

Spice of life

Brian Tingham talks to the FTA's Julie Maddocks about a day spent shadowing area engineers who work with the association's Vehicle Inspection Service

It is **7.00am** and Julie Maddocks, the Freight Transport Association's head of media relations, meets Mick Murray – one of the FTA's VIS (Vehicle Inspection Service) area engineers – for the drive to his first appointment. Today, it's Wakefield and Morrisons, where he is due to carry out a workshop audit on the way to IRTE Workshop Accreditation.

Murray served as an apprentice HGV technician with Northern Brick Company (later Steetley Transport) while obtaining his IMI and irtec certification, IRTE membership and Eng Tech registration. He's

unit). He has prepared the relevant documentation, completed the checklist sent by FTA's VIS administration team, in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, along with the online IRTE Workshop Accreditation audit pro-forma.

Morrisons' Wakefield VMU is the largest in the group. Its 15 HGV technicians all hold irtec licences and provide 24/7 cover. They are responsible for looking after 108 trucks, 380 trailers and 550 MHE (mechanical handling



7.00am



9.00am



10.15am



12.30am

Morning session:
Mick Murray with
Morrisons'
Derrick West

an experienced engineer, having worked with various freight operators – including DFDS Logistics on trucks carrying container and tilt-trailer freight – as well as a Mercedes-Benz dealership in the North East.

“As field-based staff, Mick and the other area engineers undertake a vast range of inspection types,” explains Maddocks. “They range from thorough examinations of vehicle-mounted cranes, tail-lifts or lift-trucks, to PMIs [preventive maintenance inspections] for ‘O’ licences. They also perform workshop audits to ensure that they are maintaining vehicles in a safe, legal and reliable condition – whether in-house or maintenance contractors.”

The pair arrive at **9.00am**, and are ushered over to the workshop offices, where they meet Derrick West, general manager at Morrisons' Wakefield VMU (vehicle maintenance

equipment) units. The workshop has a dedicated five-bay bodyshop and a further 10 bays, each capable of accommodating full-length combinations.

Murray starts the audit process, gathering information on the site's scope and size before moving on to tools, equipment and technical staff. It's clear that Morrisons keeps a well-documented log of inspection and calibration certificates, including those for everything from vehicle lifts to wheel torque wrenches.

10.15am, and Murray systematically works through the workshop audit, asking open questions, listening to West's responses and checking those against the evidence available – such as the electronic booking-in system for PMIs and driver defect report logs. Then, satisfied with the answers and documentation, it's time to move on to audit the workshops themselves.

12.30pm: “Throughout the audit, Derrick was on-hand to guide Mick to the lifts, jacks and calibrated equipment, such as torque wrenches and steering alignment gauges,” says Maddocks. “For



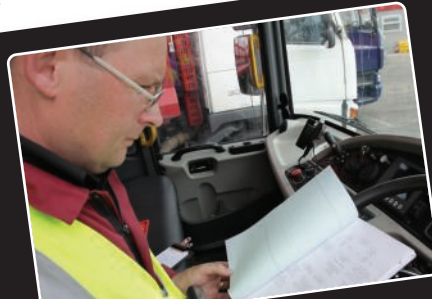
the audit, he checked that relevant equipment had been calibrated and that it was appropriately marked and in-date. He then moved on to brake testing and observed the process, before asking one of the technicians questions related to VOSA's tester manual."

It's all in a day's work for Murray, who says that he routinely inspects everything from cars and light vans, to milk floats, airport fire tenders and 44-tonne artics. And, for him, that could be anywhere from Cumbria to north Lancashire, the Isle of Man and Leeds. "My role has changed over the years, in terms of the types of inspections and the way we work," he comments. "But what will never change is the quality of the work we carry out. We strive to maintain the highest standards."

1.30pm, and it's time to move on. Morrisons' Wakefield VMU is presented with a summary of the audit findings, the full report being sent to IRTE



1.30pm



3.30pm



5.30pm



Afternoon session:
Jon Atkinson
checks Biffa's
trucks and drivers

continues to check the oil level, start the engine and check air pressure build-up performance and driving controls.

3.30pm: "Jon worked his way systematically around the vehicle, looking for faults, such as tell-tale signs of rust marks around wheel nuts," states Maddocks. "He checked fuel tank seals for damage and leaks, and used the 'extra foot' [foot brake holder] to test the stop lamps."

5.30pm: Several vehicles later, the audit is complete, with all trucks checked on the day receiving a clean bill of health and Biffa's report showing no defects. "While it may have been that having an FTA engineer on-site provided an extra reminder to drivers of how seriously Biffa views this pre-use


head office, in London, for scrutiny ahead of IRTE Workshop Accreditation. So Maddocks drives off to join Jon Atkinson, who is about to make an unannounced visit to one of Biffa's operating centres, following a morning with a local bus company, carrying out quality inspections for vehicles on school contract work.

Atkinson's career started with Yorkshire Traction as an apprentice bus technician and he later moved to become a tester with VOSA, where he gained a BTEC qualification in motor vehicles. He was then promoted to station technical officer before joining FTA as a VIS engineer for the Leeds area in 2011.

3.00pm: "I met Jon at the Biffa depot, where he explained that the audit he was to carry out would be a variant of 'stop and search'," explains Maddocks. "At Biffa's request, he was to stop vehicles leaving the depot to check for any unreported driver reportable defects. And he was to carry out drivers' walk-around checks on any vehicles he liked, as well as auditing the drivers' daily check reporting for compliance."

Armed with a boot full of tools and equipment – including ramps, jacks, wheel chocks, torch and tapping hammer – Atkinson looks over the first vehicle. Moving to the cab area, he checks the driver's defect report book and, finding all in order,

check, there was no denying that we saw a number of drivers finish their shift or change vehicles – and all performed the driver daily check, apparently as part of their normal routine," says Maddocks.

"What I enjoy about this job is that no two days are the same," comments Atkinson. "One day you could be carrying out pre-purchase inspections; the next it could be auditing a company's maintenance systems. It's all about offering advice and helping members to keep their vehicles and their operations compliant. Who knows where I'll be tomorrow?" 

FTA's Vehicle Inspection Service

FTA's Vehicle Inspection Service (VIS) has evolved from carrying out safety inspections to now predominantly quality monitoring of maintenance providers. With more than 80% of operators subcontracting maintenance to third parties, that's important. It also satisfies one of the operator undertakings on quality monitoring of maintenance providers, as outlined in VOSA's 'Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness'.

FTA's VIS undertakes more than 100,000 vehicle and equipment inspections per year, and has a database, which reveals aspects of any fleet that might be putting the operator at risk. FTA says this can be analysed by vehicle type, location, defect or maintenance provider. The process enables operators to benchmark their fleet compliance against others in their sector.