

Van man profile is far from black and white, a new study shows

Shoppers will spend around 42 billion this year on internet and catalogue shopping and most of what they buy will be delivered in a van. This new trend in shopping is helping to drive a huge increase in van traffic¹. And white van man is just that, only six per cent of professional van drivers are women, a new study by The AA Motoring trust has found.

Living with the Van is the report of a major study commissioned by Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles that looks at the different uses of vans, from deliveries to homes and businesses, to vans as the workhorse for tradesmen such as plumbers and electricians.

What emerges is a complex picture of different work routines and pressures that is far different from the stereotype of white van man. It is easy to identify differences between delivery van drivers, and tradesmen and engineers, and between van drivers who are employed and self-employed.

Employed van drivers can face heavy and potentially dangerous delivery schedules demanded by their bosses, forcing them to take risks and ignore speed limits and other traffic rules. Many face even more pressure trying to make deliveries or carry out servicing and repair jobs in areas where parking enforcement is more about revenue-raising than helping them serve the local community.

Many van drivers interviewed in the study admitted to suffering fatigue through shift working, long hours and unreasonable time pressures. Vans are over-represented in fatal traffic accidents², in spite of being under-represented in less serious accidents (they comprise 10 per cent of the vehicle population yet are involved in eight per cent of accidents).

A full profile of each of the van driver groups, along with research data on van use, accidents and driver attitudes, is available online at www.safervans.com. The AA Motoring Trust, in conjunction with Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles, has produced guides aimed at drivers and their managers for each of the groups, which are downloadable from the website.

"For the first time, *Living with the Van* allows the commercial van industry to compare how drivers and their managers regard their work. We see that managers are concerned about safety, but may not be very good at getting the message across," says Andrew Howard, head of road safety for The AA Motoring Trust.

Managers need to ask whether they are giving the safety message the clarity and emphasis it needs, and drivers need to ask whether they should be taking the messages they get more seriously.

"Business wants to maximise the use of its vans, but it also needs to concentrate more on finding ways to avoid both the direct and human costs of accidents, that poor safety practices make more likely."

Volkswagen has earned a reputation for quality, safety and reliability; says Brand Communications Manager, Mike Owens. Our customers appreciate the values of the Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles brand and are likely to take more care of their vans and the way they drive. This study has given us a great opportunity to show our concern about the way in which vans are operated on UK roads day in and day out."

A copy of the *Living with the Van* report is available online at: www.aatrust.com/safervans

NOTES TO EDITORS: ¹ The number of vans on UK roads has now risen to three million, with 320,000 new registrations each year.

Number of licensed vans from 2000 to 2004:

2004 3,053,000 (+170,000)
2003 2,883,000 (+108,000)
2002 2,775,000 (+78,000)
2001 2,697,000 (+75,000)
2000 2,672,000 (+42,000)
1999 2,580,000

In 2000, the value of goods bought by UK shoppers via the internet totalled 4.9 billion. By 2005, the UK bought goods valued at 4 billion through eBay alone. There has also been a huge surge in catalogue shopping. The value of home deliveries in the UK has grown from 28.1 billion in 2001 to an estimated 42 billion in 2006.

Most goods bought via the internet or catalogues are delivered by light commercial vehicles under 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight. In 2004, vans accounted for 11 billion tonne kilometres, or seven per cent of all freight activity.

² Because of design improvements and safer driving among van drivers, the rate of road accidents among vans has dropped 43 per cent between 1999 and 2003, but like all large vehicles they are more likely to be involved in collisions with severe consequences. Although the accident rate has fallen, the number of vans on UK roads has now risen to three million today, with 320,000 new registrations each year.

But there are still parts of the road where vans come to grief. Analysis of 51,097 van-related casualty accidents over five years shows that 64.5 per cent happen on two-way single carriageway roads, with 47.7 per cent of all van accidents happening on A roads. Although 49.4 per cent of van accidents happen on roads with a 30 mph speed limit, fast roads with 60 mph limits account for another 24.9 per cent.

Along faster roads, the higher speeds meant that vans either crashed off the road, skidded or over-turned in a quarter of van casualty accidents. Younger drivers were significantly more likely to be involved in crashes along these roads, with the average age of driver two years lower than the norm.