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What drives excellence?

As I write this, the 2018 Skills Challenge awards luncheon at Rockingham Motor Speedway is fresh in my mind. The winners are profiled in a special supplement, found after p22 of this issue.

Picking out just one of them is unfair, but my conversation with William Scott after the ceremony stands out. This Northern Ireland-based bus technician, who won the new Skills Challenge Masters category, told me that the most important characteristics for his job are enthusiasm and curiosity; the desire to understand is what drives him to figure out a difficult problem.

With the greatest of respect, I would also add stubbornness - he told me that he never gives up on a problem. For example, he spent two whole weeks teasing out the root causes of a tricky engine ECU issue that had cropped up in the fleet of his employer, Translink. And it was an experience he recalled with obvious pleasure. (The ECU overheated when the engine operated hotter than expected, which was due to a number of factors, including restricted radiators and diesel particulate filters that suffered from restrictions caused by minor fuel system faults.)

2018 was actually his fourth time competing in the Skills Challenge, and also his fourth award. He won the mechanical technician of the year award twice, and was a joint winner of the mechanical/electrical challenge in 2012. Those latter skills came in handy again in this year's cross-discipline Masters challenge. Scott credits Translink's support during his apprenticeship for helping develop electric skills.

Teaching of apprentices and others is the main theme of this month's issue. We cover the challenges of being an employer-provider of training on pp10-11, and then go on to how to acquire a Certificate of Professional Competence, an essential requirement to obtain an HGV or PSV O licence (pp12-13).

One O licence holder of particular interest is coach operator Lucketts, whose National Express franchise helped change the company's maintenance culture. It is profiled on pp18-19. There's another chance to hear from director Ian Lockett next month, as he is participating in a panel discussion at the IRTE Conference, taking place in Leicester on 27 September.

I hope to see you there.

Will Dalrymple
Editor