

Dream team

Ian Norwell finds out how the UK fared in Scania's international technician competition

Scania's 'Top Team' global competition for vehicle technicians might have been won by the Australians, but a five-strong team of technicians from Scania's independent UK dealer West Pennine Trucks came a very creditable fourth.

Whittled down from 6,000 technicians based in 46 countries, 10 nations were at the world final. Challenges included five fault-finding scenarios that replicated real-life issues from Scania's service network – covering engines, transmissions and electrics, as well as trailer-related faults and even problems with an ethanol-powered bus.

Mark Oliver, Scania GB's technical services manager, commented: "The biggest benefit of this competition is the broadening of our technicians' knowledge base and the expansion of their problem-solving skills, so it's our customers who will be the ultimate winners."

Scania CEO Leif Östling presented the awards and, paying tribute to all the technicians in the room, posed an interesting proposition. "Maybe we should bring in the R&D people who create the product and let them compete with you," he suggested.

Complexity and competition

In fact, this event is more like a quality training programme than a competition. With every new truck launch, there is an array of new technology and the balance of power has shifted from spanner to the computer. For technicians, the challenge of keeping up with it all shouldn't be underestimated.

As far as Euro 6 is concerned, 'market preparation' is well underway. For technicians, this next raft of emissions technology will require "a more systematic approach and a full understanding of the functionality", according to Oliver. But the additional complexity of powertrain management shouldn't present operators with any issues, if the experience of one unusual operator is anything to go by.

Scania's research and development team set up an independent haulage company to feed back data from a real trucking operation and, as a result, has more experience of running at Euro 6 than just about anybody else. Anders Gustavsson, who spent 25 years inside Scania's R&D before 'going native', explains that this operation puts future trucks and components to the sword, years before they get to



Team GB put in a strong performance at Scania's Top Team technicians' competition

customers. "This is a complement to our regular testing activities and it is proving to be a valuable one," he states.

Running a fleet of 20 tractors and 90 trailers, with 62 drivers, the operation triple-shifts between Södertälje, near Stockholm, and Scania's plants in Lolland, Sweden and Zwolle, the Netherlands. With each truck covering more than 360,000km annually, fits vehicles run the same routes as DHL and get paid the same commercial rate.

Quizzed on the relevance of information mined from triple-shifting, Gustavsson replies: "We call ourselves the customer from the future. This kind of intensive transport is where many hauliers will be in years to come."

The operation has given Scania 400,000km of in-service data with R series 400bhp and 420bhp tractors, as well as eight Euro 6 units topping out at 480bhp. Measuring lifecycle costs and uptime is the core of Gustavsson's work and he's even got a few competitors' chassis in the fleet as well.

Next to the 17 home-grown tractors, we walked past a Mercedes 1841 Euro 5 Actros, owned since new and with more than half a million km under its belt, a Volvo FH-420 and a 410bhp MAN.

Back with the technicians, the men from Trafford Park had completed their final workshop challenges and could do no more. Sampling a range of trucks at the test track and reversing the 24m A-frame drawbar gave good entertainment. **TE**

