

# Sparshatt Truck & Van

Supporting operational efficiency drive

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**Sparshatt Truck & Van is a successful Kent-based Mercedes-Benz and FUSO Commercial Vehicle dealership and servicing group operating across five sites – two in Sittingbourne, one in Dartford, and two smaller sites in Tonbridge and Ashford.**

Following a Management Buy Out which was completed in March 2018 and led by the group's sales manager now Sales Director Paul Rooney and his brother now Dealer Principal Steve Rooney, Sparshatt Truck and Van began a wide-ranging renovation programme group wide.

This focused on the £2m redevelopment of a new 1.8-acre site in Kennet Road, Dartford which began in November 2018 and was completed in June 2019. The new Dartford site is three times larger than the previous Sparshatt-leased site in Dartford – providing 4,475 square metre building giving space for 12 state-of-the-art truck servicing and PDI bays, and 13 dedicated Van Bays, in addition to 3,500 square metre external area for service vehicles and visitor parking.

**Sparshatt Sittingbourne benefits from more than £500k investment**

Sparshatt Truck & Van group headquarters remains in Sittingbourne. Sparshatt has two sites in the industrial area of Sittingbourne. It recently completed a £330,000 relocation and refurbishment project to create a state of the art Bodyshop about half a mile from the main Truck & Van Sales and Service Centre and group headquarters.

Recent renovations in the headquarters building included £200,000 creation of a new dedicated Van Centre on the site of Sparshatt's old Body Shop. The 529 square metre Van Service Centre offers eight new van bays. Its new dedicated Van Centre reception area has created three new administrative roles which it is currently recruiting for. One additional service technician has already been taken on and two more technicians are set to be hired to staff the new Van Centre through the night, following the winning of a major 24/7 contract for van servicing from Tesco.

The now dedicated Truck Service Centre still offers 14 truck bays. The site services Mercedes' Actros, Arocs, Antos, Atego and Eonic models and FUSO Canter light trucks for a wide range of construction, haulage and other commercial fleets. It also is a service franchisee of EvoBus (Mercedes-Benz and Setra), buses and coaches. Increased throughput following renovations has created five new job vacancies which Sparshatt General Manager of Aftersales Kevin Wise hopes to fill by the end of 2019.

Vicki Ponder, Group Projects Manager at Sparshatt, explained:

"The move to create dedicated Van and Truck service centres, completed in April 2019, was consistent with Mercedes-Benz dealership specification requirements. It had another advantage of taking our total bay numbers across both parts of the Sittingbourne site from 16 up to 22 promising a 27 per cent increase in capacity over time. Across both the Truck and Van Centres we're handling up to 30 service vehicles per day right now. We are expecting that number to rise now as the night shift in the Van Centre fills out.



Paul and Steve Rooney, Sales Director and Dealer Principal of Sparshatt Truck & Van



Finally, it delivered an improved customer experience – ensuring van service customers are routed directly to a dedicated parking area well away from the Truck parking and servicing areas. Sittingbourne’s new Van Centre has dedicated parking for 25 vans immediately outside. For example, the Van Centre is developing a new dedicated service reception area where they can drop and pick up their keys and be handled by van service advisors”

#### **Sparshatt Sittingbourne Traka key cabinets leave space to increase capacity**

A 540-slot Traka Automotive key management system originally deployed in Sittingbourne’s Truck Service Centre in May 2015, was networked with a new 180 slot capacity key cabinet in the new dedicated Van Centre in time for its opening in April 2019. The Van Centre’s cabinet is using 80 of the 180-total capacity of that cabinet, while the Truck Service Centre cabinet has 30 slots left available for expansion as business volumes increase across both Service Centres.

The installation team was able to provide access to all Traka Automotive key cabinets via existing HID access control proximity fob system which controls all Sparshatt employees’ access to different parts of the building.

All installation and training was completed in a single day in the Sittingbourne Van Centre and two days in Dartford. Reaction to the system, now it has been rolled out to all service centre technicians and service reception staff, has been very positive as Vicki Ponder explains: “Once our staff understood that they could use the Traka Automotive system to tell them exactly where every vehicles’ keys were and who had them last it was amazing how rapidly the system was adopted across both the Sittingbourne and Dartford sites. It took just a couple of days for all staff to start using the system properly.”

Kevin Wise, General Manager - Aftersales, Sparshatt Truck & Van Limited adds:

“The results from our focus on improving operational efficiencies across both the Van and Truck Centres here in Sittingbourne - underpinned by our Traka Automotive system here - is that we’ve already reduced lead times on all servicing from over five days to under two days. This translates to a real improvement in turnaround times which can only help build our reputation”

#### **Mobile key locating**

At Sittingbourne, WI-FI access was extended throughout all external parking areas to enable service technicians to access the Traka software via its mobile app on their mobile devices.

Vicki Ponder adds:

“They can now punch in the comm or chassis number (of new trucks) or number plate for used vehicles and pinpoint which iFob slot the key is attached to and who took those keys out last – all while walking around the yard looking at the actual vehicles they need access to”

#### **Assisting End of Year stock auditing**

Vicki Ponder, who initially held an Accounts role at Sittingbourne, also confirmed that she used the Traka Automotive system to run a full stock check on all vehicles on the group’s books:

“I was able to use Traka to locate all 80 trucks and vans on the Sittingbourne site and ensure all keys were safely locked away before we closed on New Year’s Eve. It offered great peace of mind which enabled us to complete our asset due diligence checks in minutes”

#### **Sparshatt Dartford caters for new type of service customer**

The Dartford site is catering for Mercedes-Benz X-Class pickup truck drivers and Vito van which is proving a popular choice for seven-seater taxi drivers living in and around the Dartford area – often operating in London. Drivers of these vehicles bring the passenger car mentality into a commercial vehicle setting. So, they’ve made their new service reception as pleasant and welcoming as possible with a waiting area, coffee machines and smartly dressed front of house reception team.

#### **Using Traka cabinets to help manage parking space limitations**

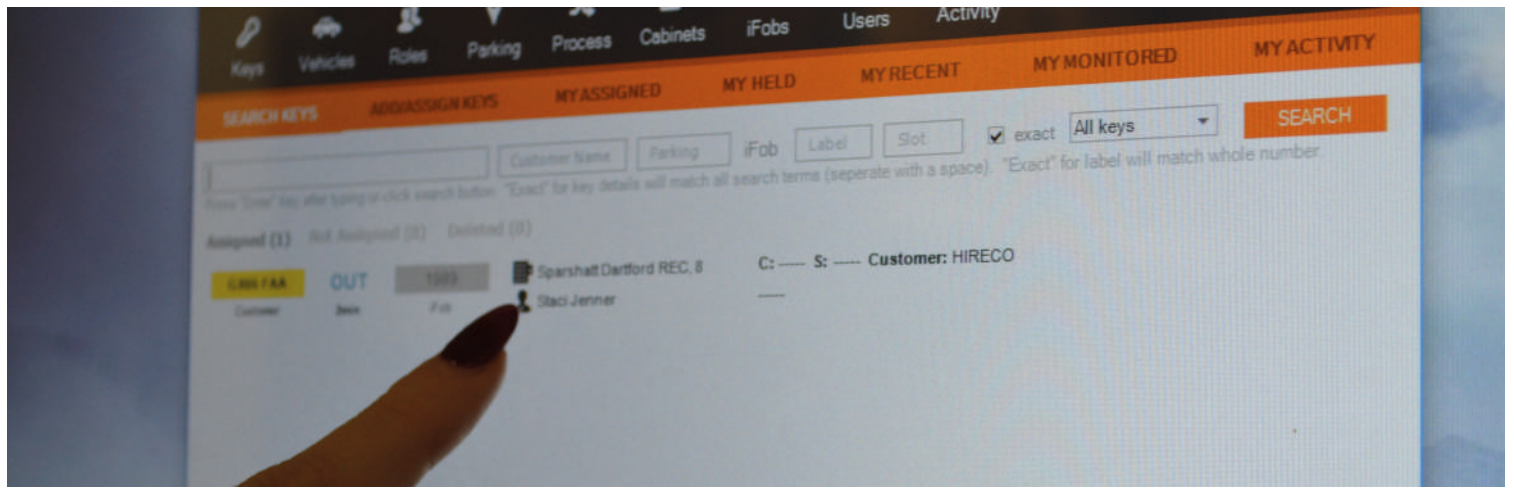
No sooner had a new Traka key cabinet been installed in the new Van Centre in Sittingbourne, then the Traka Automotive installation team moved across to the freshly-completed Dartford site to install an 80-slot key management system within a maximum 180-slot capacity Traka cabinet designed to support both the Truck and Van Service Centre areas.

This cabinet was networked with a 50-slot system in the office sited behind the new service centre reception area. The 180-slot key cabinet has been initially set up to provide capacity for 80 sets of keys. However, the business anticipates increasing servicing capacity to use all 180 slots by the end of 2020.

Staci Jenner, Service Reception Supervisor at Sparshatt in Dartford, also the nominated ‘super user’ of the Traka Automotive key management system at this site, talked through the idiosyncrasies of this site which have led to some adaptation of the way the Traka system is used:

“We have some real space constraints for parking on this site which mean that we need to park trucks and vans in long bays capable of parking three to four vehicles nose to tail. There are seven dedicated truck bays designed for parking up ‘Work in Progress’ or Completed trucks ready for collection. We have a further eight van bays, each holding two vans”

There is a reality to this sort of parking that to move a completed vehicle ready for collection might involve moving up to three other vehicles out of the same line or bay. Staci has worked with the Service Manager at Dartford to design the labelling of the slots within the Traka Automotive cabinets to reflect the position of vehicles within these elongated parking bays. So, in Bay 1 is Slot 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 numbered downwards in the cabinet. So a Sparshatt service agent needing to get a vehicle ready for collection of a vehicle whose keys are placed in the iFob slot labelled 1.1 knows that they need to also take out any keys of vehicles stored in 1.2 and 1.3 as they must be blocking the truck parked at 1.1 from exiting that bay.



For more information on Traka's specialist key management and equipment management solutions, please visit [www.traka.com](http://www.traka.com)

Staci Jenner continues:

"We've started to implement this system to reduce time spent moving vehicles in and out of bays and to help improve customer experience by reducing the length of time it takes to pick up their vehicle after servicing is completed. It's already starting to reduce time taken to move and park vehicles. For some clients we are already providing a 'first thing in the morning' update on where in the servicing process each of their vehicles is. The Traka Automotive system enables us to check quickly where that vehicle is parked and when it will be ready for collection – reporting this back to the customer and encouraging customers to pick up vehicles rapidly once work is completed.

Trucks coming in for servicing are often routine inspection jobs, so they might be in at 3PM on one day and then out at 6AM the following morning. Keeping tabs on where all keys are, bearing in mind night shift handovers, through the Traka Automotive system is massively helpful to ensure customers are not kept waiting as wasted time costs them money. It also suits us to be holding vehicles for the minimum amount of time following servicing so anything which helps us to get vehicles back to the customer fast is good for the efficiency of the site as a whole"

Another one of Staci's roles is to move the keys for Completed Truck and Van service vehicles through to the smaller Traka cabinet in the Service Reception area, Staci Jenner again:

"I can check the CDK Autoline DMS system to see which jobs are registered 'completed'. I can then check on the Traka Automotive system whether keys for those vehicles have been deposited back in a slot in the Truck & Van Centre's 80 slot cabinet. When there are several completed vehicles ready for collection, I will move the relevant sets of keys over to the Service Reception cabinet and alert the customer that their vehicles are ready for collection.

We may still need to go back to the other cabinet to access vehicles that are blocking in that vehicle when that vehicle owner finally arrives to pick it up, but the Traka Automotive key management system at least supports our focus on processing as many service trucks and vans we can each day. It's all about workshop efficiency and wider servicing efficiency here and the Traka system supports that"

#### Key security with operational efficiency

Kevin Wise, General Manager - Aftersales, Sparshatt Truck & Van Limited summarises:

"The Traka Automotive system offers us a great combination of security with operational efficiency. Before we had Traka, we just had safes and hooks with keys and cardboard tags on each key.

It was really hard to find the right key. If the missing key was not in the safe, we would have to walk around asking who was working on that vehicle last. It might have been left in the overalls of the engineer who had completed the last night shift. That might require accessing their locker to try to find the key and, in some cases, we found it was not even the person we thought it was – you could waste hours looking for keys. You can look back today and wonder 'how did we actually manage wasting all that time?' The new Traka system saves all that time, while giving customers and our engineers the certainty of knowing where keys are – all through Traka's software"

#### Sparshatt Truck and Van Fact File

Sparshatt Truck and Van now employs 265 people group wide: 148 across the two Sittingbourne sites, 75 in Dartford, 23 in Ashford and 19 in Tonbridge. Of these more than 150 are productives, 15 are in HQ administrative, HR, and accounts roles; 18 work in the Costings team; 20 in sales and sales administrative roles; 25 in Parts Advisory positions and a further five in senior management roles.

Both the Sittingbourne Van Centre and Dartford Truck & Van Centre have decided to move up to 24 hours a day, six days per week servicing. Sparshatt's Parts advisory team operates around the clock 365 days a year. That enables Mercedes-Benz parts, if already in the UK, to be delivered to customers the very next day.

Sparshatt's headquarters building in Sittingbourne is 3,076 square metres in size and has 11,754 square metres of external parking, some demarcated for new and used trucks and some for used vans for sale, and other bays for buses and truck cabs. There is an 8,400 square metre compound just to the rear of the site acting as an overspill parking for larger trucks and buses.



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