



# The power of SPORT

Competitions can bring out the best in people, even outside of the more familiar environment of athletics. Will Dalrymple reports on four international HGV technician challenges run by the truck OEMs

**F**inding the world's best truck technicians takes about a year, and starts with some multiple-choice questions. Those comprise the first step of the Scania Top Team, Volvo Vista, Renault RTech and DAF's UK Technician of the Year competitions (two similar events not covered here, are the MAN Service Quality Award, and IVECO's Service Challenge).

Once through to the national final, technicians are faced with practical tests of their ability to diagnose faults in trucks' engines, brakes, suspension, transmissions or elsewhere, under the watchful eye of the examiners. The format is quite similar to the IRTE's own Skills Challenge for bus and coach technicians, which returns to Bristol's S&B Academy in June.

As perhaps befits global vehicle manufacturers, the scale of these biennial initiatives is huge, as they draw from their franchised or independent dealers' workshop technicians to compete in regional and national and/or global stages that ultimately involve thousands of competitors worldwide. Blurring the differences between them, we outline the general process.

## QUESTIONS

Although many contestants will enter, few will succeed: this operating principle of any competition requires an immediate challenge for the contenders. At Scania, Renault and DAF, this takes the form of homework, a group of technical questions to be completed over a few weeks, drawing on workshop manuals and other workshop information sources.

A typical question at Renault might be: a certain type of truck has broken down, and these are the fault codes: what might be the issue and what is the resolution? Volvo's Vista competition requires applicants to sit an exam, with two theoretical rounds of 30 questions each, plus compete in two 'pit stop challenge' practical exams, the last of which had just been held at time of writing in early March.

For DAF, the tests - of which there are three, each with about 10 multiple-



choice questions to be completed in about two weeks - require technicians to consult its digital support resources, such as its Service Rapido online workshop manuals. Doing so not only assesses their ability to find information, but also reinforces the practice

of consulting them. DAF Trucks aftersales director Nigel Beckett states: "We are training them to look for things, so that they realise how easy the systems are to use - we sow that seed in their mind for the next time that they have a defect code."

Whatever the details, the initial assessments in the UK whittle down the numbers to a manageable number: 380 to 50 in Scania's Top Team; 184 to eight at Renault's RTech; 668 to 36 in the Volvo Vista competition, and from 1,000 to 20 in DAF's UK Technician of the Year.

Those who qualify win the right to compete in an even bigger challenge,

## SKILL AUTO 2018 HEAVY VEHICLE ENGINEERING: CHALLENGING APPRENTICES

Initial rounds start this month in the HGV skills competition for apprentices that culminates in a final at the Skills Show at the NEC on 15-17 November, via national qualifiers 18-20 July at Scania GB. IRTE is a lead category sponsor of the event, which was launched in 2013 by Volvo, IVECO and training body the IMI. Last year, it attracted 18 apprentices (competing individually) to a semi-final at Stephenson College, winnowing them down to six. The semi-finals presented them with six stations: four on trucks, and two on components. The event is open to HGV apprentices in colleges or manufacturers' heavy vehicle programmes. The day before the event, entrants were given familiarisation training, to overcome brand-specific differences. More information is on <https://is.gd/bupoyu>.

pitting their wits against perhaps half a dozen practical diagnosis tasks set up at separate workstations at a single site.

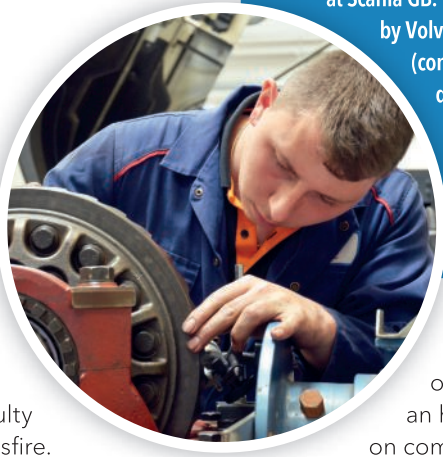
An example of a practical challenge from a previous Scania Top Team event was a faulty injector causing a misfire. Competitors were given the workshop manual, a diagnostic laptop and a short introductory scenario: the customer complained that the vehicle is lacking power, or producing black smoke. Explains Scania technical training manager Dean Rippon: "Then they usually plug in the laptop, look at the fault codes and start the engine. It is quite frantic."

Challenges are derived from real faults found in the field; this provides the function of helping keep technicians up to date.

Also current is the DAF European Technician of the Year competition in Eindhoven, which returns this month. During a full day featuring some 10 practical tests, each half an hour, contestants from some 18 European countries are pitted against each other. Among the participants is Adam Baker of Chassis Cab in Bury St Edmunds, who is defending his European title, won in 2016. DAF also organises a competition in the Americas region, run by corporate partner Paccar.

Describing the atmosphere of the finals, Karen Bailey, Volvo Group's head of competence development, says: "It really is like you are an athlete; there's no drinking the night before and there are in-team briefings. It's quite special to watch how seriously they take it."

Each challenge has its quirks. Scania's challenges are strictly 20



minutes in duration; others range up to an hour, depending on complexity. Renault

has tested communication skills as well: one previous 20-minute test involved resolving a customer complaint by drawing pictures to communicate, like in the board game Pictionary. New this year for Volvo was a virtual reality challenge.

Marking criteria - and so entrant strategy - varies by the competition. At Renault, the fault is not even necessarily the most important point, as Bailey points out: "We want people to do the guided diagnostics approach in a methodical way so that our customers know that they are following the right protocol - they're not just guessing. Because the danger is, if you guess, you may be right, but you may also be very, very wrong."

### TEAMWORK

Although some of the challenges, such as DAF's, test individuals working alone, teamwork-based tests are increasing in popularity. Renault, for example, is phasing out its individual TopTech competition, which is UK-only, in favour of an expanding RTech team-based challenge. (Here, Wigan-based Renault

dealer Woodward's Truck and Van reached third place in EMEA two years ago.) Bailey says: "We want to reflect more than the technical excellence; we want to reflect the teamwork."

Rippon of Scania echoes that sentiment. "This initiative is team-based because we want to replicate what we see in the workshop; we want to bring the technicians on, so that they improve what they do in their working day."

To that end, for the first time, the winners of the November 2017 UK heat, a team from Scania Exeter, was given £10,000 to spend on training and workshop equipment. This month, the team competes in the European finals in Taranto, Italy, against France, Switzerland, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania. The European winners then go on to the final in Sodertaje, Sweden, in December, to face another two finalists from the June semi-final in São Paulo and four finalists from Malaysia in September. First prize in the final competition is €50,000 - half of which has to be spent on the workshop.

Rippon recalls that in the last Top Team competition final, Keltruck of Nottingham came second in the world, losing by only a matter of seconds to a team from New Zealand. Time will tell whether this year's team has what it takes to win big. **TE**

