

Looking in detail at the operation of a fleet by measuring miles-per-gallon, carbon emissions and fuel costs, yields valuable data that can be used to create a greener business, running on cleaner fuels and saving thousands of pounds. **Julian Graff** reports

Some things can best be measured by their absence: like the thousands of tonnes of carbon emissions which were not produced; the hundreds of thousands of miles in unnecessary journeys that failed to materialise or the millions of pounds earmarked for car and van fleet fuel costs never actually spent or productively diverted elsewhere.

For this is the favourable balance sheet that can be drawn up by Britain's firms and public bodies which have taken concrete steps to consciously regulate the way they do business in order to minimise their impact on the environment – and opened their books to independent scrutiny in order to verify their figures.

Every year the Energy Saving Trust, through the Fleet Hero awards, honours those firms and corporate and public sector bodies which have achieved some spectacular results. Leading leisure company the Whitbread Group – 's in the hotel and coffee house business – reckons to have saved almost £2m as a direct consequence of running an environmentally friendly fleet, reducing by 15 per cent the average amount of CO₂ produced by its fleet – from 8.35 tonnes to around six tonnes for each vehicle between 1999 and 2006. The firm garnered an Outstanding Achievement award at the 2007 Fleet Hero awards.

It's not the only Fleet Hero. Supermarket giant Sainsbury's saw its online division win an innovation award for deploying the first of its zero-emission electric delivery fleet with each van saving an estimated five tonnes of CO₂ per year. All Sainsbury's online delivery vans operating in towns and cities will go green by 2010. Gateshead council has cut its annual fuel bill by £100,000 in the last two years making considerable carbon savings in the process; engineering consultancy Atkins slashed its annual business mileage by around 240,000 miles – roughly the same distance between the earth and the moon. The list of achievements – and award-winners – goes on.

How do they do it? Can any business achieve the same results? What concrete steps are involved and is it all plain sailing? As with all balance sheets, the devil is in the detail as a closer inspection of one firm's green journey reveals.

The Kent-based James McNaughton Group of companies is a major supplier of office and graphical papers, board, plastics and print-related products in the UK and Ireland. It is responsible every day for the delivery and distribution of 100 tonnes of paper, board and display products to around 2,000 customers.

In addition to its heavy-duty lorry deliveries, the firm also runs 231 cars for staff including executives and sales representatives working from 18 centres around Britain and Ireland. Howard Browning, the group's director for corporate responsibility, was given the task of greening the fleet.

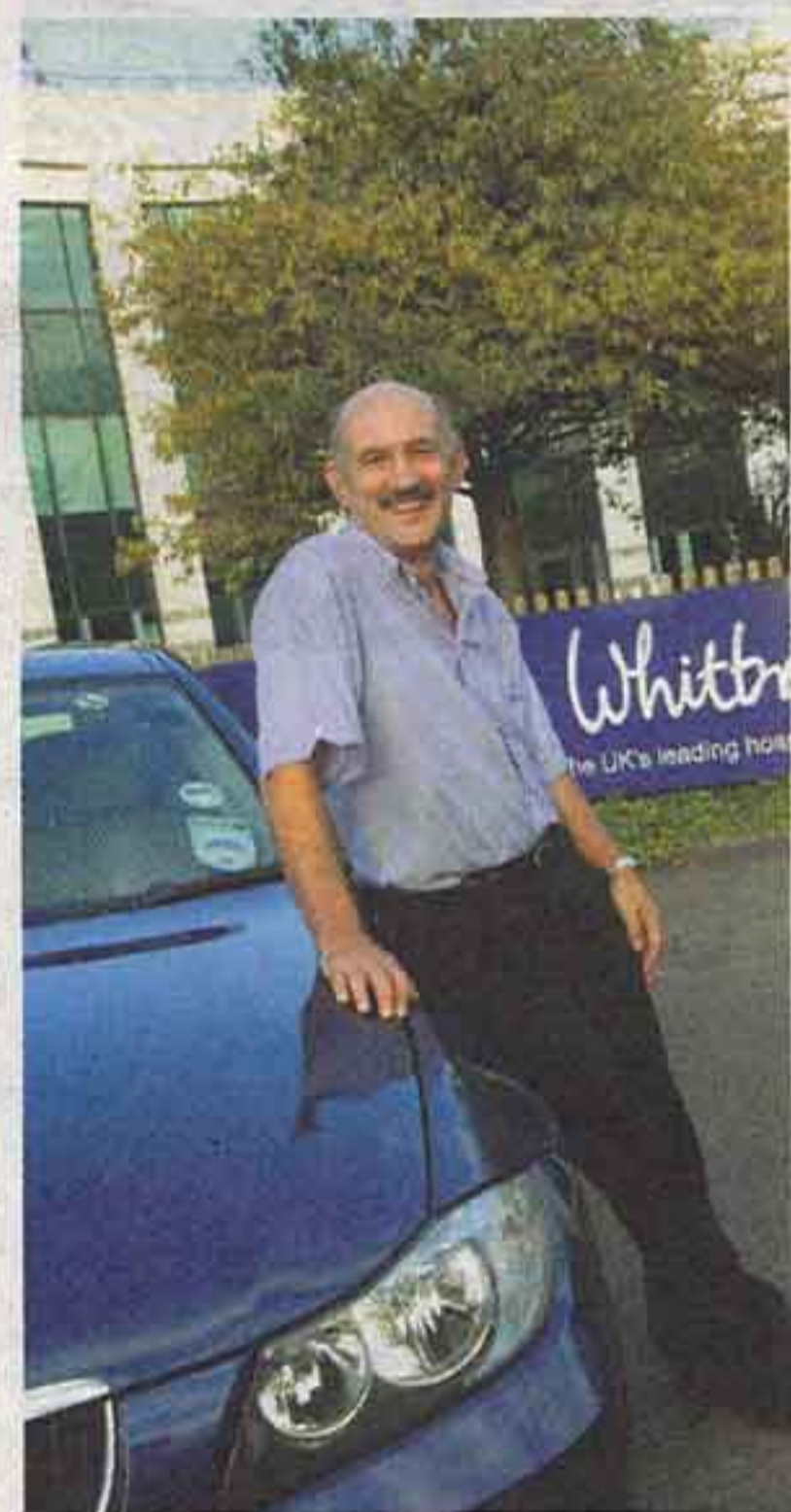
'Our main board had taken considerable steps towards implementing a group-wide policy of environmental responsibility – renewable energy supplies, paper from sustainable sources, a serious attitude towards recycling and so on – but when it came to our fleet, we didn't know where best to start,' says Browning.

'Then I discovered the Energy Saving Trust's website and was impressed with the range of issues on which it offered help and, in particular, its experience of transport issues.'

From website, to case-study downloads, to phone calls and then face-to-face meetings with an EST account manager, followed by a green fleet review paid for by the trust – 'that's how we got started. It was all very easy and efficient.'

What wasn't so comfortable was the spotlight that the EST review turned on the group's lack of fleet management information.

'The EST needed to study our figures covering petrol consumption, mileage and so forth,' Browning recalls. 'I was surprised to discover that we just didn't collate and analyse such information. The only thing we really noticed were the increasing fuel bills going into our accounts department. That was the first and probably the most important lesson we learned from the EST: what you don't measure, you don't monitor.'



Clockwise from top: Sainsbury's has saved five tonnes of CO₂ with the first of its electric vans; the Commercial Group is certified as carbon neutral; and Whitbread saved £2m by increasing the efficiency of its fleet
Photographs: Liz Carrington

Browning can now call up spreadsheets displaying facts and figures for every car in the fleet; the miles-per-gallon achieved, individual and combined carbon emissions; the number of petrol station stops per month, the price paid at the pumps and the average cost per mile – all with comparisons to previous periods.

The first key policy change was the insistence that any new vehicles under the company's car ownership scheme had to be capable of a minimum of 37mpg (due to rise to 42 mpg for 2008/9) and driven by diesel, biofuel or hybrid combinations. To date, over 70 vehicles have been changed and the fleet is now 60 per cent diesel-driven.

In addition, McNaughton Group produced an annually-updated, in-house drivers' guide with 30 EST-inspired points aimed at promoting safer, greener and cheaper driving, as well as reporting the previous year's fleet performance statistics.

The combined result of these efforts? An initial average increase of 20 per cent in the fuel efficiency of petrol cars – up from

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Green fleet review: it could save £90,000

They say there is no such thing as a free lunch, but there are no strings attached for organisations that opt for a free green fleet review from the Energy Saving Trust. In fact, they stand to save quite a bit of money.

According to the EST, a 100-car fleet can save up to £90,000 a year by following its advice and becoming greener, leaner and cleaner. Funded by the Department for Transport, the free consultancy is available for fleets of 50 or more cars and vans. Once you register for the service, there will be a face-to-face meeting, and an independent consultant will be assigned for the on-site review.

At the end of the process you will get a comprehensive report covering such areas as your fleet's carbon footprint; vehicle allocation policy; fuel economy; mileage reimbursement; driver educa-

tion; strategies for reducing mileage; and health and safety and duty of care issues. Robbie McKinnon, the EST's head of business marketing, says it may take four or five months to see results but, by implementing these recommendations, fleet managers can expect to see a reduction in costs and CO₂ emissions.

The EST conducted 120 green fleet reviews last year, but 4,000 businesses could qualify so the potential is huge, McKinnon says. The EST estimates that UK businesses could save £2.6m through a comprehensive programme to green their fleets. 'The key driver to make change isn't just the environmental aspect,' says McKinnon. 'Cost saving is also a factor.'

Terry Slavin

Visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/fleet or call 0845 6021425

25 to over 30 miles per gallon. An average increase of 31 per cent in the fuel efficiency of diesel cars – up from 30 to over 39 miles per gallon. Total business mileage reduced by 107,000 miles – despite an increase in the fleet size from 214 to 231 vehicles.

This means that in 2006/7 the company saved more than £21,000 in annual fuel costs – 'something for which we have to thank the Energy Saving Trust,' says McNaughton Group financial director Ian Pinks – as well as an estimated 138 tonnes of CO₂ emissions, based on EST calculations. Current figures show car fuel costs were further reduced by more than £86,000 – implying a fall in fuel expenditure of up to £2,500 per car – and an estimated 245 tonnes of CO₂ emissions cut in 2007/8.

McNaughton Group was the runner-up in last year's Fleet Hero awards business mileage category. 'We were delighted to have been nominated and with the fleet's continued improvements last year we'll certainly be entering again this year,' says Browning.

Another firm recognised by the EST for its emissions-reduction efforts was Gloucestershire-based office solutions company the Commercial Group, the largest independently-owned office services company in the UK and one of the first of its kind to become (in October 2006) certified as carbon neutral. In February 2007 the company embarked on an ambitious three-year plan to reduce its total annual emissions of 1,078 tonnes of greenhouse gases by 75 per cent.

Accomplishing that means tackling its fleet of 54 company cars, 12 vans and 13 grey-fleet vehicles. Including commuting mileage, transport accounted for an astonishing 89 per cent of Commercial Group's emissions.

'We had already taken robust steps regarding the fleet,' says Commercial Group environmental strategist Simon Graham. 'By installing vehicle trackers and through rigorous supply chain and delivery planning we were able to increase business, but reduce mileage-per-vehicle so eliminating an entire van route which had carbon and cost economies elsewhere. But we knew there was more we could do and all our inquiries pointed towards the Energy Saving Trust as the organisation which could aid us.'

'An initial audit followed by a green fleet review was able to verify the steps that we'd already taken and point out other areas and procedures where we could improve. For example, we hadn't considered our grey fleet. The review showed how to encourage company car drivers into low-emission vehicles and the need to establish fit-for-purpose pool cars; driver training; tackling the question of commute mileage and so on.'

Then there was the question of alternative fuels. 'It was a measure we'd been considering but our EST account manager was an expert in the field and encouraged us to push ahead,' Graham says. The Commercial Group's fleet was switched to run on waste vegetable oil-based biodiesel – 'it's not an agrofuel, but made from products that would have been destined for landfill,' Graham adds – and the company installed a bunkered fuelling station at its Cheltenham headquarters which is supplied with locally-sourced biodiesel.

The group is aiming to cut over 700 tonnes of CO₂ emissions from its fleet operations by 2010 and one year following its green fleet review, Graham says that it is already 'well on its way'.

'We have invested to do this. New vehicles and facilities cost money. But I believe that within the three-year programme we will see our investment back with a profit. I believe we will see savings to the tune of around £50,000 per annum.'

But it's the company's mission to become a socially responsible, environmentally-aware organisation that has driven this process, and within that, it's the 150 staff who have delivered. 'I'm delighted by our Fleet Hero award (runner-up in the fleet size 25-100 category). It's a real accolade for all the employees who have really made this happen. It is a mark of what they've achieved and an encouragement to go further. I want to win next year, and so do they.'