

**“We don’t train anybody up for the event. We’re continually training our staff; we’ve committed all the time to skills and training on a daily basis. Every day’s a learning curve for these guys”**

Gino Di Ponio



# ‘Show them what you’ve got’

Planned to include the necessary COVID protection measures, the Skills Challenge is set to return in June. Application deadline is 23 April; see [www.is.gd/yopika](http://www.is.gd/yopika) for details

**O**ne returning team is Edinburgh-based bus operator Lothian Bus, which is hoping to repeat the success of the victory of David Leslie (pictured, second left) in the masters category last time. Will Dalrymple speaks to Lothian Buses team captain (and Annandale Street depot engineer) Gino Di Ponio.

**TE: How do you put together a team for the Skills Challenge?**

**GDP:** “Our skilled technicians have annual appraisals. Invitations to the Skills Challenge are linked to the performance of individual technicians, their attitude to the job, their attendance, their ability and knowledge. And for apprentices it’s very much the same, but we use college reports. We never put the same team in.

We’ll see how people perform in appraisals, and if they’ve had a good year, that’s who we’ll pick. We don’t always just put our best technicians in; we rotate them. Last time was the first year that we’ve put in both for apprentices and skilled technicians.”

**TE: Was that a good experience?**

**GDP:** “Absolutely; it gives them a boost,



Photo credit: Tim Gander

and it gives them an opportunity to push themselves farther to be selected to go.”

**TE: Is there any reluctance to take part?**

**GDP:** “Among the candidates that have been picked, there is a bit of fear, because they don’t know what they’re up against. But they all want a shot at it. We’ve been able to prove over the years we’ve been quite successful, and they like to get out there and show what they’ve got.”

**TE: To what do you ascribe your success?**

**GDP:** “Training. We have over 800 buses in the fleet, so we are seeing a variety of faults all the time. And the guys have a lot of regular courses. We are committed to training and skills development, whether they are apprentices or skilled. We predominately have a Volvo fleet, so we have a lot of on-site Volvo training.”

**TE: How do you prepare for the Skills Challenge?**

**GDP:** “We don’t train anybody up for the event. We’re continually training our staff; we’ve committed all the time to skills and training on a daily basis. Every day’s a learning curve for these guys. They have a big variety of fleet to learn on. We don’t prep just for this competition; what you see is what you get with these guys.”

**TE: What’s the benefit of competing for Lothian Buses?**

**GDP:** “Recognition, certainly for the company, and for our colleagues. It was a big morale-booster when David picked up the masters; it was a great achievement both for the individual and for the company. It allows us to show the professionalism of our technicians.” **TE**



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