

Vehicle suitability



When considering and comparing new vehicles, you need to take the time to think about their specifications and features as this will greatly influence what you can safely use them for, as well as associated expenses.

Driver safety, load stability and security features should be the first points to check off during the shortlisting process, but there's also issues like fuel efficiency and emissions to think about.

Once a vehicle becomes part of a fleet or starts being used for commercial activities, the responsibility to have defect repairs, maintenance and safety inspections conducted in a timely and effective manner, and to make appropriate reports and records, should be shared between managers and drivers. Even if the vehicle being used is personally owned by a worker, their employer must ensure that it's safe and suitable.

Key actions to ensure vehicles are safe for their intended use

- Limit the variety of vehicles within your fleet so you can maintain a good understanding of the standard and performance ability of the vehicles that make up your fleet. This will make it easier to decide which vehicles can be used for certain tasks and to keep track of what each driver can or cannot operate.
- Make sure that all vehicles are insured for commercial use, appropriately maintained and have a valid MOT certificate (if necessary). This is the minimum you should be doing to fulfil your responsibilities.
 - Drivers and managers must understand the insurance cover each vehicle has and the conditions on the policies (e.g. maximum load height).
- Think about what restrictions you might want to have in place, such as engine size and type, when deciding which vehicles to purchase for your fleet. The performance of drivers can be enhanced by avoiding higher performance and/or prestige vehicles.

- Consider what the maximum height of vehicles (including car transporters and HGVs) that you purchase should be, particularly if it's likely that your drivers will have to take routes with potential obstacles like low bridges.
 - If this is not practicable, look into how technology could help, e.g. proximity warning devices and in-vehicle CCTV.
- Check that each driver has the right training and experience for the vehicle they're assigned and conduct regular driving licence checks. Driver selection is just as, if not more, important than your vehicle purchase choices.
- Work out how often each vehicle should be inspected. This will depend on what the vehicle is used for (e.g. towing) and mileage.
- Ensure the following aspects are checked on a weekly basis, alongside additional bespoke checks carried as and when it is necessary:
 - brake and power steering fluids;
 - engine coolant and oil;
 - horn;
 - lights/bulbs/reflectors;
 - mirrors;
 - seat belts;
 - tyres, including the spare (pressure, tread depth, damage); and
 - windscreen washer fluid (including anti-freeze in winter) and wipers.
- Ensure windows are clean so that the driver's field of vision isn't restricted and cabs are kept tidy to minimise the risk of objects causing obstructions around the pedals and other controls. (Also consider that a dirty vehicle will not create a good impression to a customer!)