



DRIVE FOR EFFICIENCY

Last year's changes to the requirements for trailer brake testing have driven uptake of ATF-approved brake testers. But there's rather more to kitting out modern workshops.
Brian Tinham reports

Workshop equipment isn't renowned for rapid development. Yes, we've seen the emergence of Bluetooth-connected lifts, mobile brake testers, and digital analysis and reporting software, but - with the obvious exception of diagnostic systems - not a lot else changes. And that's hardly surprising, given that the primary task of all such equipment remains to facilitate vehicle inspection, maintenance, repair and testing.

However, there are some aspects, particularly related to inspection and test - and not just pre-MOT work - where the game has changed. And the deal here is not so much about novel equipment as increased application of that equipment. That, in turn, is driving workshops and mobile service operators to upgrade their facilities.

Think of brake testers. Last year's update to DVSA's Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness upped the ante on trailer testing, requiring that a measured brake test be carried out as part of all on-site inspections. Static or 'operational' brake tests were no longer acceptable. Furthermore, while allowing road tests at safety inspections, the new GTMR advised that 'a road test method to assess the brake performance for safety inspections will usually be inadequate'.

Overnight, the haulage industry

found that all trailers would need at least three successful workshop roller brake tests every 12 months on top of the MOT. So, unsurprisingly, workshops and trailer maintenance organisations saw a step change in demand for their services, and the market for DVSA-approved brake testers accordingly spiked. And since so few workshops enjoy the luxury of space, there has been a roaring trade in portable units.

That's certainly been the experience at workshop specialist Gemco. Marketing manager James Furk

confirms that brake tester sales have been brisk, not only to organisations building new and/or refurbished ATF lanes, but also to the many others offering vehicle inspection services and pre-test lanes. "Mobile brake testers are selling well, especially to workshops already at maximum capacity where they don't have room for permanent installations," he says. "They just site them in a corner of the yard and wheel them out when they're needed."

Interestingly, he adds that in some cases, workshop managers are choosing mobile equipment over fixed, but then having it floor-recessed to save on capex and groundworks. "We sell the tried and tested BM equipment and our sister company Sherpa's brake testers, and both their mobile versions use the same software as the in-ground equivalents."

Each is also ATF-approved and operates on the Department for Transport DTp vehicle number, which launches the test program and guides inspectors through the procedure. And they deliver the same analysis and printouts, which can be stored on the associated tablet. Beyond that, Furk says headlamp aim testers have seen a resurgence, in response to ongoing high failure rates at annual test. He also observes that, although most suppliers offer basic and all-singing, all-dancing digital units, it's worth noting that DVSA

Sparkling ascent

An example of incremental improvements in vehicle lifting comes from Steril Koni, with its latest in-ground DiamondLift (see picture p38). This is available in steel cassette and frame versions to suit different workshop layouts. And there's a choice of length and travel positions, as well as two or three 15,000kg capacity rams.

Operation is via a console, with push buttons the preferred interface. DiamondLift also has automatic and independent locking mechanisms on each ram (filled with 18 litres of biodegradable oil), plus self-lubricating sliding blocks, instead of rollers, said to optimise load distribution.

Workshops have a choice of an aluminium rolling cover, integrated steel cover plate system and a hand-held remote control, plus the usual ancillaries.



DiamondLift, from Stertil Koni, is available in steel cassette and frame versions to suit different workshop layouts, lengths and capacities

examiners on ATF test lanes drop the more sophisticated units into manual mode. Draw your own conclusions.

But Gemco and other suppliers in its league would be the first to agree that kitting out workshops is not just about choosing the right equipment. As Furk says, everything from building design to construction and regulatory oversight are also involved – and there are plenty of opportunities on the way for influencing workshop efficiency.

He points to a recently completed project for Welsh Water, on its Ponthir waste water treatment plant site. The existing workshop building has been completely refurbished, working with Welsh Water's building contractor, and

a new three-bay workshop and external wash bay, with an Omer Vega 24-tonne fully galvanised lift, is now ready for its fleet of vans, light trucks and tankers.

"We liaised with the authority and its contractor on the design and layout of the workshop, working within the available shell space. Then we supplied and installed a BM 14200 commercial brake tester, Litecheck headlamp aligner and a 13-metre ATF steel inspection pit, with side tunnels and LED lighting, for their required pre-test lane," he says.

This equipment will now be used to service and pre-test Welsh Water's CV fleet prior to official testing at its local DVSA ATF. As for the rest of its supply, Gemco provided: two Stenhoj (parent

company) two-post 3.5- and 5-tonne lifts, accessible either side; workbenches; the exhaust extraction system, Abac screw compressor and associated pipework; and Samoa oil and lubrication tanks, drainers and pipework.

"Selecting and positioning the equipment was all about making the best use of the space available," explains Furk.

"Welsh Water have effectively achieved two lift bays to the side of their pre-test lane, so they get three bays in the two lanes. In fact, they can work on up to four vehicles, with two on the lifts, one truck over the pit and another reversed onto the brake tester." **TE**

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