

As the IRTE technician Skills Challenge returns to S&B Automotive Academy in June, four-time winner William Scott, of Translink, reflects on the competition and his formative experiences in engineering

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Some of William Scott's first experiences in vehicle repair – as a teenager working alongside his brothers on the family farm – had a massive effect. He says: "The tractors were needed to work the next day, so I remember many nights in the workshop, putting brakes and clutches in. We didn't have workshop manuals; we didn't have technical information. We were just relying on our wits and common sense. There were no parts on the machine that we didn't have a go at. I do believe that's where my mentality now comes from. One of the things I did learn from those days is that there is a series of basic principles to engineering. I still apply those basics over and over again."

TE: Are you a read-the-manual person?

WS: "Definitely not. I believe in the basic principles. For an electronic fault, do you have an electricity supply? Is there an earth? Are the voltages correct? Once I've exhausted the basics, then I might look at the manual."

TE: Skills Challenge tests are timed, under the watchful eye of an examiner. What do you recommend to contestants

to deal with the stress?

WS: "It depends on the test. When you have to engage with the assessor, I tell them what I am looking at and why; I treat them like a new apprentice. Another thing to keep in mind is that these tests are designed to be solved in the time available, and they also have to be easy for the assessor to reset. Because of that, they're very limited in what they can do."

TE: Why is the Skills Challenge important?

WS: "Bus engineers work in a back room. The only time that we get pushed front and centre is when it all goes wrong, and there's a breakdown by the side of the road. The opportunity to show that we are as good as anybody else out there is incredibly important."

TE: How will the role of the PSV technician change over the next decade?

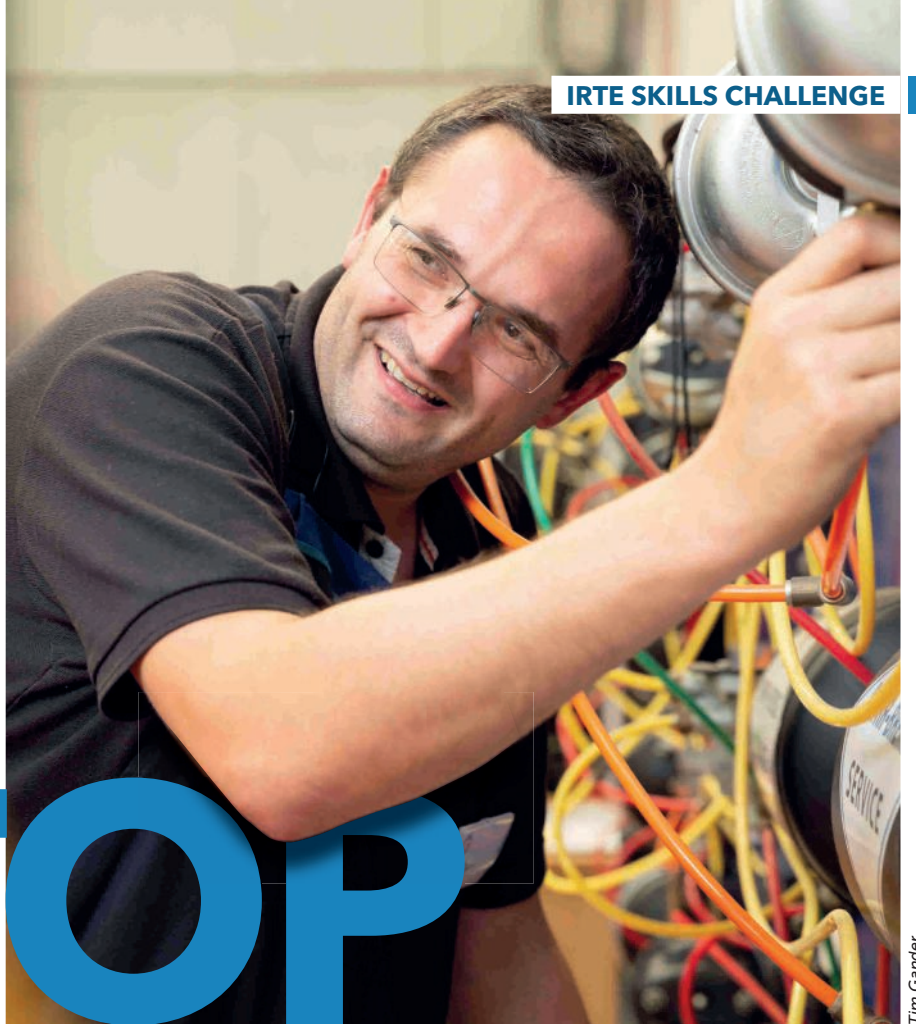
WS: "It scares me how far we've come in the last ten years. When I started, I was working on Leyland Leopards. Now it's hybrids, and we're talking about hydrogen propulsion. Where we're going, though, I only see electronics making the job easier. On the other

hand, basic maintenance is becoming more and more critical, because the tolerances that manufacturers are working to keep getting tighter. These systems depend on us getting it right."

TE: What's your favourite bit of the job?

WS: "It's whenever it all goes wrong, and you have to work with suppliers to bottom out issues. You're looking at something that is causing a big problem for us as operators. When I fix that, I really do have a feeling of achievement."

"Some of the most satisfying ones seem extremely complicated when you start, but the final fix is very simple. For example, we had a vehicle that was incredibly hard to drive. Every time the driver pressed the brake pedal, it would lunge. When we investigated, the problem was that the air was going to the retarder too fast. So we fitted a restrictor valve to slow it down. That meant that there was a much smoother integration between air brakes and retarder; the change in performance was phenomenal. We had thought that we were going to have to get some software and reprogram the transmission. In the end, all it took was a valve and some extra piping." **TE**



Tim Gander