



European Truck Market Outlook 2026

Fragile brand loyalty is colliding with electrification and rising Chinese competition.

By Karl Strempele, Phillip Roberts, and Eric Zayer



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At a Glance

- ▶ Bain & Company surveyed more than 500 fleet operators from Germany, France, the UK, Italy, and Poland—spanning all relevant truck applications and fleet sizes—to understand what drives purchasing decisions.
 - ▶ Fleet operators’ outlook is largely positive: 60% expect their fleets to grow over the next three years, while less than 10% expect them to shrink.
 - ▶ Brand loyalty is diminishing. The industry’s average Net Promoter Score (NPS) dropped 21 points compared with 2022. Meanwhile, 35% of operators said they are likely to switch brands, while another third reported no meaningful affiliation with their current original equipment manufacturer (OEM).
 - ▶ In addition, fleet operators have become significantly more open to consider Chinese truck OEMs that are entering European markets.
 - ▶ At the same time, operators have become more prone to consider battery-electric trucks (BETs), rating them highly on key purchasing criteria. For most applications, BETs have reached total cost of ownership parity with diesel trucks.
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In 2026, Bain & Company conducted its latest European truck market survey (part of a series of studies that we have run for decades), polling more than 500 fleet decision makers across Germany, France, the UK, Italy, and Poland. Our survey captures the full range of fleet sizes and both heavy- and medium-duty applications.

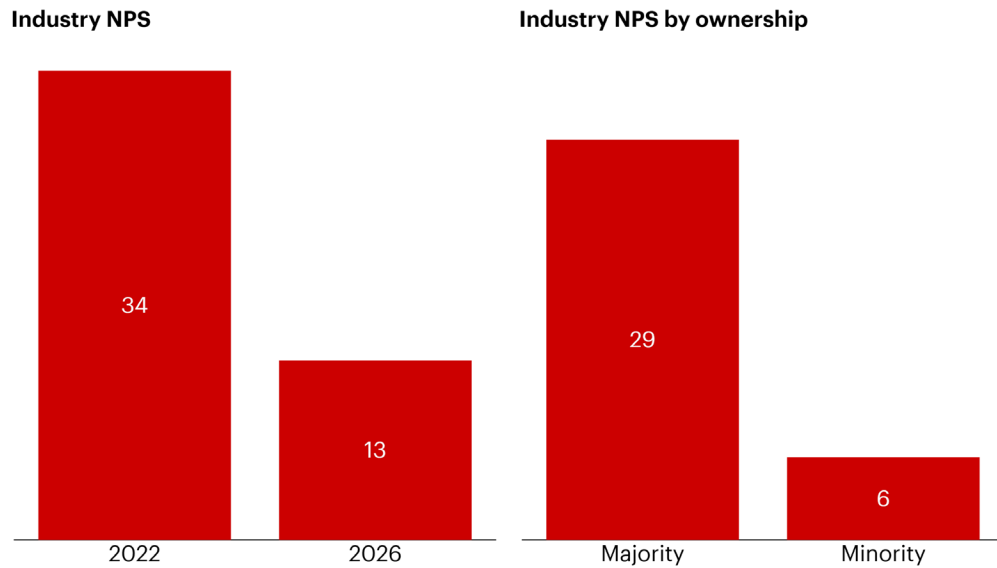
First, the good news: European truck fleet operators are largely optimistic, with over 60% expecting their fleets to grow over the next three years. Less than 10% expect their fleets to shrink either “moderately” or “significantly.” Operators in Italy showed the strongest growth outlook, with 71% expecting expansion, followed by the UK at 65%. Fleet operators in Germany, France, and Poland also reported solid growth outlooks, with more than 55% expecting their fleets to expand.

Now, the bad news: Fleet operators are largely dissatisfied with manufacturers’ current offerings and performance. In this year’s survey, the industry’s average NPS decreased by 21 points vs. 2022 (see *Figure 1*). Volvo, Scania, and Mercedes-Benz were leaders in overall NPS, though their positions varied significantly when viewed by country and customer segment.

In our last study, the bigger the fleet, the higher the NPS. This year, that trend flipped: Large and medium fleets posted the lowest NPS (10), while owner-operators recorded the highest (28). This meaningful shift in NPS suggests large fleet operators potentially have more complex needs that aren’t being fully met. This is a troubling sign for manufacturers fighting for share in an increasingly consolidated market.

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Figure 1: Average NPS fell to 13, signaling that fleet operators are dissatisfied with manufacturers' current offerings and performance



Note: Majority owners of a brand are owners for whom that brand represents the largest share of their fleet; minority owners of a brand are owners for whom that brand represents a smaller share of their fleet than other brands
Source: Bain Truck Survey 2026 (n=507)

Brand concentration also had a strong bearing on NPS, which was significantly higher in fleets with one dominant brand compared to mixed or minority fleets. In fact, the NPS gap between majority and minority brand owners was more than 20 points. This points to a circular pattern in which more satisfied customers buy more, reinforcing concentration over time. It also means the industry average NPS masks a more important signal: how OEMs score among operators when they are not the dominant brand. And that number is considerably more sobering.

On average, brands earned about 20 points higher NPS in their home markets than in markets they export to. While this “home field” advantage helps reinforce incumbent positions today, it also demonstrates the power of customer centricity and well-executed go-to-market approaches. Every OEM must aim for domestic-level loyalty outside its home market. We expect significant upside potential for the brands that manage to achieve this.

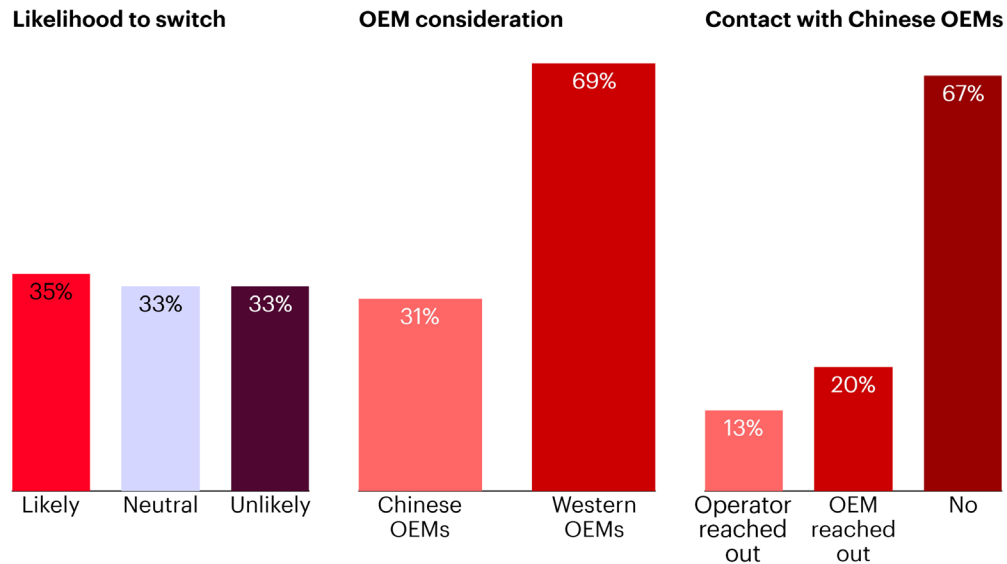
Overall, though, loyalty is eroding.

One-third of fleet operators indicated they are likely to switch brands for their next purchase (*see Figure 2*). Another 33% showed no particular loyalty to their current OEM(s).

Willingness to switch brands is remarkably high across all markets. Even in Poland (the most brand-loyal market surveyed), nearly one in four operators said they are either “likely” or “very likely” to change brands at their next purchase. In France, that share rises to 45%. German operators were the most

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Figure 2: Roughly one-third of fleet operators are likely to switch brands at their next purchase opportunity



Notes: Western OEMs include DAF Trucks, IVECO, MAN Truck & Bus, Mercedes-Benz Trucks, Renault Trucks, Scania, Volvo Trucks, and Ford Trucks; Chinese OEMs include CNHTC (Sinotruck), FAW Trucks, Dongfeng, Shaanxi (SHACMAN), Foton, BYD, Sany, XCMG, Geely (Farizon), and Windrose
Source: Bain Truck Survey 2026 (n=507)

ambivalent; nearly half said they were neither likely nor unlikely to switch. This is a large pool of undecided buyers that incumbents cannot afford to take for granted and that creates big opportunities for the brands that are ready to address these customers.

Overall, intent-to-switch fell as fleet size grew. Large fleet operators reported both the lowest switch intent (25%) and the highest share of neutral respondents (43%). This loyalty erosion is creating an opening for all brands, but especially Chinese manufacturers. Roughly one in three fleet operators has already been in contact with a Chinese manufacturer and reported being “likely” or “very likely” to purchase a Chinese vehicle in the next three years. Interest was stronger among operators of medium-duty trucks than those with heavy-duty fleets. Among operators willing to adopt BETs, more than half said they are open to buying Chinese trucks.

Openness to Chinese offerings varied across regions and by fleet size. Fleet operators in the UK were twice as likely to buy from a Chinese manufacturer compared with their peers in Germany and Poland. Small and medium fleet owners were also more open to Chinese products. Owner-operators were less inclined to test new offerings; their dependency on a single truck amplifies reliability risk, making it disproportionately costly. With large renewal volumes to manage, large fleet operators potentially face a different constraint: They’re not currently ready to commit a significant share of their fleet to an unproven brand.

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A majority of operators expects discounts from Chinese manufacturers compared with Western brands: 61% of operators expect Chinese trucks to be 10% to 30% cheaper.

To predict how these dynamics might unfold in the truck market, we can look at the adjacent electric city bus segment, which is the dominant segment for bus electrification. Zero-emission city buses claimed 58% of sales share in the EU in 2025, compared to only 4% for coaches and interurban buses.

Chinese manufacturers gained an early foothold in the bus segment, growing their European market share from roughly 10% in 2017 to about 30% by 2023, a level at which their share has broadly remained, hovering at a similar level through 2024 and 2025. Since then, European incumbents have responded with competitive products and leveraged their service networks and customer relationships to hold their ground. Notably, this Chinese growth occurred even though city bus procurement typically passes through public tenders with local content criteria, a structural feature without a clear parallel in commercial truck fleet purchasing.

The real takeaway is the growth pattern: Chinese entrants saw rapid initial gains, then plateaued as local OEMs mounted an effective response. In the truck market, Western OEMs can still respond and defend a significant share of their business. Chinese manufacturers will play a role in Europe's truck market going forward, but how large a role depends on the competitiveness, agility, and customer centricity of incumbent OEMs.

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What matters to fleet operators

Key purchasing criteria (KPCs) have remained relatively consistent over our 30 years of research, with reliability, price, and total cost of ownership (TCO) leading the pack—far ahead of services, brand reputation, and other considerations.

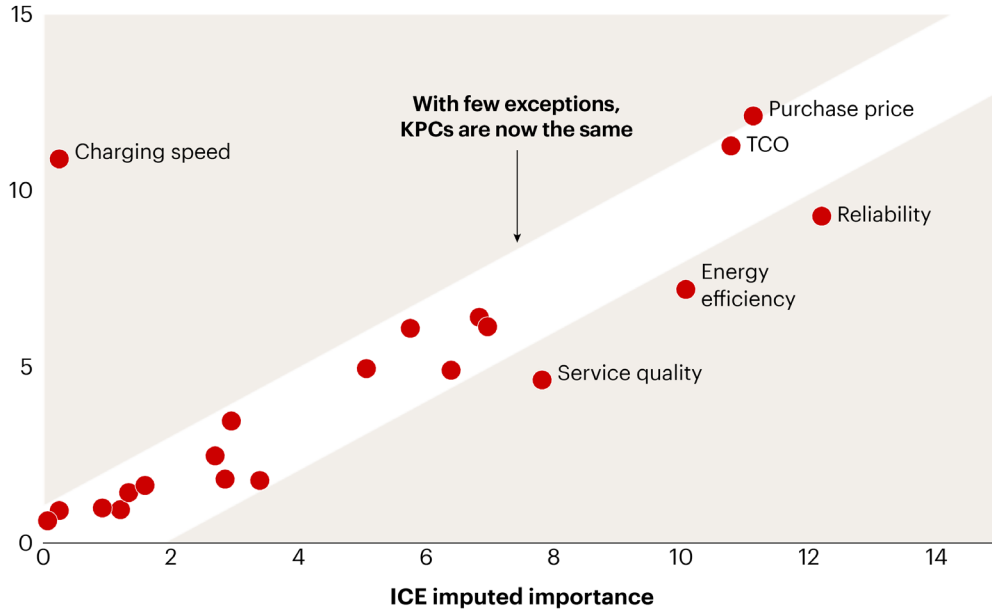
Reliability was the dominant KPC for the internal combustion engine (ICE) segment, cited by half of respondents. Reliability was also the top KPC for owner-operators, while small fleet operators prioritized initial purchase price. TCO topped the list for medium and large fleet operators. Payload was often a distant criterion; it only made it into the top five KPCs in the owner-operator segment.

This year, we compared KPCs for ICE vehicles against those for BETs (see *Figure 3*). Notably:

Figure 3: Purchase price and TCO were operators' top KPCs for both ICE and BET vehicles

Key purchasing criteria for ICE and BET

BET imputed importance



Note: Charging speed and bidirectional charging are only rated by respondents rating on the BET
Source: Bain Truck Survey 2026 (n=507)

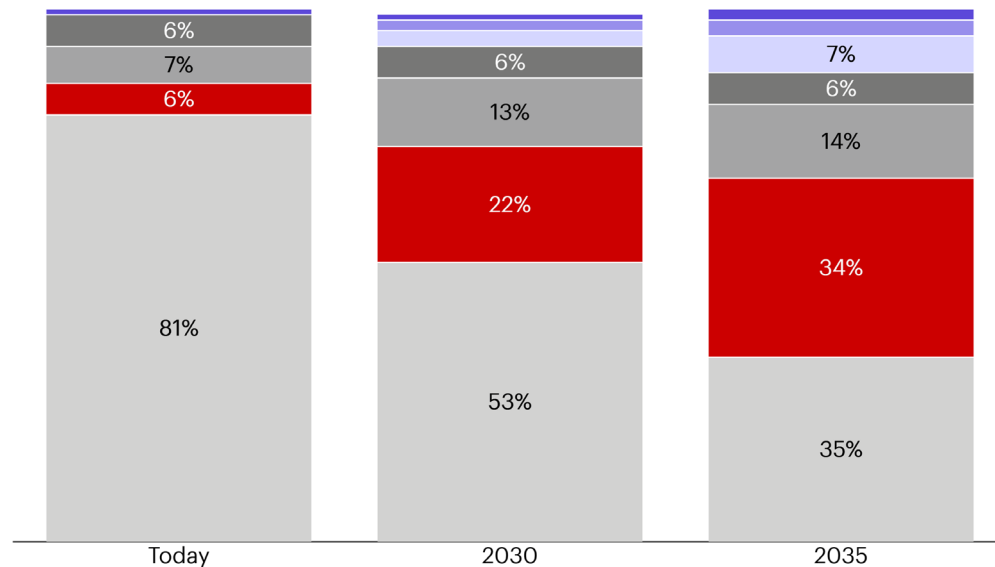
- KPC importance is increasingly similar across ICE vehicles and BETs; initial purchase price and TCO were the top KPCs for both vehicle classes.
- For BETs, charging speed ranked as more important than reliability. This indicates operators have serious concerns about operational time. Secondary battery features, such as bidirectional charging, are very low on operators' priority list.
- Service was not a leading KPC for either category. Additionally, ICE customers prioritize service quality and cost, while BET owners look at service cost and network density. Notably, service cost didn't appear on the KPC list at all for BETs.

Respondents also evaluated Chinese BET OEMs on KPCs, giving them particularly high marks on price, TCO, and technology. In fact, Chinese competitors are already perceived as superior to Western brands on driving range, energy efficiency, connected services, and infotainment. Whether Chinese trucks will be able to live up to this perception is to be seen in real-life testing in the future. Brand trust remains the primary detractor, while service network density, service quality, and resale/residual value also lag behind European incumbents.

Figure 4: Fleet operators expect their new vehicle sales to contain equal shares of ICE and BET drivetrains starting in 2035

BET evolution from today toward 2030 and 2035

■ Diesel ■ Battery electric ■ Hybrid ■ Gas or ethanol ■ H2/fuel cell ■ H2/ICE ■ Other



Source: Bain Truck Survey 2026 (n=507)

In short, Chinese BETs score well on criteria that are most important to fleet managers. With this expectation on performance, combined with expected price advantages, Chinese OEMs have already earned a spot in the consideration set for many fleet operators.

The BET transition

Similar to our 2022 study, operators expect a significant shift in their fleets' drivetrain composition. They predict that only half of new trucks will be ICE vehicles by 2030, with that share dropping to roughly one-third by 2035 (see Figure 4). While these projections are generally below regulatory targets, they reflect operators' current assumptions about what is realistic.

Respondents expect hydrogen-based solutions to remain niche for new vehicle sales through 2035. Interest in hybrid alternatives has also decreased significantly since 2022. In that survey, about one in four operators said they would consider buying a hybrid drivetrain. Today, that share has nearly halved, reflecting fleet operators' growing confidence in the application fit and TCO competitiveness of pure-play BETs.

Near-term, BET transition expectations are generally consistent across the European regions. This convergence is distinct to commercial vehicle operators; in the passenger car market, transition speed is more variable based on local consumer preferences, as well as trust, local incentive schemes, and lifestyle considerations. Commercial fleet operators are more likely to make electrification decisions based on economic grounds (TCO) rather than emotional sentiment, suggesting the transition toward electrification will be determined more strongly by truck performance, pricing, and the availability of charging infrastructure.

On the longer planning horizon, there is some divergence among countries. By 2035, Poland and Italy expect to hold lower BET shares compared with France and Germany. These projections reflect structural differences in fleet composition, not differing attitudes toward electrification.

Respondents were asked to rate their operational readiness and willingness to pay a premium for BETs. German operators had the highest readiness rating but the lowest willingness to pay premium prices. On average, German operators were only willing to pay a 10% premium for BETs. This reinforces the risk created by Chinese entrants should their prices for BETs remain lower than European OEMs.

Barriers to BET adoption have shifted since our last study. TCO is no longer the biggest roadblock since parity has largely been achieved in long-haul use cases across most major European markets. For example, in Germany, heavy long-haul BETs have up to 15% lower TCO over a five-year holding period, driven by lower energy costs and toll savings. Instead, limited public charging infrastructure, high initial purchase prices, less operational flexibility, and long charging times are holding buyers back.

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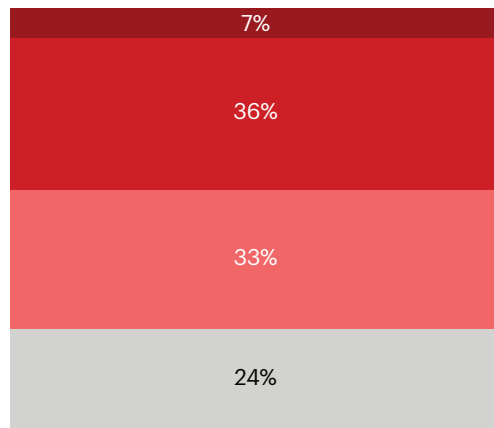
Preparing for disruption

An additional wave of disruption is only a few years away: autonomous trucks. About 43% of respondents said they are assessing the business and operational implications of adding autonomous vehicles to their fleets (see *Figure 5*). Nearly 40% of fleet operators believe that 26%–50% of their transport volume could be handled autonomously in the future. However, only 7% of respondents are in active discussions with potential solution providers.

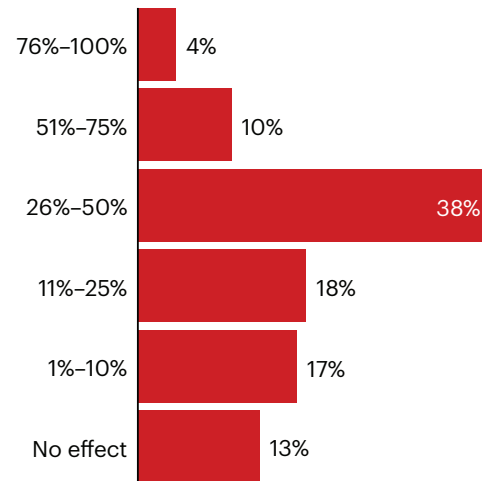
Figure 5: Autonomous trucks will soon become another point of disruption in the market

Autonomous truck readiness

■ Not considered
 ■ Initial awareness
 ■ Under assessment
 ■ Active pursuit



Expected share of transport volume handled autonomously



Notes: 1) "Under assessment" is combination category consisting of "Business case under evaluation" and "Detailed assessment completed"; 2) Active pursuit stands for "Active discussions with autonomous truck providers"
Source: Bain Truck Survey 2026 (n=507)

Implications for truck OEMs

At this inflection point, there is no single lever European OEMs can pull to retain share or grow. Instead, OEMs need to focus on a series of highly targeted, segment-specific initiatives, tailoring execution to match operators' fleet size, market, and drivetrain transition stage.

Against that backdrop, the following priorities stand out:

- Restoring cost competitiveness.** Purchase price and TCO are the leading KPCs for operators. Meanwhile, Chinese OEMs are lowering price expectations before even reaching scale. The BET transition adds further pricing pressure through higher up-front costs and uncertain residual values. OEMs must prioritize their cost and pricing positions by reducing material and other cost drivers while systematically addressing secondary KPCs.
- Focusing on customer satisfaction.** NPS is a leading indicator of market share movement: OEMs that increased NPS demonstrably gained share, while those that slid created exposure. With 33% of operators likely to switch brands, the stakes could not be higher. Yet by the time dissatisfaction shows up in market share, it is usually too late to act. OEMs must therefore monitor more sensitive early-warning metrics, such as NPS among minority brand owners, which is already negative for the weakest incumbents, and investigate the root causes of dissatisfaction across the full customer journey, not just at service touchpoints. Once loyalty is lost at scale, it is very difficult to regain.

- **Closing the BEV price gap and sharpening the sales and marketing push.** Portfolio foundations are largely in place. The battle now is for perception, pricing, and timing. Less than 10% of operators today combine high BEV readiness with willingness to pay a significant premium, but transition speed will accelerate as BEV prices fall. Western OEMs must act before price-resistant operators convert, either by closing the absolute price gap or by reframing value through attractive financing offers or usage-based monetization models. In parallel, sales and marketing messages must directly address the perceived gap between European incumbents and Chinese manufacturers, particularly on purchase price, TCO, and charging speed. The goal is to convert operator readiness into purchase intent before early BEV adopters lock in a brand preference for the next fleet cycle, ceding that segment to Chinese entrants on price alone is a risk incumbents cannot afford.

Portfolio foundations are largely in place. The battle now is for perception, pricing, and timing.

- **Leveraging truly defensible assets.** European OEMs must build on two structural advantages that Chinese entrants can't fully match today: integrated ICE and BET portfolios serving multiple applications/segments, and captive financial service arms that enable TCO-optimized purchasing options. A strong service network and proven service quality would add a third layer of defense; however, service alone will not be enough to hold the line. OEMs must proactively communicate these differentiators to fleet managers before Chinese OEMs establish beachhead relationships.
- **Preparing for a less-loyal buyer base.** Owner-operated and small fleet segments are the most loyal segments and the least open to Chinese competition. As the industry consolidates into mid-sized and large operations, the buyer profile will shift toward more TCO-sensitive, analytically rigorous purchasing decisions. OEMs must rethink their commercial model accordingly: Larger fleets carry lower service attachment rates, compressing an important margin pool. The winners will be those who adapt their value proposition (and their profit model) to a buyer base that is more consolidated and more demanding.

These steps are necessary for European commercial truck manufacturers to regain loyalty and defend their market share in the years ahead. Manufacturers also need to address the cost anchor set by Chinese entrants and leverage the competitive advantages that Chinese providers can't cross today, such as proximity, customer satisfaction, and service quality.

Fleets will undoubtedly look different when we monitor the market again. European OEMs that act now still have time to shape that outcome rather than react to it.

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