

Clean air act

The world's first economically viable battery-powered truck, the FUSO eCanter has proved 100% reliable and is integral to DPD's ambitious all-electric strategy

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

DPD's first fully-electric 'final mile' delivery depot is now being served by a zero-emission FUSO eCanter. The truck wins top marks from its driver for its comfort and quietness ▶



We're edging our way towards the bustling Elephant & Castle roundabout. This is peak time, the traffic is chokingly heavy, and it's evident from their faces that most of the drivers around us would prefer to be anywhere but here. Not Michael Zammett, though, for his cab is an oasis of quietness and calm, his demeanour unflustered. He's happy in his work – and his FUSO eCanter has a lot to do with it.

Twenty years a professional, Michael drives for multi-award-winning delivery company DPD. He spends his days negotiating the very worst that central London's congested streets can throw at him, so a bit of congestion is nothing out of the ordinary. What is very much 'out of the ordinary', though, despite its conventional appearance, is his vehicle. The FUSO eCanter is the world's first fully electric light-duty truck to enter series production. As such, it represents a major advance in the battle to improve air quality in our towns and cities.

Michael outlines his attitude to the job: "It's important, particularly when you're under pressure, to remain cool at the wheel. All this traffic can be frustrating at times, but there's nothing to be gained from getting stressed; it doesn't get you there any quicker. Plus, of course, a calm, relaxed driver, is also a safer driver, and safety is DPD's number one priority."

The truck's smooth, near silent driveline complements this approach. Michael's eCanter is one of two supplied last year to DPD – others are in service in the capital with flour milling giant Hovis and logistics leader Wincanton PLC. With its instant torque delivery, it is lightning quick from 0–30 mph, and Michael acknowledges: "When you first drive an eCanter it's the instant acceleration that is most striking. But what you then, very quickly come to appreciate, is that it's also so much quieter than a diesel-engined vehicle. The lack of noise and vibration makes the experience at the wheel far more enjoyable, and means I'm nothing like as tired at the end of the day."

This ground-breaking vehicle, which is scheduled to go on general sale via the Mercedes-Benz Dealer network in 2020, offers cost savings worth up to 1 000 Euro for every 10 000 kilometres covered, compared to a diesel-engined truck. More importantly, it also represents a genuinely sustainable alternative for customers engaged in urban distribution operations.

Powered by six 420 V and 13.8 kWh lithium-ion batteries, the eCanter's electric drivetrain with permanent-magnet-motor delivers 129 kW (180 hp) via a single-gear transmission in the rear axle. The truck offers a body and payload allowance of up to 4.5 tonnes, and a single charge allows effective operating ranges of more than 62 miles (100 km). That, for Michael, is more



Plug and play

The lithium-ion batteries of DPD's eCanters are restored to full capacity overnight, but up to 80% is also possible in less than an hour with direct current at a quick charging station

Leading from the front

Having opened its first all-electric last-mile delivery depot in Westminster last October, DPD plans to add another seven across the capital

Cool, calm and collected

Driver Michael Zammett says the absence of noise from his FUSO eCanter helps to make life at the wheel less tiring and stressful

than enough; he will rarely cover half this distance in a full day's shift.

Michael starts work at 7 am, at DPD's London City Distribution Centre in Bermondsey, south of the Thames. The company has invested upwards of £5 million here over the last couple of years, with much of it spent on a state-of-the-art, high-capacity conveyancing system that sorts anything up to 5 000 parcels an hour. It is an impressive operation. Last night Mercedes-Benz Actros tractor units arriving from DPD hubs in the Midlands delivered a combined total of nearly 30 000 consignments. Those parcels are now being sorted before being sent out for delivery in two waves to all WC, and most SE and SW postcodes. This one centre will put 150 drivers on the road today, and with the sole exception of the eCanter, they will all be in Mercedes-Benz Sprinter vans.

Having unplugged his eCanter from its overnight charging point, Michael begins the job of loading. Over the next hour he fills six 'magnums' from his allotted chute, then pulls each one out to his vehicle. A Dollandia tail-lift provides easy access to its Bevan-built box body. Michael's initial destination of the day is always the same – it's the UK's first, all-electric parcel delivery depot, which was opened by DPD on Vardon Street, Westminster, last October. Depending on the traffic conditions, the route takes him over Westminster or Lambeth Bridges. Either way, it's a journey of less than three-and-a-half miles, but typically takes the best part of 45 minutes to complete.

Turning onto Caxton Street, just a couple of hundred yards from our destination, we find the road blocked. An operative is preparing to drive a mini-roller off the back of his beavertail plant vehicle, and he's clearly going to take his time about it. Michael knows the depot is awaiting his delivery – they called a couple of

minutes ago to request an e.t.a. – but it wouldn't occur to him to hit the horn, or even to drum his fingers impatiently on the wheel. Instead, he just smiles and sits back to wait it out. All in a day's work.

The electric Canter shares the tight turning circle of its diesel- and hybrid-powered stablemates, and aided by his reversing camera it's a simple task for Michael to manoeuvre his vehicle into position outside the smart new Westminster depot, so the process of unloading can begin. The first of eight such facilities which DPD plans to open in London – the second will be in Shoreditch – it employs an all-electric fleet of 18 vehicles to make final mile deliveries of up to 2 000 parcels per day. This depot is also home to the first DPD UK-owned Pickup shop, a dedicated access point for consumers collecting parcels; another 2 500 Pickup sites operate across the UK, in partnership with brands such as Sainsbury's, Matalan and Halfords.

On returning to the London City Distribution Centre, Michael takes his statutory 45-minute break before reloading and setting out again on a round of general deliveries. First up this afternoon is a consignment of 63 crates of books for a leading retailer's branch in Bloomsbury, on the edge of the University of London campus. Then it's back over the Thames, this time for a 'drop' in Cobalt Square, Vauxhall, a stone's throw from both the riverside headquarters of the security service MI6, and The Oval cricket ground.

It's here that we leave Michael, a driver who is delighted to be playing his own small part in shaping the future of transportation. "I feel privileged, being one of the first to drive a fully-electric truck for DPD in the UK," he confides. "It's quite an honour to be honest."

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“Reducing and neutralising our carbon footprint by providing smarter and more efficient urban delivery solutions, and investing in innovation, are at the heart of DPD's DrivingChange programme. We want to be the leader in alternative fuel vehicles in the UK, and aim, ultimately, to move to an entirely zero-emission fleet. The FUSO eCanter is integral to our EV strategy. Aside from the fact that it produces zero tailpipe emissions and therefore offers exemplary environmental credentials, this vehicle is ideally suited to urban operation thanks to its combination of comfort, agility and high payload potential. We've had no issues during their first six months in service with either of our eCanters, and on the basis of their reliability and performance we look forward to commissioning more over the months and years to come. There remain significant external issues to be overcome in terms of the infrastructure to support an all-electric fleet on the scale we need, across the whole of central London. But we will continue to work with the key stakeholders to realise our aims and support the Mayor of London and Transport for London's ambition for a cleaner and less congested capital.”

Rob Fowler, General Manager – Corporate Social Responsibility & General Planning, DPD