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Squaddie to Swindon



In June, Jason Moore took the newly-created UK operations manager role at MAN Truck & Bus corporate head office in Swindon, where he now helps looking after the brand's 24 wholly-owned branches. The high-flying 40-year old has risen through the ranks since starting as an apprentice at its Avonmouth depot in 2002. He tells his story to Will Dalrymple

Moore traces back his interest in engineering to an internship at the AA as a young teenager. Moore recalls: "I've always been exposed to someone around that has the ability to work on things and fix things. On top of that my mother's Mk II Ford Escort always needed things doing to it every weekend, or it wouldn't start on the Monday! My stepdad showed me things like setting the points and adjusting for spark gap. Doing all of these things, I learned that if you adjust this, it has that impact. That appealed to me."

But his path into an apprenticeship was longer than most. Ignorant of that possibility, he chose to do A-levels (maths and physics) over going to college. In his spare time, he was an Army cadet, and planned to enter as an officer. However, Army recruiters pushed him towards university, and when the appeal of studying began to wane, he entered the infantry instead, training in heavy artillery. After two years, he was injured in training (stress fractures in his legs), and sought a medical discharge. "It was more painful failing the course than the injury itself - but maybe that was the mentality driven into you then."

Lest that be misunderstood, he credits the military with all kinds of cultural training: teamwork, cooperation, communication, understanding the importance of getting the task done. Having had two years of practical experience in the Army - plus accustomed to receiving the trainee pay - Moore knew that returning to classroom study wasn't right for him, so decided to train as an apprentice, at 20 years old. S&B Automotive Academy was his local training centre, and, after his initial assessment, suggested he consider HGV engineering. At the time it was responsible for training all of MAN's engineering apprentices, and it happened that there was a vacancy at MAN's wholly-owned local dealership in Avonmouth.

After his interview there, the service manager took him on a tour. Moore recalls: "What I remember most vividly was the technicians were harassing us, saying, 'Don't do this; get another trade!' I liked the atmosphere and the dark sense of humour, which I could relate to from my time in the military."

AWARD-WINNER

Being a big guy of nearly 21 set him apart from the rest of the first-year

apprentices, but their relationship soon evolved into him becoming everyone's big brother. His time there was such a success that S&B nominated him for an SOE Apprenticeship Award (2005). He also came third place in a national government apprenticeship award scheme. "I was annoyed because first place went to a hairdresser, and I was losing my hair already," he says ruefully.

Still, the experience reinforced his confidence, and rewarded his effort. Looking back, Moore says now: "I tell young technicians: 'If you want it, and put in the effort, you can have it.' But the key is that they have got to want it. It is a demanding industry, and it takes a lot of time, because it is 24/7, but what successful person doesn't commit the time."

The fully-qualified technician stayed in Avonmouth while the site was taken over by SA Trucks, and then taken back again by MAN. And Moore was appointed to the site breakdown callout team. This was not only for the extra money, but also for professional satisfaction. "I liked that way of working, and deep down, I liked being under the challenge of a difficult situation, of turning up and facing something completely new, and dealing with it."



ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

At the end of the interview, Moore makes sure to remember one particular person. He says: "It'd be wrong of me not to mention Pete Vill, who was my lecturer at college [S&B Automotive Academy]. He's passionate about getting apprentices done and through the training programme. He is a proper brilliant guy. I still talk to him now, once or twice a year, to touch base, and he asks questions about the business. The fact that we still talk 20 years later shows the impact he made on me."

the context in which Moore was promoted again by Littlejohn, to the MAN head office, in June 2021. "This came out of me asking, his recognition he needed help, and the business growing."

Now, in addition to monitoring branch operational performance, customer satisfaction, recruitment and health and safety, the former apprentice is also in charge of apprentices: as he puts it, "how we retain apprentices and have them come out on the other side as effective technicians."

Stepping away from operations and into the corporate world has been daunting, Moore admits. "There is an element of me asking, am I educated enough to step up to this level? But at the same time, I know nobody stops learning, and I'm not afraid to make mistakes, or to ask people for guidance, advice or understanding. And I'm happy for that to go up or down. This morning, I asked the advice of a workshop supervisor about something. I'm clear that I'm just one person and not a subject matter expert on every topic, but I have a good grasp of pretty much everything, and am willing to apply effort and grow." **TE**

For five years that was his job, and he remembers that period fondly. But all was not well in the dealership's management. When the workshop controller position came up, he jumped for it. "At the time, the biggest reason why I applied was that I thought that I could do a good job in running it. Basic things like a bit of organisation and communication could go a long way. The key fundamentals weren't there, and I could see my strengths helping. That's where it started."

He continues: "Our branch manager wasn't very strong in position, so a lot came in my direction that wouldn't normally, which at the time was demanding, but looking back, it exposed me to more business demands and opened my eyes."

When MAN's new head of branches, David Littlejohn, realised what was going on, he invited Moore to dinner, and offered him a contract to become site manager. That was in May 2015. Looking back, Moore says: "Now I understand a lot of their concern [at the time] about my age; it's a big site and I didn't have enough experience. There was a big risk that I didn't have the ability to bring the branch back on track."



I think I was convinced I was ready, but the gravity of the position didn't settle immediately. However, MAN gave me a lot of support."

MONEY MAN

The biggest responsibility, he soon learned, was financial; site managers do the profit and loss. And although Moore admits he had very little financial expertise, he picked it up little by little. Of his can-do attitude, he observes: "If I'm interested, then I'll learn. I'm of the mind that I can do it, regardless of what it is. I guess one of the management learnings for me is to understand that not everyone is wired up that way."

Soon, the site manager was also looking after a second site at Westbury, Wiltshire, and then a third, in Swindon. And recently the brand took on another five sites when it acquired the HRVS dealer group in January 2021. This was