



Press Information

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Prize guy...21st Century Logistics driver Gary Martin sets a shining example to his peers

Actros fan Gary scoops FleetBoard's Driver of the Year title

Gary Martin, a driver with Kent-based 21st Century Logistics, has won national recognition for his smooth, fuel-efficient performance at the wheel.

He beat off competition from drivers nationwide to be named Driver of the Year by FleetBoard, the Internet-based telematics arm of Daimler AG.

Gary is out on the road five nights a week in his BlueTec® Euro 5 Mercedes-Benz Actros MegaSpace tractor unit, trunking paper from a mill at Sittingbourne to the West Midlands headquarters of leading customer Premier Papers.

For the 226km haul north he always grosses at a full 44 tonnes. The return journey is some 60km longer because it involves a transfer of stock to another Premier facility at Erith, in south-east London; he is usually three-quarters full for this stint, then makes the final hour's run back to base empty.

The average gross weight of Gary's 460hp Euro 5 Mercedes Actros and curtainside trailer combination over this round trip is 37 tonnes, yet he still averages a highly impressive 8.5mpg.

Gary drove nearly 46,000 miles over the first seven months of 2008. Data from FleetBoard's Driver & Vehicle Management System shows that during this time he used the foot brake for just two miles! By contrast, he employed his exhaust brake for 3,773 miles but spent most of the time – 76 per cent to be precise – with the vehicle on cruise control. He also managed to coast for more than 14,000 of his first 46,000 miles.

FleetBoard analyses driver performance on a scale of one to ten, taking into account a host of factors including the 'degree of difficulty', gross vehicle weight, over-revving, braking behaviour, stops and, of course, fuel consumption. Gary won his award with a grading of 9.43 [and a degree of difficulty of 4.97](#).

He is a big fan of his Mercedes-Benz Actros, and particularly its Mercedes PowerShift automated transmission. “It’s brilliant, absolutely fabulous,” he enthuses. “In fact, the two-pedal set-up makes life so easy that the truck virtually drives itself – all I need to do is set the cruise control and steer; everything else is done for me.”

Anticipation, says Gary, is the key to fuel-efficient driving. “It’s all about reading the road and being aware of all that’s going on around you,” he reveals. “Maintaining momentum is crucial because every time you stop the vehicle you have to overcome an enormous amount of inertia to get it rolling again, which inevitably means increasing your consumption of diesel.”

And he has no time for those die-hard drivers who refuse to embrace the challenge of change. “I’ve been driving since 1976 and am now 52 years of age, so if I can kick bad habits and adopt new techniques then anyone can,” he insists. “We don’t have to live in a world of dinosaurs.”

21st Century Logistics is the operating company of The Dodd’s Group and provides transportation and warehousing services to a portfolio of ‘blue chip’ clients across a range of sectors. Of the 38 trucks based at its Sittingbourne HQ, every one is a Mercedes Actros and every one is fitted with a FleetBoard system. So, too, are seven more Actros deployed at Sheffield although this is not an exclusively Mercedes-Benz operation, as three other brands are represented within the remaining 18 trucks that work from this depot.

“We like to run a few different types of vehicle so we can always benchmark performance,” explains Managing Director David Pink. “We know the Actros is right up there with the very best in terms of fuel-efficiency, while we also enjoy excellent back-up from Mercedes-Benz and particularly supplying dealer Sparshatts of Kent, who are just around the corner from us and service our trucks under three-year r&m contracts.”

He continues: “FleetBoard gives us a mass of ‘real time’ data on where our trucks are and how they are performing, which we can access anywhere and at any time. It is an incredibly powerful management tool and an invaluable aid to our business.”

It is in the area of driver performance that 21st Century enjoys the greatest benefits from its association with FleetBoard. Commercial Manager John Robson says: “Of course, you need to start with a fuel-efficient truck but the quickest way to maximise mpg returns thereafter is to address driving style.

“Some guys are hard on the throttle and hard on the brakes all the time, which means they’re using more fuel than they should. By linking with the vehicle’s CAN-Bus system, FleetBoard allows us to monitor everything from braking pressures to the number of times the wheels stopped. And this means we can identify any shortcomings in an individual’s driving technique, which can then be addressed through additional training.”

A FleetBoard grading of below seven is below average and considered unacceptable, while anyone guilty of aggressive driving must change their ways quickly. “After all,” says Mr Robson, “an incident of harsh braking is effectively a ‘near miss’ and, as such, a health and safety issue. These vehicles run in our colours and we have a reputation to maintain, so it’s imperative that we demonstrate courtesy on the road.”

All of 21st Century’s drivers are incentivised to achieve the best possible economy through a monthly competition, the winners from both sites being rewarded with prizes of store vouchers. “It’s a bit of fun for the drivers but also very revealing, in terms of what it reveals about their characters,” continues Mr Robson. “The good drivers want to learn, and want to be the best. Gary, for example, is like a sponge – he takes it all on board and if his return drops by even a tenth of a gallon then he wants to know where he went wrong.”

The success of this strategy is demonstrated by the fact that when it started out 18 months ago 21st Century had only two drivers achieving over 8mpg; now, that figure is up to 18!

www.dodds.co.uk

www.fleetboard.co.uk



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