

TOMTOM

Finding the best route

Worried your vehicles could get lost, end up wedged under a bridge or incur a fine if found in a weight-restricted area? RHA area manager **David Scott-Smith** had a satellite navigation system fitted in his car, and turned the car into a truck to test the system's efficiency and intuition

Satellite navigation has become an invaluable aid for many road users, and for long-distance truckers or even multi-drop drivers on constantly changing routes. GPS can save time, money and frustration.

Unfortunately one downside was that, until recently, most GPS systems took a fairly generalised approach to routing, making no consideration for the size of vehicle or any weight restrictions that might be in place. The sight of a heavy truck stuck under a low bridge or blocking a narrow road due to misleading satnav is not rare, especially for truckers running into unknown territory. Clearly, a dedicated truck with satnav optimised for heavy commercials is indispensable in our industry.

Long-term trial

When one of the RHA's area managers was offered the chance to conduct a long-term trial with a programmable system that could be tailored for different sizes of truck, it seemed too good a chance to pass up.

The navigation system in question is from TomTom WORK, the business-to-business arm of the popular TomTom product range. TomTom's Webfleet Link 300 Dashboard system is more than just a GPS route finder. It offers a full range of services within an online application for fleet management and truck navigation.

David Scott-Smith, RHA area manager for Kent, Surrey, Sussex and inner London, agreed to test the product and had it installed in his car, from where he could set various vehicle parameters to check its ability without the risk of actually becoming stuck in a full-size truck.

Before joining the RHA, Scott-Smith enjoyed a long career as a Continental

truck driver and had plenty of first-hand experience of dealing with low bridges and unknown routes in the days when GPS navigation was unheard of.

He says that from the outset he was happy with the TomTom unit: 'The installation took one and a half hours and, although the fitment required the removal of a fair proportion of the vehicle fascia, the whole process was completed professionally, leaving no obtrusive evidence of fitment.'

Once fitted Scott-Smith says he was impressed by the build quality of the TomTom unit and found that it was easy to work with – important when installing new technology in a truck. 'The system is quick to turn on and easy to use, although clearing a planned current route does require a certain amount of scrolling through the menu to find the appropriate choice.

'I found that the satnav unit certainly

lived up to the concept of taking it out of the box and putting it straight to work.' he says. 'The main screen menus are pretty intuitive and easy to navigate with little reference required from the supplied manual.

'The navigation functionality is as to be expected and not too dissimilar from any other of the major satnav unit providers. However, the main difference becomes apparent when the operator is given the option to enter their



vehicle parameters, such as its height, width and length as well as its overall maximum authorised mass (MAM) and individual axle weight limits. Again this is a seamlessly easy transition and once the data is imported no further action is required unless the vehicle parameters change, such as with a flatbed. Once this information has been inputted the unit prepares a route tailored to those requirements.

'The satnav unit also requests the vehicle's maximum speed, so any expected journey and arrival times are realistically calculated.'

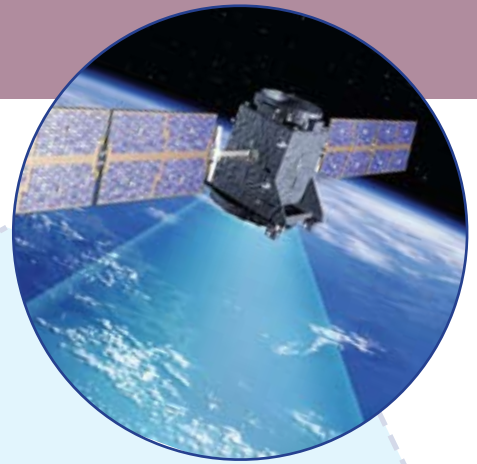
Vehicle parameters

A benefit of TomTom WORK's unit is the option to change vehicle parameters and during the test process Scott-Smith emulated all vehicle sizes that could be used by RHA members, from cars and vans through to varying rigid configurations and full-size artics, all in an attempt to catch the satnav system out.

'In early June I was visiting members in the N16 Stoke Newington area of London and my next port of call was in SW20 Raynes Park, London,' he recalls. 'To test the system to the extreme and monitor the unit's height-awareness effectiveness, I set the vehicle parameters as a 44-tonne articulated truck with a running height of 16' 6" (5m).

'Setting the route to Raynes Park, I was fully expecting to be directed back up the A10 to join the M25.

'In reality, the TomTom unit set a planned route around Islington onto the A501 Euston Road, avoiding the London congestion charge. The route was certainly unfamiliar to me, but what was particularly striking was the fact that I did not come across one single bridge. The chosen route was found to be more than passable for an articulated vehicle and, oddly enough, there was a noticeable lack of traffic which gave a pleasant feeling of constantly being on the move, a feeling that soon



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changed once back on the A501.'

So far so good, but how would it deal with less well-known areas, such as certain parts of Kent, Surrey or Sussex that are notorious for truck drivers who have been inadvertently directed by their satnav systems along unsuitable routes? 'One such area in Kent is Brenchley where RHA member Osmonds Transport is based,' Scott-Smith continues. 'Surrounded with known hotspots for large goods vehicles to become stuck, access to the yard from the Maidstone direction, via Paddock Wood, certainly requires good local knowledge, as there is only one truly accessible way in for a 44-tonner.'

True analysis

'I made a six-monthly courtesy call to Osmonds and, again, to help achieve a true analysis of the unit's performance I set the TomTom parameters as a maximum-sized artic. Once done, I made a specific point of approaching the company site in Brenchley from all the main logical directions. In each case, I was not routed in along an unsuitable road. However, in most instances the route that the unit picked out seemed to have been a bit around the block, but I could see that this was out of necessity rather than neglect.'

From David's findings the route planning looked almost infallible, but how about the journey time calculations – a facet useful to any driver or traffic planner? 'Times are automatically adjusted depending on detected traffic congestion over the planned route. In the case of severe disruption a choice is given to opt for a change in route.'

Traffic disruption

'I opted for this twice after being notified by the unit of a major traffic disruption ahead. On each occasion, the secondary route kept me moving and, although I reached my destination point slightly after the initial predicted arrival time, I can only presume that I saved overall time by not being stuck in a traffic jam.'

And on one occasion the unit actively discouraged our man from leaving the main road, even when faced with a long hold up. 'I had the unit set up as a maximum-sized articulated vehicle, and when I accepted the choice to deviate from the route, the unit then informed me that there was no alternative route to take. My analysis of this is that the only alternative route was not suitable for the parameters of vehicle driven.'

As well as being a route planner the system's telematics function



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also gives drivers and office staff the chance to plan work schedules and contact each other with address and job details. It also provides status updates which help keep both vehicle planners and customers better informed. As a result, the front screen of the TomTom unit differs from the traditional satnav screen, thanks to the addition of extra icons indicating a new job order or message, status of order, break time and end of work.

Telematics services

Although actually delivering goods was not on Scott-Smith's schedule, he was able to make full use of the TomTom telematics services by planning his daily visits to members through the system and notifying the office as each was completed.

How about the unit's other features? Did they help this driver go about his daily duties more easily? 'Night mode comes in automatically at dusk and also cuts in without any prompting when travelling through a long underpass or tunnel, such as the Dartford Crossing.

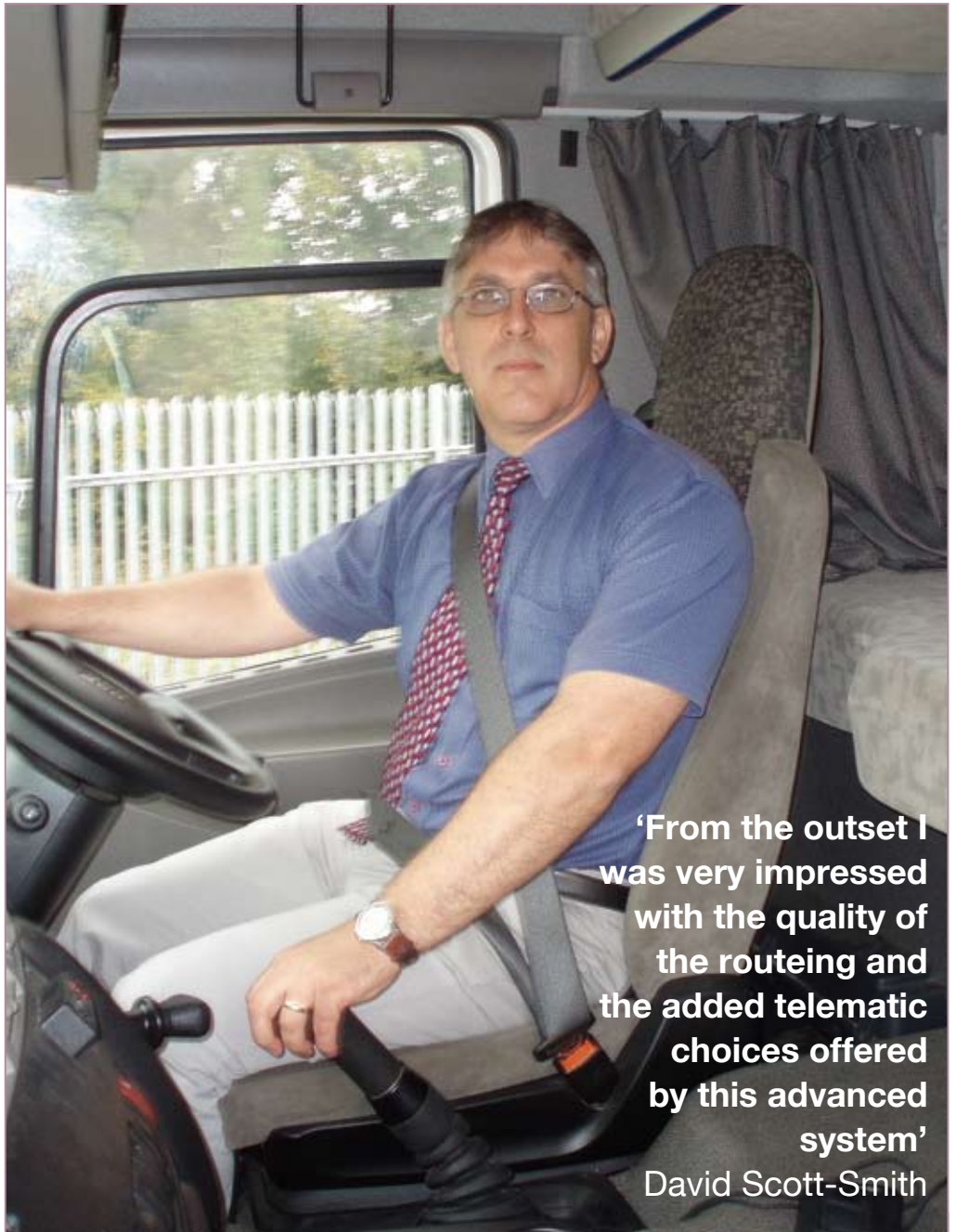
'Another beneficial feature is the unit's Bluetooth connection facility,' Scott-Smith continues. 'It can connect to your mobile and you can synchronise numbers from your phone book to the TomTom. When making a call the sound quality from the speakers is as good as using a hands-free kit from a mobile phone in a car. However, it might be a little less effective when used in an LGV.'

Effectiveness

Scott-Smith says that, while certain functions of the unit came in very handy, he wondered about their effectiveness, especially in older truck cabs. While an address can be entered manually, as with almost every satnav system, there is also another option.

'Routes can also be set by voice command direct to the unit. Again, although exceedingly effective, I question the ability for the system to work efficiently within the confines of an LGV cab when noise factor and the distance of the unit away from the driver is taken into consideration.'

Clearly any operator still running a Bedford or Scammell might struggle to use this feature inside their truck's cab!



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Roadway says...

For hauliers who need more than vehicle routing the Link 300 Dashboard is an interesting proposition. However, for drivers or operators only requiring a comprehensive satnav, TomTom WORK has just announced the latest version of its GO 7000 Truck navigation system, carrying a retail price tag of £379. At the conclusion of this trial we'll leave the last word to David Scott-Smith, drawing on his experience as a completely independent user.

'TomTom WORK's LGV System seems to be very reliable and accurate. In the time of my evaluation it certainly helped tailor routes that are suitable for larger vehicles avoiding many hazards and legal restrictions. From the outset I was very impressed with the quality of the routing and the added telematic choices offered by this advanced system.

'This system offers hauliers a method to communicate instructions to drivers and monitor their tasks, while at the same time having the peace of mind that their vehicles are being correctly routed and less likely to fall prey to a traffic prosecution if a driver has inadvertently entered a weight-restricted zone. I would have no hesitation in recommending this product to any of our members, either as a satnav or as a record-keeping telematics system.'