



LowCVP's Andy Eastlake

Fake news, bad science and fleet warnings

In the 30+ years I have been involved in testing and developing automotive solutions, one enduring engineering constant has remained. If it looks too good to be true, it probably is!

So why do I raise this now? Well, with the focus on vehicle emissions making daily headlines, fleet managers are again inundated with outlandish claims from product sellers claiming dramatic emissions reductions and mpg gains. More worryingly, these are often being given greater 'authority' through 'customer testimonials' and so-called 'independent real-road testing' but these results may often be unreliable, or carried out without the academic rigor needed to provide real confidence.

The interest in new emission-reducing opportunities often comes with what can be a somewhat myopic insistence on so called 'real-world' results and, in some cases, leads to the use of bad data and unreliable results, with engineering 'common sense' thrown out of the window. Bad data is often worse than no data at all when making purchasing decisions, but few seem to realise the importance of good experimental design.

At the LowCVP (with our EST colleagues) we are currently working with our members in industry and government to design a robust testing and accreditation scheme for technologies designed to reduce emissions down to the current Euro VI levels needed to meet proposed clean air zone limits. Designing these tests and processes to verify claims can be very complex and needs very careful control of all the variables to ensure the results stand up to rigorous scrutiny.

Unfortunately advertising standards aren't always effective in preventing sellers offering bolt-on technologies which don't work or, even worse, which may actually increase emissions and invalidate warranties, exposing the fleet to potential prosecution for operating a vehicle with modified emissions control.

There are some very good retrofit solutions for controlling emissions. SCR systems, for example, are now fitted to every new truck and are proven effective retrofits (when calibrated carefully) for buses and other vehicles. We have also seen some very impressive savings from hybrid systems and, of course, vehicle repowering solutions. However, in my (extensive) experience the results from magnets, fuel 'pills' and performance chips are rarely supported by solid evidence and invariably fail to deliver when properly tested.

But the fleet manager today can't spend time evaluating every option. It was for this reason that the LowCVP developed (with government support) our low carbon HGV testing scheme. We are now extending this certification scheme to help sort the 'wheat from the chaff' across other vehicle types and, importantly, to extend the emissions evaluation to all the noxious pollutants and greenhouse gases, ensuring low carbon and low emissions are achieved together.

If you would like to get involved, please contact the LowCVP. Our goal is, as always, to help the extended automotive industry and its customers, develop real solutions for use on real vehicles doing real journeys, that really work.

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.lowcvp.org.uk