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IRTE
engineering success

Training our technicians for a challenging world

If there was ever any doubt over the importance that DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, formerly VOSA) attaches to ensuring the competence of technicians for maintaining vehicle roadworthiness – and of the IRTE's (Institute of Road Transport) central role in this endeavour – that must surely now have been excised.

Not only is DVSA currently accrediting its own inspectors, through the irtec technician licensing scheme, before moving on to qualify its enforcement examiners, but the agency has also taken an active part in supporting the fourth annual IRTE Skills Challenge (page 4), which seeks to recognise and reward excellence among bus and coach technicians.

During last month's trials at S&B Automotive Academy, in Bristol, contestants from 10 operators entering the mechanical category of the tests had to perform a part replica of the PSV (public service vehicle) annual test, as set by DVSA specifically for the Skills Challenge. What's more, Alastair Peoples, chief executive of DVSA, is offering the winners a full day of training with DVSA inspectors to improve their understanding of the real world outside workshops – and of their critical responsibilities in ensuring vehicle compliance and, ultimately, safety.

Of course, DVSA's duties, in terms of compliance, extend well beyond policing mechanical safety, to include, for example, monitoring engine emissions, primarily at the annual vehicle test. And that fact points up another responsibility for technicians, transport engineers, operators and indeed DVSA inspectors alike. Given ongoing changes, in terms of emissions legislation and the associated monitoring equipment, both on and off the vehicle, keeping up to date is every bit as important as achieving initial accreditation at whichever levels are appropriate.

In professional engineering parlance, we talk of CPD (continuing professional development), but, call it what you like, the point is that training and education should not simply stop the day after examinations are passed. Taking exhaust streams again, it's not just about understanding the new Euro 6 requirements, the maintenance procedures and equipment involved in ensuring that vehicles remain within prescribed limits. It's also about staying ahead of the game – for example, being aware of the European Commission's (EC) latest focus on HGVs' CO₂ emissions, in a bid to reduce greenhouse gases from transport by 60% against 1990 levels by 2050, in line with the 2011 Transport White Paper (page 5).

Some might accuse the EC of forever moving the goalposts – and, certainly, there are concerns that its move, particularly so soon after mandating demanding targets for NO_x and particulates under Euro 6, smacks of left hands not knowing what right hands are doing. There is also the worry that simply certifying and monitoring trucks' emissions, as per the automotive market, will be meaningless, given the sheer variety of payload potential.

But either way, engineers and technicians need to be prepared. It's a similar story with the perennially threatened upsurge in LEZs (low emission zones). Staying ahead of the game means comprehending options, such as fitting emissions-busting technology to existing fleets. Our advice: don't miss the IRTE Conference on 17 September 2014 (www.irte-conference.co.uk).



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