



Cork Buoyant About New Deal With Toyota

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Cork International, one of Britain's biggest merchandising companies, has switched to a solus badging policy with Toyota for its 200-strong light commercial vehicle fleet. It has also started moving a large proportion of its car fleet business to Toyota.

The Nottingham-based company specialises in supplying non-food items to supermarkets and other retail outlets including Tesco, J Sainsbury, Safeway and Boots as well as many other household names along with department stores, petrol stations and pharmacy chains. Cork services some 3,000 stores and carries a similar number of its own and third party branded product lines. It is also the biggest supplier of books to major supermarkets and motorway retail outlets.

Toyota Hiace vans joined the fleet two years ago alongside Nissan vans and have proved so successful, according to Transport Manager Pete Knowles, that the company began talks with Toyota Fleet about a solus agreement earlier this year. The merchandisers use the Hiace vans to make their daily and weekly store calls, averaging five deliveries and around 500 miles a week, though actual mileage can range from 400 in urban areas to as much as 900 in outlying parts of the country.

"We were looking for a narrower, less bulky van but with good payload capacity," says Pete Knowles. "The Hiace van is one of the best weight-carrying vehicles in its class, and ours work quite hard carrying at least a thousand kilos at the start of the day." The vehicles are all 2.4-litre diesel GS five-door models, mostly standard wheelbase, with a maximum payload of 1,270kg. Other initial attractions included the Hiace's dual seats, immobiliser and the single large rear door.

"We liked the all-round engineering quality, the service intervals and the back-up from Toyota - the Hiace is the right tool for the job," says Pete.

For drivers, the all-round comfort afforded by the vehicle proved appealing: "We employ many female merchandisers, and they're pleased with the power steering and manoeuvrability, because it makes the job easier for them," says Pete.

"In terms of all-round popularity, feedback has been exceptionally good. Drivers report through their regional managers that the Hiace is reliable, does its work and is not difficult to drive."

The vehicles are supplied by ACL Autolease, and are evenly split between three and four year contracts. "Whole life costs are very good and this is reflected in the monthly charges," says

Pete Knowles. "With the Hiace's reputation, it always maintains a good residual value."

Following Cork International's positive experience with Toyota LCVs, the company has decided to move away from a user-chooser approach for its 120-vehicle car fleet and introduce Toyota cars for its salesforce. The three-year switchover, which began in June, will eventually see 70-75 per cent of the car fleet Toyota-badged. Drivers, divided into three groupings, will be eligible for Corolla, Avensis or top-of-range Avensis/Camry models, with the majority in the middle group.

"It's a big culture change for Cork," comments Sam Cameron, Regional Fleet Sales Manager for Toyota. "Having taken delivery of the first ten Avensis and Camry models on its fleet, the feedback has been very positive." The cars, also on contract hire, will be changed on a three-year/ 90,000 mile basis.

"We're delighted about this vote of confidence in our products, particularly the Hiace van," says Mark Hall, General Manager of Toyota Fleet. "Toyota light commercial vehicles do have an excellent reputation with both fleet operators and drivers, as do our cars, and positive reports to reinforce that reputation are very welcome. We look forward to supporting Cork International's operation in whatever way we can."

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