



# END OF THE ROAD?

SERVICE PROVIDERS: **VEHICLE MAINTENANCE**

**When it comes to truck maintenance, it seems more operators are now turning to franchised dealers than running their own workshops or relying on third parties. So is it game over for the independents?**

WORDS: MICHAEL PHILLIPS / PHOTOS: SCANIA

**Commercial Motor** In a recent interview with *CM* (*CM* 13 June), Turners of Soham group fleet engineer Tim King asserted: “Advances in vehicle technology make it extremely challenging for anybody other than a franchised dealer to maintain trucks properly and efficiently today.” King was talking about his organisation’s approach to maintaining 161 new generation Scania trucks.

But do the facts really stack up in favour of franchised dealers, or are operators like this simply succumbing to the transport industry’s own version of Project Fear?

Not so many years ago, countless trucks were routinely maintained perfectly well by their owners. So what has changed? According to Scania’s services sales and contracts general manager Steve James, the answer is technology.

“While it is still feasible for owners to take care of some servicing work themselves – belts and filters, for example – legislation related to emissions and sustainability has forced change by imposing new challenges upon the industry, challenges which have largely been addressed by technology,” he says. “The key point is that if you neglect to manage that technology, the vehicle’s performance, in terms of fuel consumption, reliability and emissions compliance, will decline over the long term.”

James’ contention as to why this should be so is based on what his organisation calls its philosophy



**FAST FACTS**

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of continuous improvement – a process itself driven by the ever-advancing development of telematics and the connectivity it involves.

Back in the day, the equivalent of continuous improvement was what was generally referred to as product development. While both sound much the same in principal, the key difference is that product development typically resulted in the introduction of a new or modified component whereas, as often as not, continuous improvement is as much, if not more, about software as it is about hardware.

The reason for this is twofold: firstly, there is much more automotive software around today, and



secondly, connectivity now enables manufacturers to measure and monitor what's going on out there and develop their software accordingly.

There has certainly been a quantum leap in the amount of software found on commercial vehicles over the past few years. While the number of electronic control units (ECUs) on trucks has been steadily increasing for many years, the process gathered pace with the introduction of Euro-6.

"For us, that was 2014," says James. "At that time, a typical Euro-6 Scania truck had around 20 ECUs fitted. But that all changed again with the launch of our new generation in 2016, and now there are more than 50. The

development of connectivity means that everything attached to a truck's CANbus and LINbus systems can now be monitored. Our engineers in Sweden gather data from thousands of trucks in service

around the world, and that helps them identify issues and develop updates accordingly.

"These updates are essential if the truck is to be kept in optimal condition, so checking a vehicle has the latest updates is now part of the routine whenever it comes into our workshops for service," he adds.

#### FRANCHISE ONLY

Unfortunately for those wishing to carry out their own software updates, this service is only available at franchised dealers.

"That's because data security and integrity are paramount here," explains James. "You might think that when a Scania technician plugs his or her laptop into a truck, that's it. But it's not – because that laptop is connected not only to the vehicle but also to our secure portal in Sweden which contains the latest updates and information. To access the data for the vehicle being worked on, our technicians have to work their way through a specific set of processes; it's not just a matter of plug-and-play. With the



**A new world:** Steve James of Scania says managing on-board technology is critical to vehicle performance



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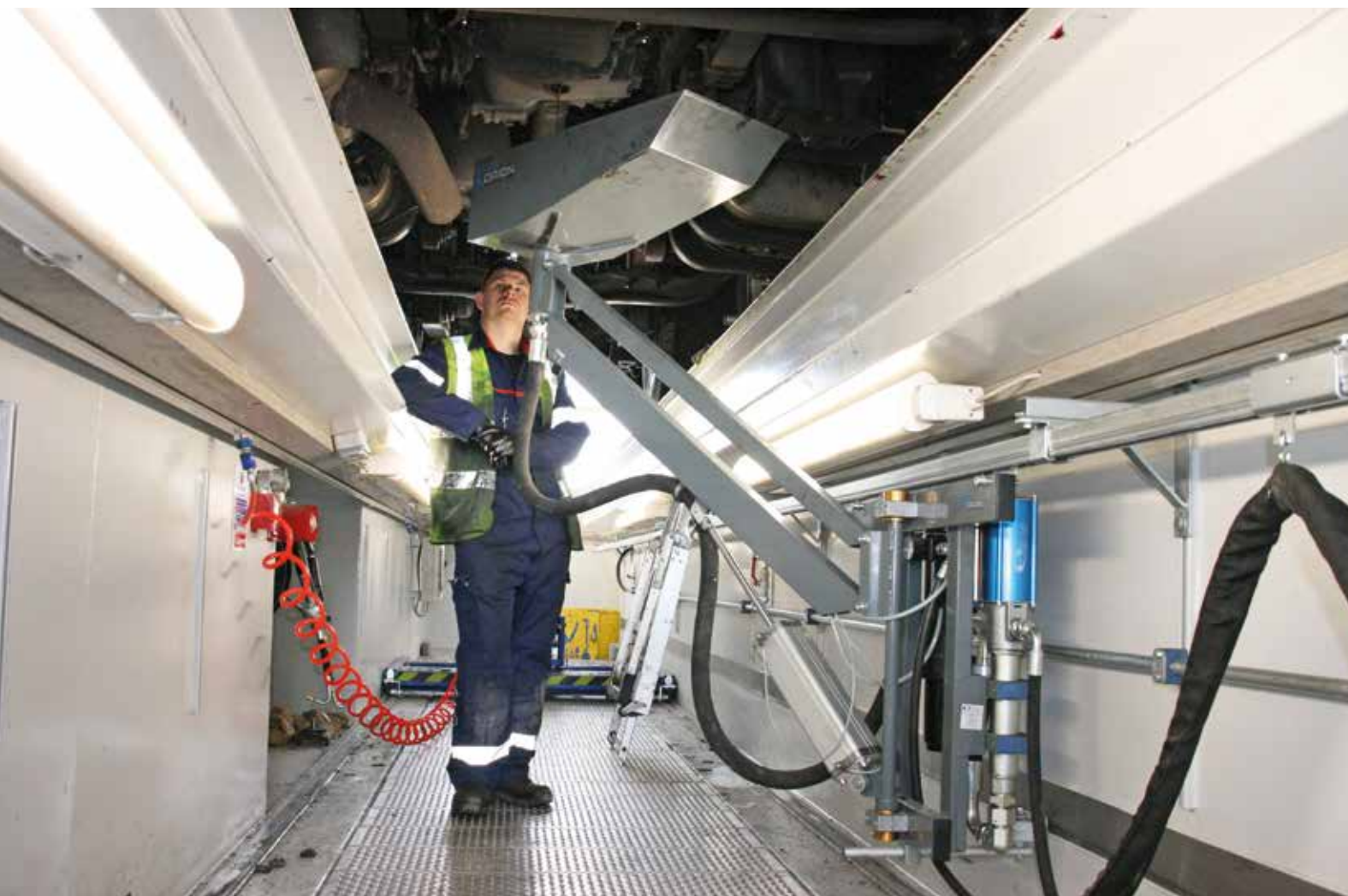
operational schedules are all part of the package.”

For those still thinking of going their own way, James recommends some searching questions. “Cleanliness is extremely important today with tolerances so fine, and we have specific processes for injectors and high-precision components. Even changing the fuel filter has changed and involves a set process to follow. So the first question should be, can a suitable working environment be provided and the right processes applied?” he says.

“Next, do their technicians, or those of a third-party workshop, have the latest knowledge and skills to do the job? Are they genuinely up to speed and able to identify and rectify complex diagnostic issues quickly and efficiently? And, of course, do they have the latest technology and tooling available to do the job correctly and assure the quality of the repair?”

“If the answer to any of these questions is ‘no’, then the final question has to be: is the operator prepared to take a hit to its bottom line by accepting less than the best total operating economy?”

“I somehow doubt anyone would answer ‘yes’ to that,” he concludes. □



number of vehicle variants we offer, it is an extremely complex and dynamic situation, and our continuous improvement programme means things can change at any time.”

In addition to this, connectivity means Scania also now has the capability to determine the appropriate service regime for an individual vehicle, he says.

“A second benefit of connectivity is that we can monitor precisely which parts of the vehicle require servicing and when,” confirms James. “To ensure we do not over- or under-service, we draw up what we call flexible maintenance plans. These are tailored to individual vehicles, and every Scania repair and maintenance contract today contains elements of flexible maintenance.

“As a result, the old way of servicing vehicles – small, medium, large – is progressively becoming outmoded, and I’d agree with King when he says it’s now best left to the experts.

“We offer repair and maintenance contracts with every truck we sell, and these can be extended to seven years. These contracts cover technology, including safety systems such as advanced emergency braking and telematics, as well as the traditional repairs, and our aim is to deliver the best possible total operating economy over the lifetime of the contract. Optimised servicing and fuel performance, fixed, known prices, maximum uptime and minimum disruption to



#### LET'S GET TECHNICAL

**Keeping up with** technology means that training is an ever-present part of the routine for technicians today. For Scania, this means investing in the region of 7,500 hours of technology training in its technicians every year.

Webinars are staged for important updates and technical teams at Scania dealers have access to the organisation's online e-learning system 24/7.

Over and above that, Scania has a network of global technical specialists on duty around the clock to provide additional assistance if required.