

# Fuel Oil News

MAY 2021



**THE TECHNOLOGY ISSUE**

**IN CONVERSATION WITH MIRIAM JAMES**

**DEVELOPMENTS ONLINE**



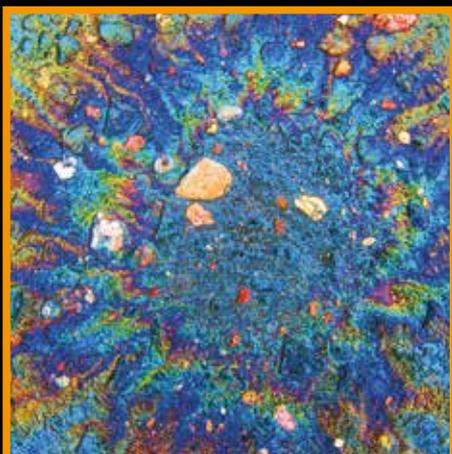
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## Innovate to succeed

When the effects of the pandemic are discussed, much of the focus is on the negative impact on the economy and our physical and mental health. But, while the damaging effects are unlike anything we've ever witnessed, it's not all bad news.

Many businesses have suffered, but others have flourished, and there are many instances of companies, and employees, embracing some of the enforced changes as permanent ones for the better.

Clearly, enforced change in consumer activity has driven much of the B2C success, with those producing PPE, sanitiser, tech solutions and the like all busier than ever. But there is still a commonality in the companies that have succeeded – the successful adoption of technology.

Over the last year we have covered, in these pages, the swift adaptation of our own industry to increased homeworking and digitisation, with the adoption of cloud software and remote working technologies. It was clear that the businesses that had already begun to embrace these benefitted from being ahead of the game.

Those that hadn't yet started down this route swiftly jumped on board and many, in the early stages, simply accelerated their digitisation. With these plans fast-tracked, funding for digital initiatives is the area that has received the most investment through this time. With that in mind, this issue looks at how technology is adapting to the evolving needs of our industry and how those in the supply chain are adopting it.

One thing the pandemic has taught us is that digital is now essential, and we can all learn from those that have embraced it. In difficult times, it's natural to look at cost-cutting, but those businesses that have successfully pivoted their approach prove that strategic investment in digital can be the key to success in difficult times - provided it aligns with business aims.

Our industry constantly seeks to improve and evolve but embracing new technology may give an extra edge in an increasingly competitive market.



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# Fuel Oil News

The independent voice for the fuel distribution, storage and marketing industry in the UK and Ireland.

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## On the cover

Our cover features Miriam James, managing director of Silvey Fleet, who we are 'In Conversation' with on pages 18 & 19. We hear of the role Miriam has played in the evolution of the business from fuel supply to fleet solutions.

## In this issue

In 'Diversification Corner' on page 11, we hear how a distributor has evolved to expand the services they offer and, on pages 13 to 15, we take an in-depth look at how technology plays an increasing role in the supply chain in our 'Industry Analysis'.

# Fears for future of Stanlow refinery

**Essar-owned Stanlow refinery, located in Ellesmere Port, is reportedly facing financial problems, but the company has said it is fully committed to its operations at the refinery, including plans to decarbonise its activities and produce sustainable fuel there.**

It has been reported that the plunging demand for fuel during the pandemic forced Essar Oil UK to have discussions with the Government with regard to its financial position.

Essar recently said that there was a 'material uncertainty' that could throw doubt over its ability to continue as a going concern. It also added that a 'significant drop in demand and poor refining margins, coupled with market volatility caused operating losses'.

A spokesperson for Essar said the company has 'historically been very profitable, but the pandemic has affected all refiners, with repeated lockdowns leading to reduced products demand and depressed refining margins'.

Essar bought the former Shell refinery at Stanlow in 2011. The site directly employs around 900 staff, with up to a further 800 contractors and produces 16% of the UK's diesel and petrol as well as almost 10bn litres of aviation fuel a year.

With reports suggesting that discussions could involve a request for direct financial support questions would be sure to arise around the 'optic' of the government providing such support to the fossil fuel industry in the year of COP26. It will be interesting to see if this could be avoided by placing the emphasis of any support on Essar's plans to move to more sustainable ventures.

## Diversifying to thrive or survive?

In January 2021, plans were announced to create a £760m hydrogen production plant at Stanlow with Essar and Progressive Energy, developers of HyNet North West, joining forces in a venture to produce low carbon hydrogen at the Ellesmere port refinery. The hydrogen will be manufactured for use across the HyNet region and is expected to create hundreds of construction jobs, followed by thousands more across the region once the network is completed.

Stein Ivar Bye, Essar Oil UK chief executive, said at the time:

"Essar is committed to innovative growth as a means to create positive impact to both economy and environment. HyNet and hydrogen production is integral to Stanlow's strategy and will set it on a journey to be the UK's first net zero emission refinery with the ambition to avoid emissions of over two million tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere per year, the equivalent of taking nearly a million cars off the road.

"With the support from government to establish the appropriate business incentives, together with Progressive Energy, we are committed to undertaking the development and the financing of its construction."

February brought Essar's announcement that it has joined forces with Fulcrum BioEnergy and Stanlow Terminals to create a new £600m facility which will convert non-recyclable household waste into sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) for use by airlines operating at UK airports.

This project, Fulcrum NorthPoint, will create 800 direct and indirect jobs during the design, build and commissioning process and more than 100 permanent jobs during its operation.

A spokesperson for Essar said:

"Historically, Essar Oil UK has attracted over \$1bn in investment since its acquisition in 2011. It is a long-standing private company without public shareholders.

"We have successfully traded through a very difficult 12 months and are now seeing increased demand for road transport fuels and improving refining margins, which has resulted in increased throughput at the Stanlow Manufacturing Complex.

"We are not a levered business and currently we do not have any short term or long-term bank debt on the company, other than working capital lines.

"Prior to coronavirus, we were generating EBITDA in excess of \$300m per year. We remain confident that we can manage through this period and come out stronger as the economy clearly continues to recover."

At time of going to press Essar reported that it has successfully addressed the required financing to replace the previous receivables facility with a spokesperson commenting:

"We are delighted to report on the positive developments at the refinery. We are grateful for the support we have received, and continue to receive, from our customers, suppliers and the Government through the last year. We look forward to continuing to serve our customers with high-value products and progressing our post-carbon transformation plans."

# Greenergy completes acquisition of Amber Petroleum

**Greenergy has completed the acquisition of Amber Petroleum ('Amber'), an independent fuel retailer and distributor based in the Republic of Ireland.**

**The completion of this transaction gives Greenergy a growing presence in Ireland where it currently markets through Inver Energy.**

Christian Flach, Greenergy CEO said:

"This transaction is a key part of our growth strategy in our key markets and it will allow us to continue to expand our integrated platform in Ireland, building on our existing infrastructure, supply and retail operations. I look forward to welcoming the Amber team to Greenergy."

Amber's existing management team and staff will remain in place.



# Essar donates £3,000 to provide dementia support

A significant safety milestone reached at Essar Stanlow has seen a £3,000 donation made to The Alzheimer's Society. The award recognises the recent achievement of reaching one million hours without a Recordable Injury at the Ellesmere Port site. The funds were raised through Essar's 'Let's Give' scheme, which links the company's commitment to safety directly with charitable giving. Essar employees and business partners nominate a chosen charity as safety milestones are met.

David Ellis, employed by Essar business partner, Sarens UK Ltd, said:

"I would like to thank Essar for their generous donation. I know first-hand how challenging living with dementia can be as my mother lived with vascular dementia before passing away a few years ago. It was a difficult time for all of us and the disease has so many unanswered questions still.

"The money will go to a very worthy charity to help research and support those in need of help. I am very proud to be part of a safety team initiative that can provide financial support to such a worthwhile cause."

Linzi Stewart, community fundraiser for Alzheimer's Society in Cheshire said:

"In Cheshire and across the UK, people affected by dementia have been hit hard by the pandemic. From the high death rate in care homes, to the significant cognitive decline for people in the community, to the rising mental health challenges for unpaid carers, the pandemic has had a severe impact, while exposing our fragmented social care system.

"People affected by dementia and



David Ellis presents £3,000 donation to Alzheimer's Society as part of Let's Give safety initiative at Stanlow Refinery

their families need us now more than ever. During the pandemic there has been an unprecedented demand for our services with our DementiaConnect support line receiving over three million calls since March 2020 alone,

and that number is growing. The Alzheimer's Society has been hit hard financially because of the pandemic and we are therefore delighted to receive a donation from Essar to help us deliver vital services to those in need."

## UKIFDA reveals sponsors for Future Fuels EXPO

UKIFDA has revealed that the sponsor for the second day of the two-day Future Fuels conference is Cobo Tankers and Services Ltd.

Long standing supporter of UKIFDA EXPO, Cobo Tankers and Services Ltd will join headline sponsor Phillips 66 Ltd as supporters of this annual event which is, this year, celebrating its 40th anniversary.

UKIFDA chief executive, Ken Cronin says: "This year's EXPO promises to be just as positive and rewarding for those involved as all our previous events have been and we're hugely excited that this will be our first virtual EXPO in its 40-year history – and that longstanding supporters of our annual industry show, Cobo, will be sponsoring the second day."



Fernando Gomis, of Cobo Tankers and Services UK Ltd says:

"We're delighted to be sponsoring day two of the first ever virtual UKIFDA EXPO. It's such welcome news UKIFDA found a way to make it safe for the annual event to take place in the

current climate, and we're proud to be involved in such a big way in the programme plans for the second day which focuses on the future of the industry and future fuels."

Dawn Shakespeare, UKIFDA membership and events manager, comments:

"Cobo has been so involved in our EXPOS over the years that we're thrilled they have a more central role this year as second-day sponsors for our first virtual event and conference. As well as being sponsors of the 2nd day of the conference they are also exhibiting and are promising exciting new things to showcase to visitors to their virtual exhibition booth".

Find the full update at [fueloilnews.co.uk](http://fueloilnews.co.uk).

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# Leading industry company celebrates 50 years of innovation



**This spring sees OTS Group Ltd celebrating its 50th anniversary and, from its humble beginnings in a farm cowshed, to becoming a leader in the fuel industry, the company has never lost sight of its values.**

Established in 1971 as Oil Tank Supplies Ltd. it was originally focused on the manufacture of small domestic oil storage tanks and installation and changeover services.

“It all started with Peter Wood and I meeting at Seale Hayne Agricultural College in Devon and we kept in touch and both realised that we were probably unemployable,” remembers co-founder Bruce Woodall. “Therefore, we decided we should start a business of our own and recognised there was an opportunity to seize in oil-fired central heating by manufacturing domestic oil storage tanks”.

## Timing is everything

“We started in a cowshed at Churchdown near Cheltenham. The tanks were manufactured in the old cowshed and every piece of steel and the finished tanks were manually handled. No forklifts! Within 2 years, we persuaded CoSIRA (Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas) to give us an industrial building loan for our first factory at Andoversford, near Cheltenham. Two years later we moved into the factory and we were then manufacturing around 200 tanks a month, and everything was looking good. Then, in November of 1973, OPEC suddenly decided to rapidly increase the price of crude oil which literally changed the domestic heating scene overnight”.

That year, the price of kerosene more than doubled in price and orders dropped within 2 months to less than 50 tanks a month.

“It taught us that we had to diversify to build a sustainable business,” adds Bruce. The company then started dealing in second-hand tanks which were refurbished and resold - mainly to the commercial sector, including farmers, many of whom were friends from agricultural days.

“In 1982 OTS diversified into supplying tanks to filling stations and then to refurbishing filling stations ourselves, employing our own skilled tradesmen. This was followed by us purchasing old filling station sites to refurbish ourselves as ‘hospital jobs’ between contracts. The same year, the company purchased Happylands Quarry near Chipping Campden, an 11-acre site, and got planning permission to use the site as our new premises for tanks and services.

“We quarried out 500,000 tonnes as a JV with a large Quarry Company to build the M40 section near Warwick and then renamed the site Springhill Industrial Estate,” adds Bruce. “We were also then involved in importing and selling wood-burning stoves and cast-iron garden furniture and Peter wished to do other things, so I bought Peter’s shares and kept the oil industry businesses and he kept stoves and furniture”.

## Constant evolution underpinned by innovation

Over the decades, OTS has constantly evolved in response to industry needs and new technologies, and has always striven to be ahead of changing times. This has led the company to developing a number of unique patented products such as the OTS MultiServ™ which is effectively a pop-up commercial filling station. Now OTS is the leader in the fuel storage and installation industry with a large fleet of fully compliant storage tanks up to 100,000 litres for hire, a highly skilled technical support team covering the whole of the UK and Ireland and also manufactures bunded steel tanks up to 200,000 litres to OFS T/200 which is the highest standard in the UK for bunded steel tanks. OTS also specialises in designing and building distribution depots, fuel dispensing systems and management systems for the large food retailers and online distribution businesses. OTS has pioneered many special projects over the years, like the floating fuelling system they designed and built for Whitelink Ferries in Portsmouth harbour, and Plymouth Fisheries new fuelling system for the trawlers.

With the drive to reach net zero by 2050 and, therefore, the advent of new fuels to reduce tailpipe emissions, the company has developed a fuel-quality division to deal with the problems arising from modern biofuels which can cause issues with the latest Euro 6 engines. The subsidiary company, TankCare Ltd, holds the UKIFDA contract for fuel quality testing for their fuel distribution members in the UK and Ireland.

“Throughout this constant evolution, innovation has remained the underlying principle to everything we do. We are proud to be celebrating this milestone today,” adds Bruce.

OTS Group heads into its sixth decade with a strong commitment to its core principles of; enabling and growing a strong, technically-advanced work force, constant innovation and improvement and continuing to serve its customers, who it also regards as its future.

Conscious of the GHG and air quality issues with fossil fuels, OTS Group has become involved with organisations like the Fuel Experts Association (FEA) who represent companies who are developing clean energy and clean liquid biofuels such as HVO. Bruce believes that there is a bright future for clean drop-in fuels and also that, ultimately, hydrogen will be the utopian fuel for transport and heating.

## Celebrations

“Covid19 may have put a bit of a damper on celebrations, but it has also made us realise how important our community is to us.”

“An anniversary logo has been developed to mark this special year, which we plan to use on all our communications. But we look forward to celebrating the next big milestone in person with employees, partners, clients and friends,” concludes Steve Gain, managing director.

## Neil Parkinson



Fuel Oil News is saddened to report the passing of Neil Parkinson. Employed by Callow Oils in the role of sales representative for ten years, Helen Needham shares memories of Neil with us.

“Although employed as sales representative, Neil was always happy to turn his hand to anything including driving the artic on occasions. His first trip, many years ago, to Cardiff Terminal has gone down in Callow folklore, when he got lost en route having said he knew the country like

the back of his hand.

“As well as being a well-respected colleague who was a super salesperson, he was a dear friend and the kindest person you could ever hope to meet. We were often spoilt in the office with his home-grown flowers and produce.

“At the Callow Oils 50th anniversary party Neil had perhaps one too many, fell over on the dance floor, cut his head resulting in an ambulance being called and the party coming to an early close. The following Monday Neil came into the office large as life and blamed his slippery, new shoes for the tumble. As you can imagine a lot of ribbing followed.

“We are still reeling from his tragic death and he will be sorely missed by colleagues and customers alike. Rest in peace Neil.”



## Mark Mackenzie

Fuel Oil News is saddened to report the passing of Mark Mackenzie, on 23rd March 2021, aged 38 years.

In April 2002, Mark started at Nolan Oils as a tank installer. He quickly took responsibility as routing clerk and then progressed further to depot manager. Mark was enthusiastic at work and he loved football and horse racing.

Mark discovered that he had motor neurone disease and had difficulty walking at the UKIFDA EXPO (then named FPS) in 2016. As it advanced, Mark worked from home for a time in 2016/17.

Mark Nolan said: “As this cruel illness progressed, Mark kept a sense of humour during our visits.

“His nickname was Treacle and most of the suppliers used to call and ask for him by this name. Mark was very popular with the supply managers and haulage companies we used. He was a very reliable colleague and friend who was, and is, sorely missed.”



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# Alpeco launches 'TEX', the new benchmark for fuel tanker management and system control

Alpeco's MF400, 800 and 1100 road tanker delivery systems are well renowned within the fuel oil distribution industry for giving long term reliability and the highest level of accuracy. The introduction of the new TEX flow computer adds another dimension in terms of system control and data management as well as protection against costly cross contamination errors.

Built from the ground up, the TEX is the result of a three-year R&D program by SAMPI and, as with its Truck III predecessor, the TEX is available as a stand-alone unit or integrated with the CHECKMATE stainless steel control module.

Key features include:

- Single operator interface for the

entire tanker delivery system

- ATEX approved enclosure with 7" full colour screen with large font display
- Alpha numeric keypad providing simple navigation of the intuitive menu
- Graphical display showing compartment volumes and grades in industry recognised colours
- Load inventory providing anti-crossover prevention feature
- Unlimited entry of named products
- Multiple connectivity options enabling remote control and data transfer between in-cab computers and iMeter tracking systems.
- TEX-LINK REMOTE giving full control over the entire delivery system



Nolan Fuel Oils Ltd, based near Bicester, has been using TEX since September 2020. Mark Nolan, managing director, said:

"It's a fantastic product, especially the cross-contamination features which prevent the accidental opening of the wrong compartment. Our drivers find the colour graphics on the screen very clear and easy to understand. We have been so impressed with the

TEX that we have specified it for a further 2 new tankers which will be added to the fleet this year."

Adrian, a driver at Nolan Fuel Oils added:

"The TEX-LINK remote allows me to switch compartments, change pre-set and line change without walking back to the tanker".

For more information, please visit [alpecold.com](http://alpecold.com) or contact Alpeco on 01296 619510.



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## Prax Lindsey Oil Refinery

Prax has made a number of significant announcements in recent months and we spoke with Sanjeev Kumar to find out more about the company's plans and how this may affect distributors.

### Sourcing supplies through Trafigura

"The crude oil and feedstocks supply arrangement with Trafigura is our preferred way forward due to our long-term relationship with them, and the fact that Trafigura has an extensive global reach in international oil markets, allowing it to source an optimal range of crude oils and feedstocks for the refinery.

"The arrangement is an important step in our plans for the long-term growth of the refinery, paving the way for us to provide operational and planning flexibility, as well as helping us to continue to deliver an excellent level of service to our customers."

### Growth, adaptation and diversification

"We acquired Lindsey Oil Refinery with the clear objective of continuing to operate it as a refinery and, through the right type of strategic investment, we will ensure that all units are enhanced. The UK energy industry is transitioning and we will be embracing this transition with the modifications we are making at the refinery. The Prax Group is still very much in a growth phase, and so we will continue to

invest in the site every year to adapt the facility to improve safety and respond to the demands of the market. Our ongoing commitment is to build a reliable supply chain to meet the needs of our customers for many years to come.

"We are currently in the process of investigating several different projects for Prax Lindsey Oil Refinery, which will bring additional value to our business. The acquisition was a natural progression for the Group, as it provides us with the opportunity to integrate the refinery and its associated product flows into the Group's UK distribution and retail footprint, which operates under the Harvest Energy brand. This will create unique future synergies with existing Prax-owned assets. We will also be moving more product by ship and rail and we own the largest private rail complex in the UK. We will, additionally, be exploiting the benefits of the 215-kilometre Finaline pipeline,



which runs from the refinery to Buncefield. The Finaline is now fully operational and allows us to deliver multi-products to the Greater London area. Product from the refinery can also be fed by pipeline from Buncefield to Heathrow Airport and, as a significant aviation player, we can further strengthen our presence in this arena.

"That is not to say that we intend to neglect the Humber area, as we are determined to play an important role in the region. We are only a few weeks into our ownership and there are many opportunities that we still need to assess. We are reviewing strategic future projects for the site and the wider area, such as the Humber Zero Project and co-processing greener biofuels. Separately, we also have planning permission for a racking system to be installed, where trucks can be loaded more efficiently. So, watch this space!"

### Using our resources to meet net zero

"Our industry is facing tremendous challenges as it transitions towards a Net-Zero economy.

## Pledges on jobs and decarbonisation as Luc Smets joins Prax

Luc Smets has been appointed general manager of the Prax Lindsey Oil Refinery at North Killingholme.

Luc brings with him more than three decades of experience in the petrochemical industry, with 23 of those years spent with ExxonMobil.

As part of corporate strategy for the refinery, the Prax Group has committed to boosting the workforce while also focusing on the reduction of emissions under a net zero initiative.

In a recent interview, Luc said: "The first commitment the Group made to the team at the refinery, is that the existing organisation will not be affected. We need the existing team and nobody is at risk.

"But, looking at all the projects we have on the table, the question is what resources we need now and in the future, and can we do it with the existing organisation? The answer is no ... and we are now looking at where and how to expand the organisation. Should it be insourced or outsourced?"

"At this moment, the only certain answer I can give, is that job numbers will rise, and sooner rather than later."

Commenting on the net zero agenda, Luc said:

"Our intention is to play a major part in most of these projects in order to take our Corporate Social Responsibility seriously and be

sustainable for the future.

"Although we have only been in place at Prax Lindsey Oil Refinery for a couple of months, we are already making contacts with relevant organisations in the surrounding area, such as ABP, VPI, Phillips 66 and the Petroleum Industry Association.

"We are aware of the Humber Zero initiatives, and I want to understand what this entails and what role we can play in these projects.

"We fully support the move towards zero emissions, and while this will be challenging as we move ahead, it is part of our corporate and local strategy and underpins everything we do."

Luc added that Prax was investigating what measures the company could take to become a benchmark for the region, while contributing positively to the work of the authorities in this respect.

On another key aspect of the future strategy of the Prax Group, Luc underlined the commitment to developing operations in the area of



The sector will use its extensive resources to decarbonise its activities and products with technologies such as hydrogen supply, energy storage and carbon capture utilisation and storage. The Covid-19 recovery process and the net zero target need to be addressed as twin challenges in order to meet the UK's decarbonisation target in an efficient manner. In terms of the refinery, we will be ensuring that our social responsibility strategy continues to remain front and centre of everything we do."

**Tailor-made solutions**

"We now have a complete national presence for UK distributors to pick up oil supplies. We are a sizable player, and that scale means that we can service our clients much better, guaranteeing them both reliability and security of supply. The UK distributor community is also assured of availability of product due to the geography of our UK supply network, and the relatively short distances we can cover from the refinery to such places as Grangemouth, Jarrow and London. However, we recognise that some distributors may wish to pick up product by rail and ship, rather than road, and our new offerings ensure that we can accommodate these requirements.

"Coupled with our ability to provide tailor-made and competitive pricing solutions, spot volumes, and dedicated desk support for corporate contracts, this means that we are confident that our overall portfolio for distributors is very attractive."

hydrogen:

"Hydrogen will play a major role in the future, and we are currently looking at how we can bring value to the ongoing initiatives," he said.

Looking ahead, Luc is keen to bring his experience of both corporate and independent plant operations to the table in his new role, melding the best of the two cultures as the refinery makes the transition to Prax.

"One of the reasons I joined Prax is the challenge involved in a takeover such as this, and I am excited to move forwards with a knowledgeable team, who are capable and motivated and ready to respond to the new working dynamic," he said.

"We are a company in the fast lane, decision lines are short, management is lean and another key advantage is the hands-on attitude of our CEO Sanjeev Kumar, who is always on hand to steer developments."

*We look forward to seeing and sharing Prax's future decarbonisation plans within our pages. Get to know Luc Smets a little better in our 'In Profile' feature in the August issue.*

# Mitchell and Webber

**Providing home-heating oil throughout Devon and Cornwall for over 120 years, Mitchell and Webber has, over time, expanded both the services and products it offers to include industrial maintenance services and alternative liquid fuels.**

**R**obert and John Weedon, directors of South-West based distributor Mitchell and Webber, take us back to 2018 to tell us why the company decided to diversify its offering to include industrial services:

"We received various customer requests for tank cleaning, fuel polishing and fuel uplifts from tanks and we decided that, with additional training and by bringing specialists on board, we could offer this as an extension of our services."

Elaborating further on the services offered, Robert said:

"Extensive training has been undertaken which we believe exceeds industry standards. We have developed our experience with various specialist vehicles, from ADR vacuum tankers to bulk uplift vehicles.

"Catering for national and international customers from various sectors, our industrial services include tank cleaning, fuel uplift, fuel polishing, pipework, cleaning services, upgrading and installations of fuel systems and storage tanks. All services are carried out by trained and certified staff members."

Telling us more about the benefit of offering industrial services, John said:

"A key benefit of this increased offering is that we can offer a quick and affordable response for our customers. The operations are all year round so available staff can be utilised during quiet periods, in the summer, for example."

**Diversification of product portfolio**

The March issue of Fuel Oil News detailed Mitchell and Webber's involvement in the national trials of HVO. John speaks further about this diversification of the company's product portfolio:

"We are delighted to have been the first company to commence the OFTEC & UKIFDA trials in a property in Redruth and these have gone extremely well. We have expanded the trial to cover more appliances, such as AGAs, Rayburns, condensing, noncondensing and low Nox boilers. We very much hope this new liquid renewable fuel will be the way forward for heating homes in the UK."

Highlighting areas where the industry will continue to adapt, John concluded:

"With the onset of future renewable fuels, we see a future for the industry and will always adapt to what our customers require".





## HVO trials expand from Cornwall to Croftamie

THE MARCH ISSUE OF FUEL OIL NEWS REPORTED THAT THE NATIONAL HVO TRIALS, CONDUCTED FIRST BY MITCHELL AND WEBBER IN CORNWALL, WERE TO EXPAND ACROSS THE UK. HERE WE HEAR FROM **JODIE ALLAN**, MANAGER AT GLASGOW-BASED DISTRIBUTOR JAMES D BILSLAND, ON HOW THE COMPANY HAS TAKEN THE TRIAL TO SCOTLAND.

### Taking the reigns

Jodie explains how the company got involved:

“The trial is part of the ‘National Trials’ comprising UKIFDA, OFTEC, tank manufacturers, distributors etc and being on the UKIFDA management committee enabled me to become part of the working group. Each of the distributors in the working group were asked to provide proposed sites for the trials to take place, which OFTEC would then survey. The aim was to have sites positioned throughout the UK to gather data and then feed back to the group. With the initial trials carried out in Cornwall we, at James D Bilsland, are well positioned to play our part in expanding them”.

We asked Jodie what the feedback has been from customers.

“Customers have been very keen to learn more, as they know that the cost that would come with having to put in a new heating system such as an air source heat pump would prove costly, especially when they have a perfectly good, working heating system in place, so it makes sense that a renewable liquid fuel should be available.

“Before the trial, we did not have an alternative liquid fuel however, we do sell wood pellets and wood chip which are renewables,

as well as having a CHP Unit (Combined Heat & Power) at our main yard in Croftamie that supplies our heating for our offices and workshop.”

### Where will HVO sit in relation to hydrogen?

“We are going to need a range of fuels and technologies. The key is to ensure that the consumer has a choice and that the solution is, where possible, the lowest cost and least disruptive. Hydrogen and renewable liquid fuels will each have their place.

“I believe the trial will play an important part in ensuring renewable liquid fuels are on the government’s strategic planning when dealing with climate and plans for net zero carbon emissions. This, in turn, will safeguard our industry and make sure we are part of the future and that we have an important role in reducing carbon emissions, if allowed.”

### HVO at home

Jodie also revealed that, as part of the trial, her own home heating has been converted from kerosene to HVO.

“The trial will probably run in my home for around a year to gather data through all the seasons. If all goes well, and depending

on what government does in relation to the current C11P duty on renewable heating fuels, it may be a permanent change.

### What was involved in this fuel conversion?



“The existing fuel storage tank had to be emptied and cleansed, as far as reasonably possible, with all the fuel filter elements being replaced. A HVO conversion kit was used, which had a replacement

biofuel hose and a range of HVO nozzles. We then had Kyle Spittal from K Spittal Plumbing & Heating facilitate the conversion to HVO – and Kyle continues to monitor the conversion. It wasn’t intrusive in the slightest and has been seamless.

“I believe HVO could be adopted as an alternative liquid fuel should the trial produce the results that we are looking for and as long as production can meet demand.”

Fuel Oil News will be following the trials closely and we look forward to sharing updates.

# Technology: Supporting the supply chain

THERE IS MUCH BEING WRITTEN ABOUT THE WAY IN WHICH AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGIES CAN INCREASE EFFICIENCY, IN TERMS OF BOTH TIME AND COST, IN MANY AREAS OF THE INDUSTRY. HERE, WE SPEAK WITH FUEL OIL SUPPLIERS, WHOLESALERS AND DISTRIBUTORS, AS WELL AS SUPPLIERS OF TECHNOLOGIES, TO FIND OUT WHAT HAS BEEN MOST RECENTLY ADOPTED THROUGHOUT THE SUPPLY CHAIN AS WELL AS WHAT COULD BE COMING NEXT.

## On-site AR and remote working for efficiency and improved safety

As part of a digital transformation strategy, Shell has entered into a contract with Intoware who will provide WorkfloPlus at Shell's upstream and downstream manufacturing operations, following a 12-month trial.

Telling us about the service provided to Shell, Vince Galvin, chief revenue officer, Intoware, said:

"WorkfloPlus will help Shell's workers to undertake activities such as daily inspection audits and maintenance tasks by creating live in-work views, progress updates and immediate results analysis, encouraging collaborative working and improved problem solving."

The recently released enhanced reporting capabilities, with the option to integrate WorkfloPlus into customers' existing identity infrastructure, allows for improved job scheduling and the ability to connect to the remote experts of their choice. With social distancing, the ability to consult with experts remotely, even when carrying out inspections or repairs is an extremely valuable service.

Vince Galvin explains further:

"Companies are looking for new innovative technologies that will accelerate their digital transformation programmes, ones that can be easily adopted and make a real difference, especially when it comes to the connected worker. The ability to use mobile and wearable technology, combined with workflow software that drives productivity gains and connectivity without compromising on risk or health and safety, is increasingly in demand for many industries, including downstream oil refiners and distributors.

"For instance, when these technologies were combined with WorkfloPlus to digitise inspections, they yielded a substantial 200% increase in offshore productivity for one of our clients recently. In the pandemic environment that we now find ourselves in, with restrictions on movement and requirements for remote



working, companies are increasingly adopting new digital solutions such as WorkfloPlus to help optimise operations, even with fewer frontline workers".

Michael Kaldenbach, digital realities lead, Shell said:

"WorkfloPlus adds, to our existing eXtended Realities portfolio, the ability to support our front-line workers with process guidance and reporting when connectivity is challenging. Digitising standard operating procedures allows front-line workers to focus on their tasks and access additional relevant information when required.

"Once their task is completed, the WorkfloPlus platform automatically compiles the captured data in a report that is shared with relevant stakeholders and systems, thereby simplifying and reducing the overhead of the front-line worker. If connectivity is not available at the work location, this data transfer automatically occurs when the front-line worker is back within communication range, allowing them to focus on their next activity instead of having to manually write down the results or transfer them into their existing systems".

Michael Kaldenbach continues:

"We see benefits from the detail and

simplicity of Intoware's digital workflows for onboarding, inspections or repairs and the ease of integrations will help us access key, often unique, data insights. This, together with a fast and easy deployment, live job updates and alerts, integrated remote expert providers and great support from their technical development team are going to enable further efficiencies and safer working practices".

## A single, paperless system

With the value of a single, simple and paperless workflow process emphasised by the Shell / Intoware partnership, Paul Foley, CEO of DreamTec tells us more about the full-system technologies that are being most widely adopted by fuel oil distributors and the positive impact this is having for management, staff and drivers:

"For many of our customers, they start with installing meter tracking, keeping a close eye on stock. Many then move to the full tablet solution, removing paper and going electronic."

"Covid has increased demand and actually presents a good reason to adopt technologies that reduce the time for drivers to be near or in the office, cut out paper handling and give management transparency on field activity.

With so many staff members working from home, our systems give management complete control.”

Explaining the advantages further, Paul continued:

“There are huge benefits to digitising the distribution business, mostly around speed, with drivers being focused on making deliveries and office staff being able to focus on sales and customers rather than admin or paperwork. Some of our customers made the move to these systems years ago, whereas some are only starting now. Without doubt, if you want to grow the business, systems like our latest android command can give you the tools to deliver a fantastic return in a very short time”.

Darren Priddey, national sales manager at Fuelsoft, also emphasised customers’ desires to have a single, paperless solution to save both time and money:

“Integration is at the heart of everything we do, and we continually look to enhance the level of integration with industry leading ‘in cab’ solution providers, DreamTec and Touchstar.

“We’ve recently completed Phase 1 of a development project with Lightyear, an accounts payable (AP) automation tool which automates the data-entry from all supplier invoices and puts the invoices into a digital approvals workflow, saving AP teams up to 80% of their time, eliminating the need to manually enter the invoices. Integrating Fuelsoft with Lightyear provides real-time, accurate accounting data within the Fuelsoft platform, and means that users can collaborate with team members, accountants, bookkeepers and suppliers with the digital approvals process that Lightyear provides. It makes accounts and bookkeeping easy and, most favourably, paperless.”

## Seamless integration

When speaking with suppliers, distributors and wholesalers on this topic it was clear to see that, at the top of the priorities list, alongside going paperless and being able to remotely control deliveries, is seamless integration.

Darren Priddey tells us more about the last 12-18 months for Fuelsoft:

“The uptake of fully integrated web ordering systems has seen major growth over the past year and a half, and this is down to a number of factors. With our integrated solution, customers can place an order on a distributor’s website, and this order will feed into the back-office software, be scheduled and be transferred to the ‘in cab’ computer for the driver to see. No tickets need to change hands and drivers



don’t need to go back to the office to pick up orders. As well as saving both time and money, this has also helped to keep valuable social distancing measures in place.”

“Fuelsoft is also fully integrated with Optitool, an optimised route planning software solution,” Darren continued.

“Optimising drivers’ routes saves further time, presents the opportunity to increase the number of deliveries in a day, and allows the fuel distributor to provide the customer with ETAs and consequently a higher level of service”.

With a number of available systems, technologies and updates, being able to utilise several throughout the distribution process, to maximise cohesive operations, is key to a seamless supply chain.

When asked about the technological advancement that has most revolutionised the industry, Nick Hawkins commercial director, Kingspan comments on the seamless integration of the company’s latest radar telemetry device:

“Our latest Radar telemetry device uses 2G, NB-IoT or SIGFOX connectivity. It integrates seamlessly with Codash and Fuelsoft and gives the end-user the option of a mobile phone app. Plus, installation could not be easier on either plastic-banded or single-skin tanks; you don’t even have to drill a hole!

“We have several hardware and connectivity options, ensuring the correct solution whatever the tank, whatever the location, whatever the requirement. And if a fuel oil distributor purchases one of our Kingspan tanks, we can supply a hardware telemetry solution, free of charge”.

As Nick emphasises;

“Distributors are becoming more aware of the value of telemetry and are using it to improve customer service, reduce customer churn, and drive operational efficiencies such as reducing left-on-boards and delivery frequency”.

## Ahead of the curve

Alongside seamless integration, the ability to

be one step ahead of demand is imperative, especially considering how quickly technology advances. Martin Cook, managing director, Mabanaft, explains that staying ahead of the curve is helping to transform processes for fuel oil distributors:

“Mabalive continues to transform deal administration with real-time pricing, online ordering, deal tracking and detailed reporting. We also plan to launch online bidding on Mabalive, which will offer a new and exciting dynamic to the process of purchasing fuel online, as well as additional tracking and monitoring to further enhance our services.

“Mabanaft is also now offering a vendor managed inventory (VMI) service which uses technology to remotely monitor a customer’s tanks to ensure a site remains ‘wet’ at all times. We will be looking to roll this out to customers who could benefit from VMI as part of our delivered-in service.”

## A medley of solutions for distributors

Another company constantly seeking new ways to automate processes is Mechtronic who, as of the end of March 2021, has 300 of its OptiMate systems in operation across the UK and Ireland, with another 150 in build, and considers that this move towards OptiMate is a clear demonstration that automation is seen as the way forward for the fuel industry.

Brad Wilkie, sales and marketing manager at MechTronic, said:

“OptiMate has been engineered to feature a range of automatic processes such as product loading via our bespoke SPGI (smart product grade indicator) system, automatic line change and the automatic process of emptying of the manifold – drivers and fuel oil operatives can be confident that the correct fuel is delivered every time and free from contamination.

“In addition, through the use of modern technologies and solid-state firmware, we have been able to reduce the number of components (such as logic valves and sensors) by some 30% which increases the performance and reliability of OptiMate”.

As a fuel distributor open to considering new solutions Mark Nolan, managing director of Oxon based Nolan Oils, shared some of the automation technologies that the company already has in place.

“Masternaut vehicle tracking allows the entire fleet to be viewed on a live map at any point in time. This means we can track fleet activity, provide arrival times and check a vehicle’s status with ease. I’d go as far as to say that real time delivery update has been the most revolutionary to date.

“We also utilise Alpeco’s TEX FLOW operating system on our COBO tanker. This allows us to monitor grades and volumes in each compartment and reduce the risk of making costly errors in the set-up and delivery process.

“We have also been trialling lorry cameras on the new truck and will eventually fit these to all of our lorries. To keep a close eye on storage, we use EA Project Stock which is fantastic for stock checks and reviews.”

Automation is not always seen as a positive especially where it cannot compete directly with acquired knowledge. Route optimisation software, for example, may be unaware of a shortcut known to someone who has been in the industry 30+ years, but, for a new driver who is not as familiar with the surrounding area, optimised route planning could be hugely advantageous.

#### What is coming next?

In addition to their remote structure, Intoware is also releasing a web client. Vince Galvin tells us more.

“The web client will help move us into job management as well as improving the digital workflow side. The aim of all this is to provide

our customers with a digital solution that transforms their workforce, enabling connected working for better data-driven decisions in downstream oil.”

Asked about what’s in the pipeline for DreamTec, Paul replies:

“We are constantly evaluating new technologies and looking for application in our product – some of the newer wireless platforms include 5G, NFC, RFID. Using the collected data to drive improvements we always look for useful trends that can help customers make better decisions. Meter technology is also improving, and we have meters at the heart of all our solutions, so we like using the accurate data they collect”.

Commenting on Fuelsoft’s upcoming additions to its product portfolio, Darren said:

“Our software roadmap includes providing a higher level of integration into banking software to enhance bank reconciliation services for our customers. Alongside this, we will continue to improve and enhance our existing automation and integration technologies, taking on board all feedback from quarterly reviews with our customers”.

Brad Wilkie also speaks of changes in MechTronic’s pipeline as a direct result of

customer feedback.

“Based on customer feedback, we are developing a remote control which will provide drivers with the full management of the delivery process from the point of delivery. This will not only save time during deliveries but ensure that the driver remains at the point of delivery throughout.”

In considering where digitalisation and automation may take the industry, Michael Kaldenbach, Shell offers a useful conclusion.

“Digital technologies are transforming our lives in ways that were unimaginable even a decade ago. Digitalisation is also transforming the energy industry, by improving efficiency and safety, and by facilitating the use of renewable energy. We believe what could be next is the end-to-end digital integration – where we recognise that digital is all about data: from collecting data and feeding that into AI. This creates end-to-end solutions that result in actionable insights that support decision making, thereby creating value.”

It has been interesting to speak with various stages of the supply chain on different automation technologies for this feature – but what works, or doesn’t work, for you? Let us know: [stephanie@fueloilnews.co.uk](mailto:stephanie@fueloilnews.co.uk).

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# Diversity in distribution

FROM WHAT WAS, ONCE, A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY, GREATER DIVERSITY IS BEING SEEN EVERY DAY WITHIN DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES, SUPPLIERS AND TRADE BODIES. WE SPOKE WITH **EMILY YATES**, WHO JOINED CRAGGS ENERGY IN 2015, ABOUT HER ROLE AS A YOUNG, FEMALE, FUEL OIL DISTRIBUTOR.

## Fresh blood

I joined the Craggs' new apprenticeship scheme in 2015, called 'Craggs Academy' which was created to entice young people to learn about the industry and join the fuels sales world. This worked brilliantly, as myself and two others that joined the academy are still working for Craggs Energy to this day.

After completing the apprenticeship, Craggs offered me a full-time position in the customer service department, a role which I filled for around two years, before moving into a domestic and agriculture sales role. Around the same time, I started making fuel deliveries in the evenings and weekends in our 4x4.

## A new challenge

Prior to joining Craggs, I went to college, completed a qualification in childcare, learning and development and, during this time, I worked in schools and nurseries in Calderdale. I quickly fancied a change in career and saw the apprenticeship advertised. I knew I wanted to learn something completely new and challenge myself with something very different to what I

had been doing.

Craggs Energy not only gave me that challenge but helped massively with self-confidence. I've come on leaps and bounds since joining the company and have not looked back since. Talking to customers over the phone and face to face on fuel deliveries has helped in a big way.

I love the fact that I can be in the office selling fuel and lubricants during the day and, once the office is closed, I am out and about meeting customers face to face whilst delivering their fuel. I cover the whole of our deliverable area in the 4x4 for emergency run outs and hard to access properties. I love going to new places and meeting new people too.

## Settling in

I settled in quickly to what has previously been a male dominated industry. I had a lot of support from my managers at Craggs, including our CEO Chris Bingham – he has really helped me get to where I am today, and I can't thank him enough for what he has done for me over the years. When I first

wanted to make fuel deliveries, I went to Chris with the idea and he was over the moon. Chris, alongside other managers, helped to make it happen.

Although I have been making deliveries for almost four years now, a lot of people are still surprised when they see me turn up with their fuel. The majority are happy to see a woman working hard and getting the job done, just as well as anybody else could. I believe there are no reasons nor barriers to prevent women joining the operations side of this industry and making deliveries. From a Landrover to a ridged, to an artic, why not? It would be brilliant to see a lot more women doing these roles.

## Looking ahead

Now, I am extremely keen to get my HGV and ADR licence to be able to deliver on tankers as well as the 4x4. I have just recently moved job roles from a sales role to becoming part of the transport team and helping out with operations. I am more than willing to better my skills in a wide range of job roles with Craggs Energy.

# In Conversation with Miriam James of Silvey Fleet

JUST OVER A YEAR AGO, AN EXTENSIVE REVIEW OF MABANAFT'S UK-BASED COMPANIES SAW A COMPLETE SHIFT OF FOCUS FOR THOMAS SILVEY FROM A FUEL SUPPLY BUSINESS, TO PROVIDING FLEET SOLUTIONS UNDER THE SILVEY FLEET BRAND. AS PART OF THE RESTRUCTURE, MIRIAM JAMES WAS APPOINTED MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE BUSINESS AND FUEL OIL NEWS MANAGING EDITOR, **MARGARET MAJOR**, RECENTLY CAUGHT UP WITH HER TO FIND OUT HOW IT IS ALL GOING.

## Talk us through the heritage of the business from its beginnings through to the major change last year.

Our heritage is in supplying fuel – formed in the 1800's the business was originally involved in dredging, following which it was a supplier of coal and latterly of fuel to both commercial and domestic customers. In 2009 the business was acquired by Mabanafit Limited, although it still remains an independent company.

Fuel cards were initially introduced as an additional offering to support existing commercial customers with their refuelling requirements.

I joined the company in 2010, originally to establish a separate Fuel Card channel however, in a relatively short space of time, I also became involved in all areas of the business.

Over the next years, business reviews led to the introduction of a new structure and associated processes and procedures. Bulk fuel distribution activities continued across parts of England and Wales until, in 2019, we made a strategic decision to focus solely on the provision of nationwide fleet solutions to businesses. As a result, the bulk fuels business was sold.

Today, our mission is to be the best fleet management solution provider, supporting companies in the efficient, and effective, management of their fleet operations. Our customers have always been and remain at the heart of everything we do, and our commitment to putting them first and answering their needs is robust.

## What influenced the decision to diversify from the original business and focus on fuel cards?

As a small regional distributor of fuel, we recognised the opportunities that the expansion of our fuel card business model provided. Strong communication with our customer base led to the introduction of a fleet management

solution in 2018 – Miles Monitor. Alongside fuel cards we now offer a complete 360 solution to customers in the management of their fleets.

## How did you ensure an effective focus on two different areas?

Having created a new and separate fuel card business, within the existing business, this allowed us to challenge the status quo. With the knowledge and experience gained from the establishment of the fuel card channel, specifically the processes and procedures, a new business model for the bulk fuels business was implemented. In addition to this we focused on updating our culture.

We are a people-led business and, therefore, the performance and development of our employees is of paramount importance. The success of our fuel card business reflects the early employee buy-in and commitment to our mission and values. For me, such commitment is critical to a business such as ours and, therefore, effective ongoing communication of strategy and how each area of the business contributes to that strategy cannot be understated. In addition, along the way, it is important to be honest, to celebrate success and in pursuit of ongoing business improvement, continually challenge the way things are done.

## I understand you have been involved for over 11 years now. What has been your own personal involvement with the business and the launch of the fuel cards?

For the majority of my tenure, I have been heavily involved in all areas of the business, with a particular focus on the design, development and, most importantly, implementation of effective strategies. In addition, I was a driver in the review and re-statement of our mission, business vision and the establishment of the associated values which, together, define the culture of the organisation.

Some of the changes introduced have been relatively simple, such as ensuring that we provide exceptional levels of customer care every time, whilst others have come as a result of challenging industry and company norms which was especially relevant to the bulk fuels business as it was so reliant on seasonality. What it comes down to is making sure the changes are working and delivered consistently.

Following the sale of the bulk fuels business, our focus is on the ongoing development of our portfolio of fleet management solutions designed to help our clients focus on their core business whilst we take care of their fleet operations.

## What have been the main company milestones of growth and change?

For the bulk fuels business, I would say that the biggest achievement was the introduction of a more strategic approach, moving the focus from one of being operationally led to sales and marketing led.

In early 2019, to clearly differentiate between the services and products offered, i.e. bulk fuels and fuel cards, the latter was rebranded as Silvey Fleet, to emphasise our growing range of products designed to help drive fleet efficiency.

By November 2019, following a UK Group wide restructure, the bulk fuels division had been sold. This allowed us to focus on the continuing development of the Silvey Fleet business to provide customers with services and products designed to help them manage and run their fleets more efficiently.

Despite all our changes and the significant challenges brought to bear by the Covid-19 pandemic, in December last year I was absolutely delighted to learn that we'd been awarded the 'We Invest in People' Gold accreditation. Investors in People recognised, over the past year that, despite there having



been significant changes to the business, our employees have remained highly engaged.

**With the growth you have experienced as a company you must have faith in the future of some form of fuel distribution. With the government seemingly backing heat pumps or other new tech over biofuel, do you remain confident?**

We still have a long way to go to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. It is inevitable that this will happen however, as long as you are prepared for changes and ensure that your business model is flexible, you will be able to navigate through the change.

There will still be a need to meet the needs of customers and provide 'energy.' It is a case of continuing to identify and explore new opportunities and being open and receptive to change.

**How do you see the longer-term future for the supply of diesel, kerosene and gasoil markets?**

I think we will see significant changes with the demand for traditional fuels moving to alternative sources of energy with a shift, to EV, CNG, LNG and hydrogen.

**Has growth resulted in geographical expansion or moves and how many locations do you operate from?**

For us, growth came from having one office and centralised functions. Initially our head office was in Yate. Having all the key functions together made it easier to deliver consistent approaches for many aspects of the running of the customer-facing and operational functions.

By 2019, we were quickly out growing the space available at Yate, so we took office space in Bradley Stoke, within the Bristol conurbation.

**Given the government actions to hasten the energy transition does the company envisage a need to change or diversify further and, if so, what direction might that take?**

Diversification and change is natural and our business is used to such situations. We have learnt that we will continue to go where the market and customer leads us, since it is important to keep evolving and responding to customer needs.

That's why it's important to be ready to adopt and adapt. Being agile means that we can quickly respond to change.

**What is the company doing to satisfy its environmental conscience and what goals is the company setting in advance to reduce emissions?**

For the past two years we have supported forestry replanting schemes; during 2019 we planted a tree for every employee and, this year, we're working with the Forest of Avon. We have also introduced other ways to reduce our emissions, such as encouraging employees to 'cycle to work' or car share where possible. We also operate a paperless policy.

**Since the launch of the fuel cards talk us through the development of other complimentary products such as the Miles Monitor fleet management products**

Whether it be for transportation of people or goods, the businesses we work with rely heavily on their vehicles, which in turn need fuel, be it petrol, diesel or electric. For us it was a natural progression to look at introducing a range of fleet management solutions so companies could make cost savings and improve the efficiency of their fleets.

The changes we help them make are more procedural and thus disciplined, for example the requirement for drivers to record each journey on our mobile app. This means that there is less margin for error as drivers get into the habit of logging the start and end of each journey. As a result, companies can be confident that the mileage recorded is accurate. Using the app also saves administration time, and over time, fleet managers can build up a picture of the routes and thus can determine if they need a more efficient vehicle.

Our aim is to be the best fleet management solution provider – I want to be able to offer our customers the right fleet management tools to deliver the greatest benefits.

**Over the next three years, what do you see as the major challenges to the industry and what are the positives?**

I think that the greatest challenge to the industry will be the move away from fossil fuels to more environmentally friendly alternatives. On the positive side, this allows us to be inventive and create partnerships with companies who are not directly involved in the oil and gas industry.

**We reported at the end of the year on your impressive Investors in People accreditation. How does this reflect the values of the company?**

Our Gold accreditation very much embodies our vision – we are dedicated to delivering the highest quality customer service and investing in our people and their development. We believe that happy and motivated employees are a critical element in the ongoing development and success of our business.

**Looking to the future what is the vision for Silvey Fleet?**

Our vision: To be the best fleet management solution provider.

We will achieve this by having the courage to embrace change and opportunity, challenge the status quo and grow in harmony with our values. Our staff are passionate, determined, energetic and creative. Customers, employees, suppliers and owners are extremely proud to be associated with the company.

We are a customer-centric company so we will always do what the customer wants. By working with them, listening to their pain points and understanding their business, I know that we can continue to adapt our fleet management solutions to suit their ever-changing needs.

# In Conversation with Bangor Fuels

DIVERSIFICATION IS A CONSTANT THEME OF OUR INDUSTRY AS THOSE INVOLVED IN ALL ASPECTS OF FUEL PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION FIND WAYS TO KEEP PACE WITH THE EVOLVING NATURE OF FUEL DEMAND. HERE WE SPEAK WITH DAMIAN FUSCO, OWNER OF BANGOR FUELS IN NORTHERN IRELAND, TO LEARN HOW THE BUSINESS HAS GROWN AND DIVERSIFIED SINCE HE TOOK THE BOLD STEP TO TAKE IT ON 20 YEARS AGO.



## It began with belief

Now a multi-faceted business, Bangor Fuels is where it all started, and where Damian clearly still feels the greatest sense of pride. Damian takes us back to the beginning:

“Most local people will recall Rayker Fuels, a coal business. Well, I managed them from 1994 and, after a few years there, I saw an opportunity to buy the business.”

It turns out that ‘buying the business’ was a different arrangement to the way it would usually be understood. Damian didn’t have the ready cash to invest in the way he wanted to but he did have sufficient belief in the future of the business to propose a bolder arrangement.

“I offered the owners the opportunity to sell to me and for me to pay them back out of annual profits. Accepted, I took over in 2001, and so it began. I had just backed myself to make a success of it and be able to make a living as well as paying for the business!”

A lot of hard work followed over the next 12 months leading to two major developments. January 2002 saw the purchase of a first oil

tanker and then the business moved to Gransha Stores later that same year.

The years that followed were about keeping his head down and building a reputation.

“There is no real secret to those years,” Damian admitted. “It was largely down to hard work, making sure that our service was second to none, and holding a keen price. I didn’t have a grand vision of where the business was going, and none at all of me being where I am now.”

An unspoken testimony to the personal graft that Damian has invested over the years is that his hands are black. They are, in fact, ‘permanently black’ due to the number of times he lay under lorries and vehicles until the early hours of the morning putting in new clutches or doing what was needed to keep the wheels moving.

“If it needed done I just did it myself, whatever it was.” A commitment well understood by other self-made businesses but, as Damian is first to acknowledge, family and friends were also a ‘massive support’.

## Constant investment and growth

As the company has grown it has continually looked for ways to improve and diversify through investment. By 2007, a new home was needed, and 5 Balloo Way was purchased, which is where Bangor Fuels remains now.

With the rapid growth experienced under his ownership, we asked Damian to explain the principles the business was so successfully built on and he answers without hesitation:

“Quicker, cheaper and more reliable. That’s what I set out to be and how we’ve succeeded. Furthermore, we are now renowned for our respected ‘one price promise’ – irrespective of distance.”

This approach proved to be a successful growth strategy, very popular with customers and, having started in North Down and Ards, BT1 to BT9 and BT16 were soon incorporated, and in time, greater Belfast and beyond as Damian confirms:

“We now go to Antrim and Larne, as demand has pushed expansion.”

## Diversification came naturally

Another driving force is the desire to add value to the local area and employ people who are willing and keen to work.

Constantly regarding challenges as opportunities has led to natural diversification and the business became businesses, with Damian now proud owner of not only Bangor Fuels, but also Fusco Vehicle Sales, Maypole Garden Services, Maypole Construction Design & Build, Maypole Lawnmowers and, most recently, Wolseys Bar & Restaurant. All are now prosperous, well-known local brands important to the local area with Bangor Fuels employing 35 people and 85 employed in total across the companies.

When asked how these other businesses



came about Damian explains:

“What do you do with drivers in the summer when orders are down? How do you keep seasonal factors at bay and keep paying people? Well, we put an ad in the Spectator and opened a gardening company!”

And this ability to create an opportunity from a challenge wasn't a one-off.

“What happens when you build a fleet of vehicles that need replaced, and need repaired, and lawnmowers that need updated and fixed? Well, you get the drift.”

At each challenge the business has evolved and grown, and we wonder what other developments may be coming.

“The challenges of the future are not just operational, such as the fact that it is now much harder to get qualified tanker drivers, but also how far to expand and develop the business,” Damian replies thoughtfully.

“I'm not necessarily going to grow province-wide, but the business is expanding organically as new customers continue to come to us. And I'm still very passionate about Bangor. All my businesses are in Bangor and I try to support the local community where possible. It would have been easier and less rick to tick along as Bangor Fuels, but I'm keen to invest locally, which is why I've expanded into other local areas”.

It seems that Damian is not a man to rest on his laurels and our suspicions are confirmed when we ask about his passions outside of work. Damian thinks for a while then admits:

“When I'm not working, I'm in work”.

Given this passion for the business and the area we have no doubt there will be more developments to hear from Bangor Fuels soon and we will look forward to sharing them.

The hands may be black, but the future certainly doesn't appear to be so.



## Northern Ireland – biofuels on the cards for home heating?

WE CATCH UP WITH **DAVID BLEVINGS** OF NIOF AND ALSO OFTEC IRELAND MANAGER, FOR HIS THOUGHTS ON THE LATEST UPDATES.

A public consultation has suggested that biofuels could be an option for the future of home heating. Issued by the Department of Energy, under Economy Minister Dianne Dodds, it outlines ideas to achieve net zero carbon and affordable energy in Northern Ireland.

OFTEC has welcomed the inclusion of biofuels in the paper as a realistic and affordable step in the right direction for the 500,000 homes in NI using liquid fuelled heating systems.

Two broad approaches to phasing out fossil fuel heating oils for off-grid consumers are proposed.

In the first, oil boilers would be banned, placing a significant emphasis on heat pumps for off-grid properties.

The second continues to allow oil boilers for properties and instead focuses on phasing out the sale of fossil fuels giving consumers a range of options for home heating including biofuels and biomass in addition to heat pumps.

OFTEC Ireland manager, David Blevings said:

“It is encouraging that the consultation includes the comment, “There will not be a “one size fits all” solution for decarbonising heat in Northern Ireland. We therefore do not intend to remove potential low and zero carbon solutions from consideration at this stage.” We have always claimed that a one-size fits all approach to reducing carbon emissions in the home heating sector simply won't work. Whilst heat pumps will be the right decision for some homes, there are over 500,000 homes in Northern Ireland that will require costly and disruptive retrofitting to their installation in order for this heating method to work efficiently. A change to biofuels utilising existing equipment is an easy, low cost and non-controversial option. Consumers must be given a choice rather than have a solution that does not meet their needs imposed upon them.”



The consultation has proposed that the “Oil Industry in Northern Ireland provide a credible pathway to net zero by 2050 involving biofuels. This work must provide robust and comprehensive information on current and future costs and supply.”

David is keen to deliver this:

“We are welcoming this challenge put forward to our sector and we will work together to deliver a plan outlining how bio-fuels can lead the way to reaching energy targets. HVO offers a near drop-in replacement for heating oil at a fraction of the cost of installing an air source heat pump and an immediate reduction of c.88% in carbon emissions.

“HVO is already available in the UK and global supply is increasing fast. With the right policy support, UK industry could scale up domestic production and deployment to meet the heating requirements of rural homes well within the net zero timeframes. Tackling climate change in the home heating sector needn't leave members of the community behind.”

“The task facing local Government to reduce emissions is a mammoth task. It requires input from many departments and takes in heating, transport, agriculture and power generation. We have demonstrated that biofuels can, and will, work in the domestic and commercial heat sector and look forward to preparing a robust road map demonstrating how we can decarbonise the liquid fuel sector.

We are committed to delivering a solution that ensures the continuation of a thriving liquid fuelled sector and working with Nicholls we now have HVO in the Belfast terminal which is being utilised by commercial and transport companies already who are keen to reduce their carbon footprint”.

OFTEC's aim is to enable all existing oil heating users to convert to a 100% sustainable fossil-free liquid fuel by 2035, well ahead of governments' 2050 decarbonisation targets.



# PORTLAND MARKET REPORT

APRIL  
IN VIEW

## THE IMPACT ON OIL MARKETS AND THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF THE BLOCKAGE OF THE SUEZ CANAL

The blockage of the Suez Canal by the Taiwanese mega vessel *MV Ever Given* (20,000 Containers / 80,000 Horsepower) tells us a number of things. Firstly, that ship owners who pay for the “privilege” of using Suez Canal navigational pilots should probably ask for a refund. Secondly, that no matter how trusty and reliable it is, a 1994 Komatsu earth mover is no real match for a 200,000-tonne container ship. Finally, the event lets us know that in this uber-globalised world, our dependence on shipping and shipping lanes is absolute.

### “THE IMPACT ON OIL MARKETS WAS MOST INTERESTING.”

Opened in 1869(!), the Suez Canal is a man-made waterway that links the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Its value to the maritime world lies in the fact that it cuts off around 4,000 nautical miles for ships travelling East to West (Asia – Europe / Americas) or vice-versa. On any given day, 50 ships travel through the canal and the amount of cargo transported along the 120 mile stretch of water equates to nearly 12% of global trade. 20% of the ships using the canal transport oil – either crude (2m barrels per day = 300m litres) or refined products (1.5m barrels per day = 235m litres).

The impact of the canal closure on oil markets was most interesting to observe. When the news became public, oil prices shot up by \$4-5 per barrel. The next day, prices came back down, again as traders concluded that there would be a swift resolution to the problem. However, when it then became clear that the only salvage equipment on hand was a digger last seen on Alexandria High St, prices began to tick up again. On the shipping markets, there was of course a spectacular spike in prices, with spot charter rates for oil tankers doubling overnight. All this, because the Captain of a giant ship was having a snooze, whilst the Canal Pilots were playing Kerplunk with the First

Mate...

There were also some fascinating oil market movements in the “sub-sections” of the industry. For example, Used Cooking Oil (UCO) traded at 3 times the price of normal diesel. The context behind this is that all European road transport fuel (ie, petrol and diesel) contains circa 10% biofuel and much of that is Used Cooking Oil (UCO) from China. Around 25m litres of UCO is imported into Europe weekly and several cargoes of this product became stuck in the “Suez queue”. We also saw the reversal of (Sweet) Brent Crude values versus (Sour) Arabian Crude (Arab Heavy). Under normal circumstances higher priced Brent goes East (via Suez), whilst European refiners import cheap Arab Heavy (also via Suez). But the blockage meant that Europe became “long” on Brent (and other sweet crudes from North and West Africa) and short of the heavier stuff. This suppressed the price of Brent, whilst putting a premium on the harder to source sour crudes from the Middle East!

As for the ship owners and cargo charterers waiting to access the canal, they had to face up to the ultimate logistical dilemma. Did they “stick” and hope the blockage was cleared or did they “twist” and head for Europe / America via the Cape of Good Hope? If the blockage cleared quickly, then waiting was obviously the best option. But what if it took weeks to clear? Equally, adding 7-10 days of cost and sailing time by heading all the way around Africa is a costly diversion. Besides, going “round the Cape” means navigating the pirate-peppered waters of East Africa, which would normally require armed vessel support and a level of marine insurance that many shippers balk at. As it turned out, most ships waited, putting their faith in the salvage operation and this led to a “queue” of around 400 vessels.

The modern world is defined by global seaborne trade, yet few of us have ever considered what happens when the movement of goods by sea is interrupted. Suez is by no means the only seafaring chokepoint. From an oil perspective, the Straits of Hormuz (Persian Gulf) sees 20% of the world’s oil (20m barrels per day) pass through its waters – that’s 1/3 of all oil on the seas at any given time. The Straits of Malacca (Malaysia / Singapore) is

the busiest shipping lane in the world, with 275 ships plying this seaway every day and 90% of China’s imported oil also coming via this route. Less oil focused, but a bit closer to home, the straits of Gibraltar link the Mediterranean with the Atlantic and are only 7 miles wide at their narrowest point. This makes fitting the 2,300 commercial ships passing through each week a significant logistical challenge.

### “THE ULTIMATE LOGISTICAL ‘STICK’ OR ‘TWIST’”

The only real way to refloat a ship (of any size) is to raise the water level, but here the Suez Canal has one major flaw. Unlike other man-made waterways, the Suez Canal has no locks, because the land it bisects is totally flat (in effect, the Suez Canal is actually a man-made river). So, whereas, for example, the Panama Canal can close the lock gates either side of any stricken vessel, and then fill the middle section of water – this option is not available in the Suez. The good news though was that, in the end, the efforts to shift the *Ever Given* by tugboats (the digger went back to the building site) were successful. Now to clear the vessel backlog! For those shippers waiting to access the canal, the delays, complications and re-routings made for an expensive few weeks.

For more pricing information, see page 26

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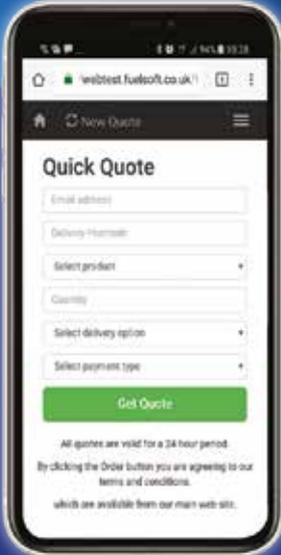
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# Developments with online facilities

A consideration of developments in online facilities relating to the distributor sector.

## Backdrop:

While the development of online facilities and internet presence reaches back to the mid-1990s, recent years have seen a marked acceleration in the pace of digitisation. The arrival of the pandemic in early 2020 has 'turbo-charged' this acceleration, effectively bringing forward developments which would otherwise have taken place over the next 3-5 years. Two noteworthy numbers relating to UK experience serve to highlight this phenomenon:

- Retail sales transacted online have risen from circa 20% to around 35% of the total.
- Within the grocery/food segment of the above, the online share has more than doubled, from circa 7% to about 15%.

While the return to 'normality' may see the above increases stabilise for a period, this is generally viewed as a 'step change' which is not going to reverse.

With this in mind, we look at the main developments in the distributor sector.

## Principal areas of development:

Four particular 'strands' can be readily identified, which will be highlighted; these are:

- Real time price reporting and market intelligence/ information/ updates
- Trading platforms
- Price comparison
- Distributors' sites- for marketing, promotion, communication, transactions, etc.

### Real time price and market intelligence

The two companies offering these services both use 'source' oil market price data on physical trades from S&P, Platts. Essentially they seek to provide timely information and real time data on prices and market developments to facilitate decision making in the key areas of product purchasing, pricing, risk and inventory management. The companies in question are:

- Rate Information Services, better known as Fuel Prices Online, which was founded in 1994, initially providing daily Platts data, translated from \$/mt in to pence/ litre, by way of fax.
- The Oil Market Journal, which was started in 1999 and now also has an office in Geneva, providing data on European prompt and forward market prices for gas, power and emissions.

### Trading platforms

The purpose of these facilities is to provide a secure platform in the B:B sector for both sellers and buyers of refined oil products to conduct transactions in a prompt, seamless and efficient way, using real time pricing data. There are currently three such facilities in place:

- **Mabalive**, developed by/for **Mabanaft UK Ltd** and launched in 2011 as a 'pioneering fuel ordering/buying and end-to-end deal administration facility', since when it has been subject to several enhancements/refinements.
- **Online Fuels Ltd**, established 2014, has built up a portfolio of users, the most substantial of which is Shell Deutschland, whose commercial/ wholesale oil products transactions have been managed through a platform developed by the company since 2018.
- **Parity Cloud Solutions Ltd**, which is part of **IT Energy Systems & Consulting Ltd.**, whose Parity Energy Platform was launched in 2018 and is used by a major refiner/ oil products marketer in the UK and USA.

### Price comparison

Since the first site was launched, in 2004, by Boilerjuice, there has been something of a plethora of sites vying for oil heating users' interest; at the last count there were no less than seven in number, of which five provide the facility to handle the full sales process i.e. enquiry > pricing > order > delivery > invoicing > payment. These sites are:-

**Boilerjuice:** [www.boilerjuice.com](http://www.boilerjuice.com)

**Compare The Oil Price.com:** <https://comparetheoilprice.com/>

**Fuel Tool:** [www.fueltool.co.uk](http://www.fueltool.co.uk)

**Homefuels Direct:** [www.homefuelsdirect.co.uk](http://www.homefuelsdirect.co.uk)

**ValueOils.com:** [www.valueoils.com](http://www.valueoils.com)

The following two pass on enquiries to prospective suppliers, as lead generators:-

**CheapestOil:** [www.cheapestoil.co.uk](http://www.cheapestoil.co.uk)

**Heating Oil Shop:** [www.heatingoilshop.com](http://www.heatingoilshop.com)

So, by any standards, given the relatively modest size of the overall market, in terms of heating oil users, this is quite a crowded field!

### Distributor sites

These have come a long way since modest beginnings in the mid/late 1990s, where the few that existed comprised 'static shop windows', reflecting the format/content of the time. Now, they incorporate features such as; full sales process (enquiry ... payment) i.e. transactional, customer log-in facilities, PR initiatives,

marketing, communications, news, etc.

Across the sector as a whole, site presentation, layout, ease of navigation/ use, etc. shows a high standard, to meet the expectations of users in this 'digital age'.

Any review of a randomly chosen selection of distributor sites, covering a range of geography and business size, will give a good flavour of the kind of presentation, content, format, etc. of sites across the sector.

## Areas for further development:

Developments in cloud services have, and will, continue to open up new possibilities for online applications. Beyond commercial / transactional applications, the following activities could hold potential for further / future consideration / pursuit:

- Payment systems (e.g. Stripe)
- Logistics' enhancement
- Recruitment
- Training / Workplace learning / staff development
- Customer relationship management (CRM)
- Supplier relationship management (intranet)
- Advertising / promotions

As the experience of recent years, especially the last one, has demonstrated, the picture is a rapidly evolving one, with new and unforeseen opportunities likely to materialise at any time!

One of the keys to success in the distributor business is, and always has been, first and foremost founded on the quality of the individual service provided and person-to-person interaction, whether with an office or at the point / time of delivery.

Harnessing the power, capability and possibilities of online applications effectively should be seen as complementary and supportive of this customer service 'imperative'.

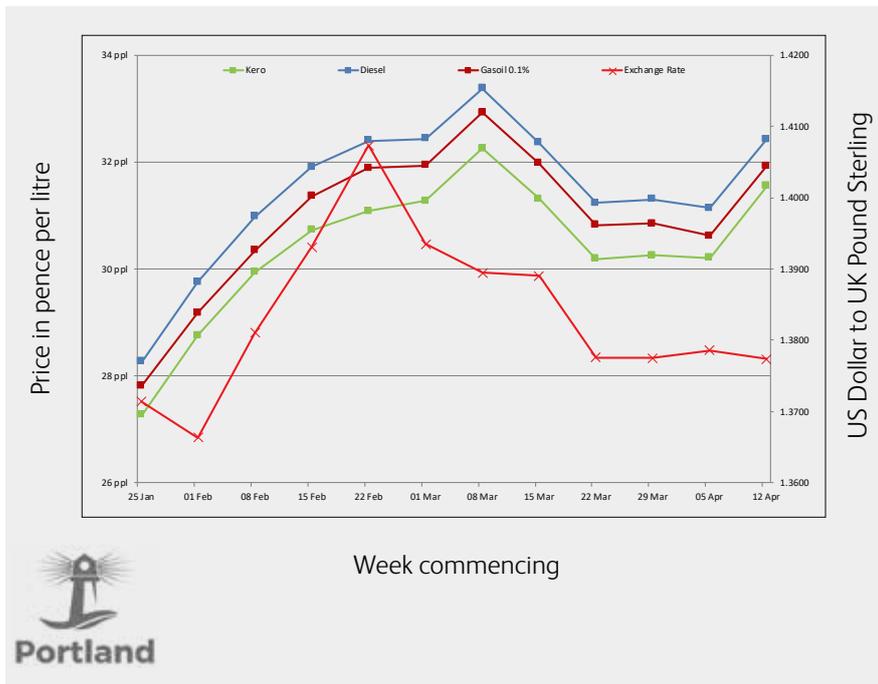
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## Wholesale Price Movements: 19th March 2021 – 18th April 2021

	Kerosene	Diesel	Gasoil 0.1%
Average price	30.59	31.56	31.10
Average daily change	0.45	0.47	0.48
Current duty	0.00	57.95	11.14
Total	30.59	89.51	42.24

All prices in pence per litre



Highest price <b>32.04 ppl</b> Fri 16 Apr 21	Biggest up day <b>+1.29 ppl</b> Fri 26 Mar 21
--	---

<b>Kerosene</b>	
Lowest price <b>29.37 ppl</b> Thu 25 Mar 21	Biggest down day <b>-1.23 ppl</b> Thu 25 Mar 21

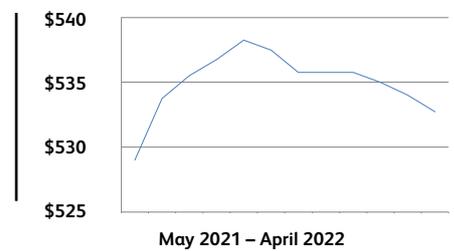
Highest price <b>32.85 ppl</b> Thu 15 Apr 21	Biggest up day <b>+1.36 ppl</b> Fri 26 Mar 21
--	---

<b>Diesel</b>	
Lowest price <b>30.40 ppl</b> Thu 25 Mar 21	Biggest down day <b>-1.22 ppl</b> Thu 25 Mar 21

Highest price <b>32.39 ppl</b> Fri 16 Apr 21	Biggest up day <b>+1.32 ppl</b> Fri 26 Mar 21
--	---

<b>Gasoil 0.1%</b>	
Lowest price <b>29.98 ppl</b> Thu 25 Mar 21	Biggest down day <b>-1.22 ppl</b> Thu 25 Mar 21

Gasoil forward price  
in US\$ per tonne



## The Fuel Oil News Price Totem

	Trade average buying prices			Average selling prices		
	Kerosene	Gasoil	ULSD	Kerosene	Gasoil	ULSD
Scotland	32.90	45.15	92.94	37.51	48.24	96.58
North East	31.85	43.78	92.02	38.18	46.64	94.69
North West	33.42	46.38	94.41	37.87	49.09	96.81
Midlands	31.92	44.31	92.48	36.20	47.13	95.38
South East	32.02	44.27	92.46	40.87	49.19	94.98
South West	32.37	44.11	92.30	38.10	46.92	94.60
Northern Ireland	32.48	45.48	n/a	36.72	48.96	n/a
Republic of Ireland	46.24	50.91	93.88	50.55	53.92	96.85
Portland	30.23	41.83	89.17			

The price totem figures are indicative figures compiled from the Portland base rate using calculated regional variances.

Buying prices are ex-rack. Selling prices are for 1000 litres of kero, 2500 litres of gas oil and 5000 litres of ULSD (Derv in ROI). Prices in ROI are in €.

Wholesale prices are supplied by Portland Analytics Ltd, dedicated providers of fuel price information from refinery to pump.

For more information and access to prices, visit [www.portlandpricing.co.uk](http://www.portlandpricing.co.uk)

WELCOME TO MAY'S EDITION OF OUR SPECIAL MONTHLY FEATURE WHICH GIVES YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO 'MEET' AN INDUSTRY FIGURE AND, HOPEFULLY, TO DISCOVER ANOTHER SIDE TO THEM BEYOND THE WELL-KNOWN FACTS.

IN THIS ISSUE WE CHAT WITH **CLAIRE BISHOP**, VICE PRESIDENT, UK LAND FOR WORLD FUEL SERVICES, TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE PERSON BEHIND THE COMPANY'S UK LAND BUSINESS, COMPRISING WATSON FUELS, FUEL CARDS, LUBRICANTS, BOILER SERVICING AND WHOLESALE FUEL ACTIVITIES.

## “DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU ARE GOING TO DO”

**CLAIRE BISHOP**

### Give your career history in 25 words or fewer.

Lots of numbers, spreadsheets and analysis from trainee accountant to finance director in technology and manufacturing and a move into fuel distribution to Vice President.

### Describe yourself in 3 words.

Balanced. Analytical. Reflective

### What were your childhood / early ambitions?

Fighter pilot.

### Describe your dream job (if different from your current job).

Running my own sustainable fashion empire.

### What's the best business advice you've ever received?

Make time to switch off properly from work and return refreshed.

### Share your top tips for business success.

Do what you say you are going to do.

### What's your most recent business achievement of note?

I'll cheat a little here but, as part of a team rather than an individual, meeting the challenges and successfully navigating the impact of the pandemic and continuing to do business without interruption.

### Tell us your greatest fear.

The arts and particularly live music not returning to their pre-pandemic levels.

### Which is most important – ambition or talent?

Talent.

### What's the best thing about your job?

Every day is different and it's never boring.

### Is there a quality that you most admire?

Creativity.

### What are you most likely to say?

Let's review the facts.

### What are you least likely to say?

Did you watch the match last night?

One of the Japanese art islands



Claire with her dog and at the top of Mount Fuji after a night ascent



### Describe your perfect day.

At a music festival, the weather is perfect, food and wine in abundance, with your loved one and friends, in a good viewing spot and your favourite band has just come on stage as the sun sets.

### Do you have a favourite sports team?

I don't follow team sports – too much exposure to all things sport when I was growing up.

### What's the biggest challenge of our time?

Supporting young people who have been the hardest hit by the pandemic with the opportunities that many of us took for granted, uninterrupted education, fulfilling jobs, appropriate housing and without having to pay back the still building Covid deficit.

### Cheese or chocolate?

Always cheese.

### Share your greatest personal achievement.

I'm very proud of my work as a volunteer with the Prince's Trust. I have been a business mentor for a number of years, and I get satisfaction from helping a young person with simple skills learnt

over the years that you or I very often take for granted.

### What's your pet hate or biggest irritant?

Currently, a lack of respect for someone's space.

### If you were elected to government what would be the first law you'd press for?

Elimination of excess packaging, particularly supermarket fruit and veg, cosmetics and clothes.

### If your 20 year-old self saw you now what would they think?

It's going to be OK.

### What is number 1 on your bucket list?

To go on a very much delayed gap year, buy a camper van and head off into the sunset with my partner and dog.

### What 3 things would you take to a desert island?

A surfboard, an unending supply of music and books.

### Tell us something about you that people would be very surprised by.

Yes, I can surf (I gave it away in my earlier answer) and that does mean catching a wave and standing up. This is not the same as paddle boarding or body boarding.

### Who would you most like to ask these questions of?

Coco Chanel.



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