

# Healthy competition is the key to competence

**A**s we go to press, this year's premier European bus and coach trade show – Euro Bus Expo 2012 (6–8 November at the NEC) – is almost upon us. In keeping with tradition, it promises serious launches.

Among the most coy are Alexander Dennis' (ADL) Plaxton coach division and Optare, which are giving nothing away. Meanwhile, MAN says it will show its EcoCity gas bus; Wright Group is bringing a Boris Bus (New Bus for London); Volvo is coming with its 7900 single-deck hybrid and a 9700 Prestige Plus; and EvoBus will launch the Mercedes-Benz Citaro K.

And there will also be exhibition debuts for Scania (with the first of 19 K270UB 4x2 gas-powered chassis being built with ADL for Reading Buses) and King Long, showing its new XMQ6130 tri-axial coach for the first time. Indeed, the list goes on and on – way beyond the OEMs to include most of the sector's technology and equipment providers, both for on-vehicle and workshop application.

Just as important will be the series of master classes, in association with BAE Systems and Greener Journeys. Subjects, we are told, range from handling hybrid technologies to emissions-busting interventions, telematics and environmentally-friendly transport options.

Most important, however, for fleet engineers and technicians will be the launch of the IRTE's Skills Challenge for 2013, with sponsors Allison Transmission, Bridgestone, Delphi, Halfords, Knorr-Bremse and Shell. This year's event saw technicians from Arriva, Bluestar Bus, Go-Ahead, Ipswich Buses, London Borough of Redbridge, Trent Barton, Translink, Wilts & Dorset Bus Company, and even the Ministry of Defence competing – but IRTE believes the 2013 challenge will be even bigger, having captured the industry's imagination.

It's hardly surprising. The Skills Challenge is not only an opportunity to pit bus and coach operators' best technicians against one another, and to recognise and reward the victors. It is also an invaluable and very public catalyst for raising the game, and indeed the image, of all transport engineers and technicians, and their training providers. Everyone wants to be a winner, so there's nothing quite like healthy competition to drive excellence.

That matters. The safe and successful operation of bus and coach operators up and down the land is in no small measure due to the knowledge, experience and dedication of the engineers who look after their PSVs (public service vehicles). Everyone knows that regular training, leading to recognised qualifications, is therefore critical, but most also concede that, especially in these straitened times, it's all too easy to let professional development programmes slip.

This is not unique to the PSV community, though: the same applies to technicians in haulage and distribution. That's why irtec (the IRTE's recently revised technician licensing scheme) is currently seeing such growth (page 5). Competition is again the key, but of a different kind. Dealerships and independent workshops alike are using irtec to attract and retain business – by donning the mantle of respectability that flows from independently accredited competence.

That's good news, and it's attracting enthusiastic support from VOSA and the traffic commissioners. But there's room for more: it's time for an LCV and HGV Skills Challenge.



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Published by: The Society of Operations Engineers

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Registered in England:

Company No. 3667147

Registered Charity: No. 1081753

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Publisher: Peter Knutton

Transport Engineer is the official journal of IRTE.  
Produced on behalf of IRTE and The Society of Operations Engineers by Findlay Media Ltd, Hawley Mill, Hawley Road, Dartford, Kent DA2 7TJ  
Tel: 01322 221144  
Fax: 01322 221188  
www.transportengineer.org.uk

Transport Engineer is distributed free of charge to SOE members, dependent on membership sector. For non-members, the annual subscription rate (12 issues) is £71 UK and EU, or £73 airmail outside EU. For other SOE members, the discounted rate is £28.



Printed by: Holbrooks Printers Ltd, Portsmouth ISSN: 0020-3122

Views expressed in Transport Engineer are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Society of Operations Engineers or of Findlay Media Ltd.

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