road charging schemes could lead to an administrative nightmare if they all introduce their own systems with different rules. As the registered owner of the vehicles, this could have serious implications for leasing companies. We already manage on average 7,500 fines for the London charge every year and the cost of managing fines could burst through the £1 billion mark if leasing companies have to administer it around other cities as well.'



PEOPLE

Elite expansion

Barry Chaplin has joined Elite Incident Management. Barry, who has 22 years fleet industry experience including holding senior positions with both Arval and Inchcape Fleet Solutions, has been appointed business development manager by the Brighton-based company.

Sharp sales

Nigel Sharp, one of Ford's most experienced European executives, is returning to the UK to lead Ford of Britain's sales team from January 1, 2006.

New Director for ATS

Russell Fleetwood has been appointed as the new National Car Sales Director for ATS Euro-master. Reporting directly to Group Sales Director Paul Burnell, Russell will oversee a host of ATS Euromaster's largest fleet contracts with names such as Arval, Lombard, Lloyds TSB and Masterlease.

COMPANY NEWS

Kwik-Fit Link

Kwik-Fit Fleet is to provide a range of fast-fit services to TCH Business Link.

The two companies have signed a three-year contract with a 12-month review clause, which goes live on January 1, 2006.

Nation's fastest

Nationwide Autocentres are one of the top performers in the annual league table of Britain's fastest growing private companies. They achieved the number 57 position in the 'Sunday Times Virgin Atlantic Fast Track 100' and were highest placed company from the automotive sector.

Next issue of
FLEET WORLD DIGEST
out 12.12.2005

IN BRIEF

THREE FOR THE ROAD



A&A Group has warned that the change in licensing law could lead to a greater number of drink drive convictions. It says that if people are drinking longer than the likelihood of them still being over the limit when they get behind the wheel the next morning is heightened.

Tony Allen, Chief Executive of the A&A Group, said: 'Many less experienced and young drivers may not be aware of the length of time it takes for their system to be clear of alcohol and could quite innocently get into their car after a long night in a pub or club, which could lead to an increase in the number of convictions or worse.'

DON'T MAKE M25 ERRORS

Drivers using the "actively-managed" stretch of the M42, which sees variable speed limits being operated from Monday morning onwards, must obey speeds on overhead signs and not assume that there is a grace period for offenders, says The AA Motoring Trust.

FOREIGN TRUCK RISE

Lorries from the EU states which joined the European Union in May 2004 continue to record enormous growth in journeys to the UK. In the year to end of Q3 2005, vehicles from new member states increased by 82 per cent.



CRANFIELD LAUNCHES PSYCHOMETRIC DRIVER RISK ASSESSMENT

Peak Performance have combined with Cranfield University to launch an online driver risk assessment developed specifically for company car and emergency services drivers based on psychometric principles. Called the Driver Risk Index (DRI), the new product is based on 20 years of academic research into the psychology of driver behaviour and uses psychometric principles for the first time to predict how company car and other drivers are likely to behave behind the wheel of a car.

Human factors contribute to around 95% of road traffic accidents and this new approach allows fleet and safety managers to more accurately identify high risk driver behaviour and implement the

specific training needs to tackle it, thereby reducing the potential for road traffic accidents. Organisations that have already signed up to take the FDRI include Royal and Sun Alliance, Thames Valley Police, JCB Finance and ALD Automotive.



DIGITACHS COME NEARER

Digitachs could be with us from April, says SMMT after its people were at the recent Digitach meeting called by the UK Department for Transport. Another EU meeting, in Brussels, is to look at changes to drivers' hours rules under the Working Time directive and hopefully will squeeze Digitachs onto its agenda. If the meeting agrees the EU plans as part of its Conciliation process, that decision will be binding. Once it has been translated into lots of different languages it will be published in the EU official journal. Just 20 days later it will be law, right across the EU, applying to 'in scope' vehicles; this means virtually everything over 3.5 tonnes gross.

But the difficulty is that no one knows when the decision will be published and so predicting when Digitachs become a legal requirement on new vehicles is too much of a lottery. In practice the start point could be any time from early April to July and there will be only 20 days warning. Best estimates at the SMMT are that Digitachs will be a legal reality from the beginning of June.

DRIVER - STAY ALERT

Volvo has released details of another safety innovation - Driver Alert - which aims to reduce the number of accidents caused by drivers falling asleep at the wheel. Statistics show that driver fatigue is a major road safety problem across the world, claiming more lives on our roads than alcohol.

Volvo has developed the Driver Alert system after extensive studies and testing, both simulated and on a test track, into the way drivers react when tired. The system uses a camera installed between the windscreen and the rear view mirror, with a number of sensors and a processor, to constantly monitor the distance between the car and the road markings. If the vehicle is moving in an uncontrolled way, the system will alert the driver with an audible alert and message on the car's information display panel before he, or she, falls asleep.

NEW MODEL NEWS



VW reveals Jetta spec

Pricing and specification for the new Volkswagen Jetta have been confirmed, ahead of its UK launch on 3 February 2006. Prices start at £14,635 for the entry-level model - the Jetta S FSI 1.6-litre 115 PS. Standard specification includes: alloy wheels; climatic air-conditioning; front and rear electric windows; speed sensitive power steering; rain sensors; LED rear lights; and a complete range of EU4-compliant engines.

Key launches in 2006/2007

- City cars and superminis - Hyundai Getz, Volkswagen Fox, Peugeot 207, Toyota Yaris, Fiat Grande Punto, Nissan Note, new Mini
- Upper-medium sector - Ford Mondeo, Mercedes-Benz C-Class, Volkswagen Jetta, Alfa Romeo 159 and Kia Magentis
- Executive and luxury sectors - Lexus LS, Citroen C6, Saab 9-5 and Volvo S80
- SUVs - Toyota RAV-4, Land Rover Freelander, Suzuki Grand Vitara, Jeep Commander, Jeep Patriot, Jeep Compass, Dodge Caliber, Audi Q7, BMW X5, Mercedes-Benz GL-Class, Honda CR-V, Nissan X-Trail, Hyundai Terracan, Fiat Sedici, Suzuki SX4, Volkswagen Golf-based SUV (name TBC), Vauxhall Antara
- Sports, coupe and convertibles - Vauxhall Astra Twin Top, Peugeot 407 Coupe, Renault Laguna Coupe, Volkswagen Eos, Audi TT coupe and roadster, Volvo C70, Honda S200, **Jaguar XK Coupe and Convertible**, Porsche Cayman
- MPV - Volkswagen Sharan, Ford Galaxy, Mercedes-Benz R-Class



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