Paul Kirby Podcast – Transition to Fleet Electrification EV Café.

Simon: Welcome to Let's Talk Fleet Risk, a podcast for those who manage drivers and their vehicles and want to reduce road risk in their organisation. This quarter 2, Driving for Better Business is focusing on sustainability, so it seems a great idea to invite Paul Kirby onto a special edition of the Let's Talk Fleet Risk podcast.

Paul is one of the best-known experts on electric LCVs with over 30 years in the automotive sector. He's one of the founders of the EV Café and can be seen advocating for electric vans at many of the commercial vehicle shows and conferences. Paul is also the founder of consultancy and training firm EV Essentials.

Welcome to the podcast Paul.

Paul: Thank you very much Simon

Simon: Paul you've got something in common with our other podcast guest this month, National Grid Fleet Manager Lorna McAtear – you were both crowned Green Fleet Champions at last year's Green Fleet Awards. What's fired up your passion for electric vehicles, and especially electric vans.

Paul: I first drove a Mercedes Benz sprinter electric vehicle in 2004 and when you think about how long its taken for that vehicle to get here it's incredible, but really, having driven electric vehicles over the last 20 years, what I've noticed is that they are such a better environment to be in and when I was working at LeasePlan the company became a member of the EV100 which is a group of businesses all committed to Net Zero by 2023 and the that sort of passion grew to help people. When I saw the environmental benefits, I also saw the driver benefit because I am a great believer in positive mental health and helping people to have a good experience in their vehicles. When you think about the driver behind the wheel of a van they often have a bad reputation but the main reason I believe for that is the stress and pressure they are under in terms of deliveries etc. Electric vehicles take a lot of that away – it's a much better experience for the driver and ultimately, I believe electric vehicles are safer to drive than their diesel or petrol counterparts. So, there's a number of reasons, but's it is focused on getting the job done in a safer more efficient fashion that's good for the driver.

Simon: You talked about the fact that electric vehicles are safer – why do you think that?

Paul: Having driven vans of all shapes and sizes over the years, if you're sitting behind the wheel of a diesel vehicle with a gear stick and you're trying to pull out into a busy roundabout, let's be honest, vehicles are operating in busy city centres or towns, pulling out from junctions with various loads on, and what the electric vehicle gives you is a point and shoot. You don't have to worry about changing gears or being in the right gear - you can put both hands on the steering wheel and go, whereas in the diesel vehicle you're having to do a number of things. You could be in the wrong gear for the weight in the back etc. That was the first thing and also, we drive more carefully in an electric vehicle because we're conscious of preserving range, I think we're more relaxed. A study was done on London taxi drivers that said they were happier, which is interesting, they were calmer and more focused on the wheel of an electric LEDC range extended electric vehicles. They were delivering a much better experience and so those are the main reasons I believe it's safer to driver an electric vehicle.

Simon: The driver wellbeing is interesting – we've done a lot of work with CALM – van drivers are predominantly male, and CALM is aimed at preventing male suicide. It can be a very lonely existence - so making that environment nicer – and the electric vehicles are certainly pleasant places to be – so it's probably an underestimated benefit.

Paul: I agree with you completely, CALM – the campaign against living miserably – I love that acronym. It's such a 'does what it says on the tin' kind of description. I love that and the charity's focus. When you think about the suicide rate of men it's the biggest killer of men under 40 I think and men are our predominant

driver population so the fact there are wellbeing benefits – it points to getting the drivers engaged early on in any approach we take to electric vehicles because they will understand the benefits.

Simon: The other point in terms of being safer to drive, when I spoke to Lorna who runs one of the biggest fleets in the UK, I'd expect her transition to electric vehicles to have seen possibly an increase in collisions as people go used to a new experience. Her experience was that people were more cautious and drove more safely and making sure that the charge lasted as long as possible they drove more safely, and her collision rate went down. Is that your experience?

Paul: Yes, what we know is that the vehicles are typically easier to drive, and drivers are calmer – that whole ecosystem works well. Insurers are even saying that you're 25% less likely to be involved in an accident in an electric vehicle and this experience mirrors everything that Lorna has said. I wouldn't disagree with any of it – it's absolutely the case. Anybody I've come across driving electric vans are finding it a positive experience. But I will say getting the driver engaged in the first place will make or break that transition. We also hear stories when vehicles are demonstrated and drivers take them out into the big wide world, they are nervous – they say it doesn't work – 1. Because it's different, 2. Because they have to do things differently and charging becomes an issue because if you have only ever driven a petrol or diesel vehicle and you've only ever turned up at a petrol station to get your fuel, you may have never noticed the funny looking boxes with cables, that will power your vehicles, so you go into it with trepidation, so I think getting them onside in the first place is critical to a successful transition which will ultimately benefit the vehicle and the driver.

Simon: I know that some really big fleets are on their journey to complete electrification of their fleets by anywhere between 2025 and 2030 but it seems, there's a lot of small businesses who don't really know how to start. They maybe have a small fleet of diesel vans – what should they be thinking about – what are the challenges they need to think about now in order to transition as a smaller fleet to electric vans?

Paul: I think smaller fleets are slightly more challenged than the larger fleets as they tend to have predictable journeys and routes and mileage. They also have professional teams of fleet managers and probably experienced board members, finance execs, facilities people – all of those stakeholders who are needed for this transition. So, I think smaller businesses, if I take my own experience of stepping into business myself, there are a lot of questions you don't know the answer to. There's a lot of help out there – online and potentially people can come and talk you through the process, but you need to engage with a wider stakeholder base, starting by talking to landlords – you might say why? – but you talk to them because you need to think about charging. It's the first thing to consider. You need to put in your own charging points, you're not going to be reliant on the fuel station down the road. You will be putting in charging infrastructure in your own car park, premises – because we would want to be in maximum control of our own destiny when it comes to charging. Charging in the public domain at the moment is still somewhat of a concern because you can't always guarantee you get on the charge points, and you can't always guarantee they're working. It' s okay for most of the time, and it's okay for a car – but when you're in a van there are other challenges, so getting control of the charging experience is one of the first things you should do, almost before you think about vehicles. Can I charge whatever I buy? That's the first question. Then you can start thinking about the vehicles and when you do, then it's considering the data behind what you're doing. I'm not a great fan of data, I'm a great fan of insight that data is essential for, but because I'm not a the most detailed of people I enjoy the opportunity to take data and then to turn out an answer than says these were the routes you have done, this is how many miles, this is where you've been and by the way if you put a charger here it would enable you to get additional charge in the place where the vehicles spend the most time. But whatever you do, it's key to just get started, get demonstration vehicles, to engage your drivers, to find champions in your business who may be very positive about electric vehicles and will help you in your own transition because they've got a electric vehicle at home.

What we've seen from the big fleets there is a lot more people now that are van drivers, sparkies, electricians, chippies, that are working within big organisations like British Gas that can then share their experiences as well, so we're seeing this cascade of experience coming into the van world, and more and more people are waking up to it.

Simon: It's especially helpful to get as much information from as many people who have used electric vehicles as you can – help you understand to meet the challenges.

Are electric vans right for everything?

Paul: It's a definite 'no' – whilst we have a lot for solutions for van users, many use cases are already very much sorted, but there are those when there is a real challenge. Towing in civils or construction is one case. If you're using your van to move your diggers, that's not going to be an ideal scenario because there is no electric vehicles that can tow considerable weight currently. By considerable I mean over 1500kgs. That means quite a lot of small business where they are multi using the vehicles – many times the vehicle goes out without towing, but it won't do those critical jobs which means that you can't really justify going to electric vehicle unless you take the blank canvas approach and get back to basics. How do I do my business? Is there another way that I can get that digger to the site or is there another way that I can do a particular job. Long trunking, if you're doing 350 -400 miles in a day it wouldn't be my recommendation to be thinking electric just yet, unless you have considerable amounts of time.

That said, with the public charging improving you can take time out of your day to have a break and you should be taking time out to do that, as I'm sure DfBB advocates, a decent break during the day – 45 mins – you could use that as your ideal charging time, and you would get certainly another 100 miles, because there are decent range vehicles on the market, but it's not enough for some.

Simon: One of the things that Driving for better business espouses is better management of those that drive for work because of the benefits - understanding and managing those risks better - in a traditional vehicle those risks are predominantly the driver's ability to check the vehicle and make sure its road worthy before they go out and then to competently use it in a safe manner, so with electric vehicles what are the differences as far as vehicle checks go and what driver training is needed to effectively use an electric vehicle?

Paul: In an electric vehicle it's simply an ICE vehicle with the engine taken out and the fuel tank taken out and a motor put in and a battery put in – that's basically the difference. Obviously there a few electrical bits and pieces that connect it all up and a charge point rather than a filler cap – so there are a lot of things around the van that are exactly the same. It's very important to be still checking your tyres – arguably more so because your tyres are on vehicles that are typically higher powered than their ICE counterparts. Diesel vehicles don't have the same amount of power delivery from the moment you put your foot in the accelerator. So tyres are an area for focus because there is a potential for higher tyre wear.

You would l check everything else – washer fluid, lights, glass, mirrors, make sure that you do all of the normal daily checks. You just don't have to do the oil anymore which is a good thing, right? Your version of the oil check is to check you have enough range to do the day's work. Making sure the vehicle is charged and you have your charging cable because if you go out and about there are some chargers – the rapid chargers – have fixed cables but if you turn up at a customer and you can charge there, you might need your cable. Making sure your charge port is not damaged – just making sure your vehicle can function while you're out if you need to charge – those are the key things. Obviously, driver training – this is a fabulous opportunity to really engage the driver. They are approaching something they haven't done before – a new way of doing things so this might be a time where your driver is more receptive to driver training and getting the best out of the vehicle. They know it all with a diesel vehicle but you put them in an

environment where they are not quite so sure you can school them from the beginning and give them an opportunity to absorb better safer driving that is synonymous with electric driving.

Simon: Many fleets are used to telematics data from their fleet to determine driver training requirements. Does telematics still work in EVs, and do EVs have their own new data streams available? Do telematics systems still work with electric vehicles or do they have their own data?

Paul: The electric vehicles themselves are a little different than their internal combustion engine counterparts. They're working on different protocols so whereas you could just plug in to the OBD and a lot of data would be taken from the vehicle, it's not quite as easy anymore. For some reason the manufacturers have taken an opportunity because they don't have to have an OBD they've taken the opportunity to do their own thing and go off piste if you like.

More reverse engineering has to happen and there is some incredible data you can take from electric vehicles around the battery – how it charges, whether it is charging and all of the usual driver behaviour type of things like hard acceleration, harsh braking, how they corner, all of that information is still there. What we do know is that manufacturers are keen to create their own data streams so they are looking at ways of putting it into the vehicle – certainly Ford are doing that currently. Mercedes have done it for some years now and it will be more important in electric vehicles as well. They are trying to take the data and sell it in a way to the wider market so broadly speaking, data is available, certainly for the driver behaviour piece, but it is different and there are things that are changing and I think the typical telematics providers will become data management companies. Taking the data from whatever source and then doing the science ion the data so they can produce the insight we need.

Simon: One of the things that is topical is the cost of fuel and energy, with fuel at record prices and cost of energy is going up from events around the world - how does that affect any financial decisions for a switch at the moment

Paul: You mentioned the EV Café earlier and we did a session when the price cap went up for domestic energy and all the noise, and the horrific world situation, and it's a two pronged tragedy in that all prices are going up so everyone is affected at all levels at society so whether you're in business or a private individual, you're being affected by the increases in the cost of living. Fuel going up and electric going up means that the gap is still there and still significant. The gap when you're paying for public charging verses fuel is narrowing but generally speaking, the cost per mile of fuel – electric vehicle vs diesel is definitely considerably less and makes that total cost of ownership argument still stack up broadly speaking.

I think the total cost of ownership is something people have to get their heads around. You'll pay more in the short-term for the vehicle – that will change over the next 2 to 3 years potentially, but in the meantime what you'll see is that the cost of energy will mitigate the overall cost of running that vehicle. Also, as we talked about the reduction in accidents, the driver wellbeing, I think people will be less off work – there's a lot of soft benefits. The other key benefit when we think about total cost model – energy is going up as is fuel, the cost might be narrowing but the other benefit is down time. The scourge of every fleet manager – down time really impacts a business and can cost a business significantly. I was talking recently at an event and asked the question, what is the cost of downtime? Many times, even fleet managers don't know, but one lady in the room said it costs me £300 per day for planned downtime and £1500 a day for unplanned downtime – so downtime has a significant cost. Averages can be £750 - £800 a day with much research behind that which is possibly surprising so when you can reduce downtime because the maintenance levels are much lower – the fact they don't have an engine with just a few moving parts rather than thousands. This makes a massive difference in time and costs, so when you've got the whole cost of ownership not just focusing on fuel, it makes a really big difference to your cost model when you're looking at an electric vehicle.

Simon: That's an excellent way to finish our discussion – one of the key benefits off road time and down time is the biggest thing when I speak to fleet managers. A final question, What would be your first steps for any fleet managers or business owners looking to start their switch to electric vans

Paul: I would say that you could get a really good consultant, my website address is… just kidding. I would look around for help in your peer group first of all. The community of fleet managers and community around electric vehicles is a really friendly place. Once you've reached out and asked those questions, look at vehicles and get data on your journeys so you understand longest and shortest journeys so you have clear understanding of what your fleet does today, what it needs to do tomorrow and engage your drivers early on because they will be really good advocates. Then try some vehicles. Where possible try vehicles where you can also get a good experience on the charging, charging is key – making charging a part of the plan is essential and engage with the wider business to make sure you have all the stakeholders round the table and onboard. There's a lot of insight and information out there on this transition and if you're unsure – reach out to somebody that can give you advice, or maybe support you long term in that transition.

Simon – Excellent advice and I will put links ion the show notes to both the EV café and the EV Essentials website, and I guess anyone who would like more advice from you can get in touch with you via LinkedIn

Fascinating – thanks very much Paul

Simon: If you manage drivers and their vehicles and you face similar issues to those discussed in this podcast, there are links in the show notes to some useful resources on the Driving for Better Business website, and these are all free to access. If you enjoyed the conversation, please don't forget to hit subscribe so you know when the next episode is released, and please also give us a five star review as this helps us to get up the podcast rankings and makes it more visible to others who might also find it useful. You can follow us, that's Driving for Better Business on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, and most importantly please help us to spread the word. All our resources are free for those who manage fleets, and their employees who drive for work. Thank you for listening to Let's Talk Fleet Risk, and I look forward to welcoming you to the next episode.

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Interesting points made:

- Backed up those collisions are often less in EVs as drivers are more cautious.
- Insurance costs for an EV are 25% less – massive business benefit
- Another massive benefit is reduced cost of vehicle downtime due to lower maintenance requirements
- Driving an EVan is safer – you're never in the wrong gear for the load
- Nicer experience so driver wellbeing is improved

Links

EV Café https://www.evcafe.org/

EV Essentials https://www.ev-essentials.com/

Paul Kirby https://www.linkedin.com/in/thepaulkirby/

DfBB Article: Electric vans and your 'driving for work' policy (10/10/2019)

https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/articles/electric-vans-and-your-driving-for-work-policy/