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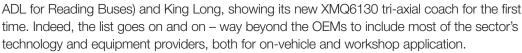
IRTE engineering success

Healthy competition is the key to competence

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.







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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