



An irtec accreditation gives customers assurance that a tyre technician who is asked to work at their premises will be able to work both competently and safely. That's a key concern, says Bridgestone North Europe training and development manager Phil Thirsk, given the high priority that responsible O licence holders give to compliance.

Accreditation involves an assessment which evaluates the ability of a technician to carry out a number of tasks and includes a timed online test. If successful - they either pass or fail - then candidates are licensed for five years and issued with a photo ID card.

Dominating the interior of the training centre is a cut-down tandem-axle trailer chassis rescued from a scrapyard and fully refurbished, which trainees use when they are removing and refitting wheels and tubeless tyres. Their ability to do so forms part of the irtec assessment (see also <https://is.gd/voluri>), as does repairing a truck tyre to British Standards, and regrooving one. The centre has the necessary equipment for the latter, in line with manufacturer's recommendations.

An open-air area is used to train technicians to work safely at the roadside. Bridgestone supports the

A new purpose-built training centre set up by Bridgestone in Nuneaton is playing a key role in implementing irtec tyre accreditation for HGV and PSV technicians, finds Steve Banner

National Tyre Distributors Association's REACT (Roadside Emergency Action Concerning Technicians) scheme, <https://is.gd/isawad>, which licenses them to do so. Around 4,500 people hold REACT licences and the scheme has the backing of the Highways Agency. Bridgestone supports the NTDA's Tyre Technician Professional Development Scheme, too (<https://is.gd/iqvux>).

As well as working at the roadside, other topics addressed at the centre include wheel security and the manual handling of truck wheels and tyres, as well as tyre inspection. Assessment takes a day and costs £260 plus VAT.

The new centre means that irtec assessments can be carried out in a controlled environment, say Thirsk and his fellow development trainer Paul Turner (pictured below, left and right, respectively); and that is vital if they are to be valid.

"The technicians are observed while they are engaged in up to ten different disciplines," adds Thirsk.

If an employer provides technicians with training, the

argument runs, then they are likely to feel valued and are thus more likely to stay; skilled workers are difficult to recruit at present. Properly-structured training should also attract newcomers.

It seems to be working. Turner says: "What we're finding is that the provision of training is helping with staff retention at both dealer and fleet level."

Bridgestone pioneered irtec tyre a year ago. Thirsk says it has assessed 50 technicians to the standard so far.

"There are a lot of guys working in the tyre industry who have never had any formal training, and once you get to a certain age you tend not to want to go on a course because you think you know it all," observes Turner.

"Once you do go on one, however, you often discover that there are quite a few things you don't know." **TE**

