

EST training scheme is extended to cover vans...

The Energy Saving Trust's Smarter Driving Programme, which is subsidised by the Department for Transport (DfT), has been extended to include vans up to 3.5 tonnes. Previously the training was only available in cars.

The inclusion of vans has come about because Government subsidy for the SAFED van training ended in March, which removed the potential issue of DfT funding two programmes with overlapping objectives.

The fuel saving driving techniques are similar for cars and vans, with the training in both vehicle types focusing primarily on use of gears, improving anticipation and maintaining

momentum. There are, however, some subtle differences. For example there are times when block shifting or pulling away in second gear might be appropriate in a car but not a van.

The format of the training is the same for cars and vans.

It takes place on public roads and starts and finishes from the workplace in order to cause minimal disruption to the working day. Each driver spends 50 minutes with an experienced fleet driving instructor and fuel consumption is measured over identical circuits on public roads before and after training.

The Energy Saving Trust provides the

van, fuel and insurance as well as the instructor, although if an organisation prefers to do the training in their own vehicles that may also be possible.

The first 10,000 car drivers to do the training saw an average 14.8% reduction in fuel consumption between these 'before' and 'after' laps.

For a car covering 12,000 miles per year, this reduction equates to an annual fuel cost saving of around £200-250. With many vans covering higher mileages and having higher fuel consumption, the potential savings are significantly greater. And with most van drivers using fuel cards the financial benefits will accrue directly to organi-

sations. The training costs £15 per person, based on training nine drivers per day.

This price will remain fixed throughout 2010/11 but is capped at a maximum of 26,000 trainees. In the first month of 2010/11 organisations booked nearly 2,000 places.

Bob Saynor, who manages the programme, said: "We're very pleased the scope of the programme has been extended to vans. Over the last year we've had a lot of enquiries from fleet managers about training in vans but up until now we've had to turn people away. The financial arguments in favour of training are clear cut."