

# SETTING NEW STANDARDS

The famous Mercedes Benz three pointed star has proven to be a rising star in the taxi trade. When the Mercedes Vito taxi was launched, it gained a lot of interest and it has now been on the streets of London (as well as elsewhere in the UK) since June 2008. The vehicle has grown in popularity and almost 500 have now been sold to taxi owners in the capital. KPM's Peter Da Costa, Chairman of the company producing the taxi, says: "The Vito taxi is selling in increasing numbers and is helping licensed taxi drivers win back work from the private hire trade. We are offering both drivers and passengers the "Best in Class" experience with the Mercedes taxi. The vehicle is setting new standards which drivers like."



When the company was set up to design and build the new taxi, Peter was joined by Jevon Thorpe, the man who designed the TX1 in his days at LTI, as well as Roy McMaster, who had also come from a taxi background, including Sales and Marketing at LTI. Their company, One80 wanted to become

a leading provider of accessible taxis in the UK, with their initial focus on London. Now more than twelve months later, Peter Da Costa says that the Vito taxi is not just a premium, recognisable brand; it is also proving accepted with the drivers as a quality product which is well suited to its job. It is not just owner drivers buying the vehicles either, some of the fleet proprietors are now choosing the Vito taxi. Peter has said that London's taxi fleet needs to smarten up and the Vito taxi is helping to do this.

During a recent tour of the factory, the team were on hand, along with Rob Thrift and Paul Hayward from Mercedes Benz, to answer questions. Some of the questions asked related to problems that had been experienced with the Vito, including the rear wheel steer and the intercom system. The questions were answered directly; the intercom is being looked at and a design for an upgrade is being tested. The component which caused the problem with the rear wheel steer has been rectified. Mercedes are so confident about the product that



Roy, Peter, Jevon, Paul and Rob

they have given it a LONO. This is a "letter of no objection" which is hard to achieve as Mercedes value their branding so highly. The letter means any Vito taxi can be taken to any Mercedes commercial dealer and they will be able to service and repair all of the taxi, including the taxi components. All of these dealerships are being trained in working on the taxi and some are operational 24 hours a day. These Commercial dealerships understand that a vehicle off the road is a vehicle not earning its keep. This is a highly regarded award and brings the benefit to taxi owners that they can always be assured of a quick efficient service from the dealerships.



The original Vito vehicle arrives at the factory in Coventry each week, where it is stripped out before being fitted with the new interior. Current production is around 10 each week but as the vehicle popularity grows so will the number of vehicles built. The facility is a modern building and the vehicles get their rear wheel steer added here. At the moment, the black Vito is proving the most popular, but other colours are available. Regional markets for the taxi are expanding, with a choice of wheel bases available and the company are looking towards a successful future for this vehicle and are also considering other products for the taxi market. These will always be accessible vehicles and could include hybrids at some point.

