

LIFE IN THE ATF LANE

Opening a DVSA-approved facility to conduct MOT testing demands a great deal of investment. Brian Wall speaks to authorised testing facility (ATF) operators to find out what it takes and why they went down this path

The primary role of a DVSA authorised testing facility (ATF) is to ensure that heavy goods vehicles, trailers and public service vehicles, such as buses and coaches, are roadworthy, and meet safety and environmental standards.

The first step to set up and run an ATF, so you can host MOT tests in your own right, is to apply to DVSA. It will carry out an assessment and most likely a site inspection before deciding whether or not to give the go-ahead.

Of course, only DVSA's own accredited staff can carry out these tests, during which they need to inspect the underside of the vehicle by using an ATF DVSA test pit to ensure a vehicle is roadworthy. So, becoming an ATF in the first instance calls for acceptance of this 'pecking order', plus the financial commitment that goes with it.

Once authorised, an ATF can have DVSA staff carry out tests on its own vehicles and offer a testing service to third parties (using DVSA staff), where customers' vehicles are tested at the ATF, instead of at a DVSA test station.

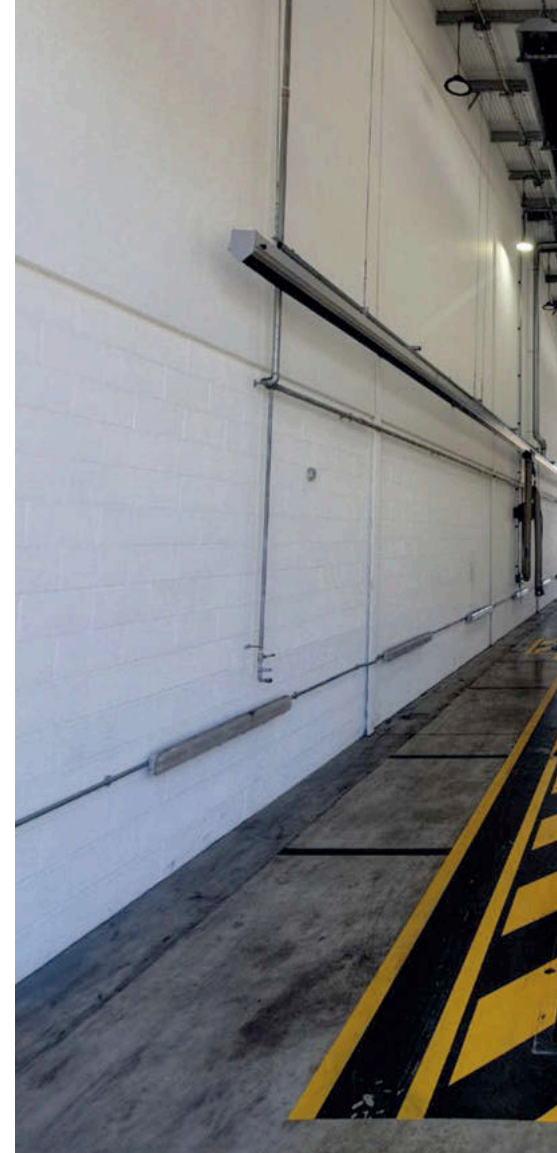
Back to more on that up-front investment. Anyone intending to set up as an ATF will need a testing area that's at least two metres wider than the vehicles to be tested within a permanent weatherproof building, the relevant

and approved testing equipment, as well as offices from which DVSA staff can visit and work. The Garage Equipment Association (GEA) publishes comprehensive lists of equipment that is approved for MOT testing (www.is.gd/tumofe). A key stipulation is that any new or replacement equipment an ATF purchases must be shown on these lists, kept in good working order and be properly calibrated.

Some types of equipment can connect directly to the service that you use to record MOT results (see www.is.gd/hahace). This means these can be automatically transferred, without the need for manual data entry. Worth noting is that DVSA is introducing a rule specifying any new or replacement equipment bought by an ATF must be able to connect to the service. For example, this became obligatory for roller brake testers on 1 October 2019 and for decelerometers on 1 February this year. Deadlines for diesel smoke meters, exhaust gas analysers and headlamps are under consideration, but no dates have yet been confirmed. For more information, see also www.is.gd/jukasi.

BONE OF CONTENTION

Some ATFs have argued the case for carrying out the tests themselves, on the basis that empowering them to



do so would ensure bookings were better managed and cancellations minimised. However, the DVSA points to its latest annual satisfaction survey with ATFs (conducted this year, prior to the pandemic), which "revealed that 84% of ATFs find the quarterly booking cycle easy to plan and manage, with the majority being satisfied with the days and times they are allocated. Overall satisfaction with bookings rose from 34% in 2018 to 83% in 2020", according to a DVSA spokesperson.

PAYBACK TIME

While any pit that forms part of a workshop demands a sizeable cash injection, why not choose the ATF pit specification, which can give you a return on that investment, asks Matt Dille, marketing manager at Premier Pits. He elaborates: "At present, the DVSA is not approving new ATF facilities, but that isn't to say it won't in the future, nor is it to say you couldn't get a return straight away, if you install the pit now: not just in the

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Chris Taylor



One such company is Mercedes-Benz Dealer group Rygor Commercials. Service director Chris Taylor says: “If the site space allows, it makes sense for us to offer a one-stop shop for truck customers, where we can carry out O-licence inspections and then MOTs all in one place. This maximises our customers’ vehicle uptime, getting them back on the road safely and sooner.”

Within its business, Rygor has two ATF lanes at its Westbury [Wiltshire] site, one at the Gloucester branch (pictured, near left) and all the requisite ATF equipment already installed at its new Heathrow Truck Centre (which opened in September). “This [the ATF lane] will go live as soon as we have received our audit from the DVSA,” adds Taylor. There, it has installed automatic safety covers, along with automatic safety barriers.

Meanwhile, Scania Gatwick (main picture), inaugurated in April 2019, was created out of the need to ‘restructure the area’ and replace its previous sites based at Lewes and Lingfield. “All new-builds across the Scania (Great Britain) Limited network incorporate ATF lanes to deliver a premium customer service and one-stop-shop facility,” says Adrian Inscoc, dealer director for Scania’s south east region. “The Scania Gatwick facility also fits well with Scania’s sustainability programme, as it reduces needless vehicle movements.” **TE**

Nor does DVSA data, shared with the trade bodies, support any apparent issues relating to cancellations. “DVSA cancelled 14 testing hours in the three full months prior to the start of lockdown [December 2019 to February 2020]. During the same period, ATFs cancelled 3,445 testing hours,” the spokesperson continues.

Meanwhile, the Department for Transport is leading a review of heavy vehicle testing. “DVSA is working with them on this, alongside organisations

representing authorised testing facilities and operators,” confirms the agency. The review is expected to conclude by the end of this calendar year.

SURGE IN ATFS

Certainly, the fact that DVSA inspectors carry out the MOT tests at ATFs has not deterred a whole swathe of operators across the UK from securing ATF status, and continuing to apply to do so, in pursuit of expanding their existing maintenance and repair operations.

form of a revenue stream, but in overall efficiency of the fleet and enabling the company to save money.”

Investing in an ATF pit enables an operator to start saving money from day one by allowing it to check and pre-test vehicles whenever needed, without having to wait for availability, points out Dilley. “With the average checks costing around £10 per axle, plus the cost for a driver and diesel, the potential saving per year is around £900 per vehicle. This is without the revenue made by not

incurring losses from having a vehicle off the road for 16 hours over a year,” claims Dilley.

Even if funds are not available to have an ATF pit fully up and running, it is still worth investing in the infrastructure, he argues. “This can be achieved by having the pit and equipment sumps installed, then plating over the sumps until the time is right to have the equipment up and running. This option gives you a fully workable pit for vehicle inspections and maintenance, which is future-proof to give an additional revenue stream when the time is right.”

