

MWheels: We'll continue sharing the safety message

AS REPORTED IN OUR APRIL magazine (see page 16), MWheels is disappointed by the Department for Transport's apparent failure to incorporate European Union Directives 2014/45/EU and 2014/47/EU into the wheel-related section of the new Heavy Goods Vehicle

Inspection Manual. After seeking an explanation and receiving what MWheels told Tyres & Accessories were "vague" answers, the DfT and the DVSA have agreed to meet the wheel specialist this month to discuss the matter.

Fully conversant with the EU Directives thanks to eight years of campaigning for improved commercial vehicle wheel safety, MWheels expected the DfT to effectively introduce a 'copy and paste' of the Periodic (Directive 2014/45/EU) and Roadside (Directive 2014/47/EU) documents. We can then only hope that Matthew Mardle, chief operating officer at MWheels, was sitting down when he read the draft HGV Inspection Manual released in January. He says he was "shocked" by what it contained – or rather, didn't contain – and that's perhaps

an understatement: Scant trace of the EU Directives can be found in the section pertaining to commercial vehicle wheels and hubs; instead, a careful comparison with the existing HGV Inspection Manual is required to spot any changes.

"As we understand the EU legislation, member states are well within their rights to amend the EU Directives, but any amendment must represent an improvement on the EU Directives themselves," comments Mardle. "This is not what the DfT has done when it comes to commercial vehicle wheels." The DfT evi-

dently disagrees, responding to questions from MWheels by declaring it understands it has met all obligations to bring the EU Directives into law (as the UK and all other EU member states are required to do by 20 May).

Implementation isn't optional

Yet for MWheels this isn't just a case of 'he said, she said' – the commercial vehicle wheel specialist believes it knows what it's talking about, and to verify this has done its homework ahead of the



One point of legislation based on the EU Directives is knowing a wheel is fit for purpose based upon the vehicle's operational requirements



Matthew Mardle, chief operating officer at MWheels

planned meeting with the DfT and DVSA. Clarification has been gained from no less an expert than one of the architects of the aforementioned EU Directives, the former chair of the European Parliament's Transport Committee. He supports MWheels' position, stating that "under EU law, full national implementation of both EU Directives is compulsory in the UK, as is the case in all 28 European Union member states."

A second opinion was also sought, this time from Germany, where Directives 2014/45/EU and 2014/47/EU have been brought in their entirety into new national law. Stefanie Schröder, head of the Department for Transport and Digital Infrastructure at Germany's Permanent Representation to the European Union, explained her country's understanding of European law to MWheels: Both EU Directives must be introduced by 20 May 2018. The procedure for amending Germany's applicable legislation (TechKontrollIV – Verordnung über technische Kontrollen von Nutzfahrzeugen auf der Straße) to incorporate the EU Directives was nearing completion when we spoke with MWheels in mid-April.

"After examining the draft documentation for commercial vehicle wheels and hubs, we don't believe the DfT has fulfilled its obligation," emphasises Mardle, adding that MWheels now expects the DfT to explain why it thinks it has. What

MWheels wants answered during this month's meeting can be summarised as follows: Given that European Union law requires the UK to fully implement EU Directives 2014/45/EU and 2014/47/EU and enact these by 20 May 2018, why is the Government not fulfilling this obligation? And should it truly believe it has completely met its obligation with January's revised testing document, how does it understand its accomplishment of this?

MWheels is readying itself for one of two possible scenarios – either the DfT will realise it has to introduce the EU Directives as a whole, thereby vindicating MWheels' work over the past eight years, or else it will provide proof that explains why it has met its obligations under European law. Should neither scenario eventuate, British fleet operators may have something else to worry about besides Brexit: "As far as we're aware, 27 EU member states look set to implement the EU Directives as they relate to commercial vehicle wheels, and their regulations will apply to any UK vehicle that leaves our shores and goes into Europe," says the chief operating officer. Anyone running vehicles equipped according to differing UK legislation could thus be exposed to harsh penalties should a compliance issue involving a truck or trailer arise.

"Should they disprove our arguments for changing the law to reflect the safety-critical natural of commercial vehicle wheels, we will continue the lobbying process," states Matthew Mardle. "The fight will always go on. There's always education, education and education – it's what we believe in. We want to educate people on the importance of steel and forged aluminium commercial vehicle wheels so that fleets know what they're basing their decisions on when they sit down and make their purchasing and

maintenance decisions. If the DfT says it is right and makes no changes, we'll continue lobbying the DfT to upgrade its legislative documentation for wheel testing and we'll still take the EU Directives to British operators and say 'we co-created this, and this is why.' Effectively, all other member states agree with the EU Directives, and UK fleets operating in Europe need to know about them and what they say about commercial wheels. Much of our transport now is intracontinental."

Greater accountability for provenance needed

Does the UK then risk missing an opportunity to address a number of safety-related uncertainties within the commercial vehicle wheel sector? Mardle thinks it does. The HGV Inspection Manual introduced on 20 May will still allow steel or forged aluminium commercial vehicle



MWheels stands 100% behind everything it sells, including the Xbrite+ (pictured) and Xlite forged aluminium wheels

wheels made anywhere and in unverified conditions to be sold in the UK, no questions asked. Mardle observes that "at the moment a market trader can buy wheels from any factory in the world, even if they have no form of certification, and sell them in the UK as there's no law to stop this." And sell them they do – it is difficult to gain an exact measure of the market in the absence of clear published data on wheel imports into the UK, however

Merits of aluminium vs steel to push UK, European growth

Last September, MWheels announced a five-year extension of its exclusive European distribution arrangement with Wheels India Ltd., the country's largest commercial vehicle wheel manufacturer. The deal applies to distribution of the Xlite and Xbrite forged aluminium wheel ranges, products that are spearheading MWheels' push into mainland Europe.

This push is now under way: The company has established a facility in Neuwied, Germany and will build up a local team there over the coming 12 to 18 months. This operation, MWheels GmbH, opened on 1 February and is tasked with supplying customers located in Europe. "Xlite and Xbrite are the core stocks held in Neuwied at the moment," shares Mardle. "We are promoting these as a good alternative to the Alcoa brand."

Possessing stocks in Germany gives MWheels an immediacy of availability in Europe unachievable when shipping wheels across the Channel from the UK, and establishing a European operation also offers the company added security should Brexit turn sour at some point. Mardle is optimistic: "We have a good plan for Europe – growth will come through forged aluminium wheels, just as it does here."

The chief operating officer points out that MWheels' performance in Europe is particularly good in light of data showing the German market to be 3.5 per cent lower than expected in January and February. He credits the growth of MWheels in Europe as being a key sales driver that helped boost the company's year-on-year turnover by 20 per cent in 2017.

Mardle also sees "great growth opportunities" within the UK market, with MWheels well placed to benefit from added skill sets brought into the business over the past couple of years: "Team growth provides the right specialists for talking to customer counterparts in every area of the business. It opens doors to bigger fleets, to the medium and larger operators. We can now talk with them at every level – and can talk at the level that's expected."

The company's target for 2018 is to again achieve a 20 per cent increase in sales. Much of this activity is expected to come from Europe, and growth will be aided by a new 'steel versus aluminium' marketing campaign.

Forged aluminium wheels weigh less than their steel counterparts. Forged spun wheels, such as the Xlite and Xbrite+, also run truer and offer greater rolling efficiency. Mardle calculates that fitting a trailer with a set of six aluminium wheels saves well over 120 kilograms, a difference in weight that manifests itself in fuel savings or greater payload capacity. Furthermore, as forged aluminium wheels generate less heat when running, tyres and other components located around the wheel unit last longer.

"Forged aluminium wheels are more expensive to buy than steel but the return on investment is quick when taking all these factors into consideration," Mardle stresses. He adds that MWheels will dedicate its UK and European sales plans this year to the steel versus aluminium message, communicating this via social media, training videos, hard literature and advertising.

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Equipping a trailer with six forged aluminium wheels saves well over 120kg compared with fitment of steel wheels

cheap products represent a considerable proportion of total sales.

The point of legislation based upon

the EU Directives is provenance and gaining an understanding of where a product has come from, as well as knowing it is fit for purpose based upon the vehicle's operational requirements. Steel wheels in particular are viewed as consumables, and if somebody buys a cheap product and it cracks, it'll be discarded and replaced. But Mardle raises an important point: "Our argument has always been, what if the wheel causes

serious damage or death and injury – where do you stand?"

Directives 2014/45/EU and 2014/47/EU clearly define where each party's accountability begins and ends and provides clarity in issues such as like-for-like wheel replacement. "The EU legislation is very good indeed," Mardle comments. "We should know – we supplied the technical information on which the EU engineering boffins created the text."

Mardle adds that many of MWheels' large 'PLC' customers have already endorsed the specialist's efforts to see full introduction of the EU directives. Support has also come from tyre makers; MWheels has discussed legislative issues at length with all the premium tyre makers as well as a number of mid-market players and has helped them to understand the importance of the wheel and tyre as an entire answer.

In conclusion and bringing current questions about EU and UK legislation back to MWheels' own business, Mardle stresses that he and the company's supply chain operator have visited all factories where the products it distributes are made and have accumulated an in-depth understanding of material sourcing, manufacturing processes and product testing. "We can stand 100 per cent behind anything we sell. And post 20 May, this becomes far more important in what we believe is 27 from 28 member states. No matter what the DfT says, we won't stop sharing our message."

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