

WINNERS' CIRCLE



In 2022's IRTE Skills Challenge, the team sent by Lothian Buses, comprising bodywork technician Shaun Kenneally, electrical technician David McIntyre and mechanical technician Kieron Briggs (pictured, below, left to right) won the judges' choice award for outstanding regional operator. Lothian chief engineer Dylan Dastey (left) shares his insights into the event

Transport Engineer (TE): How big is Lothian Buses in terms of number of depots, number of technicians and number of buses?

Dylan Dastey (DD): We have 130 engineering maintenance colleagues and over 250 others within the engineering function. Our teams are responsible for over 720 vehicles across seven operating depots of varying sizes, in addition to a coachwork facility.

TE: What are the most important engineering issues for Lothian Buses?

DD: Vehicle reliability and operational standards, without a doubt, to ensure we provide a safe and reliable service for the people of Edinburgh and the Lothians.

TE: I understood that you put the Lothian Buses team together. Why did you enter a team for the Skills Challenge; that is to say, what are its benefits?

DD: We've participated in the Skills Challenge for a few years now and have always received positive feedback from both the competition organisers and our team members. It allows our engineers the opportunity to go up against their peers from other companies to put their abilities to the test, as well as offering them the chance to learn new skills and meet different like-minded engineers.

TE: How much time did participation in the event take, and how was that time spent?

DD: The team were there for three days in total - including travel time - and they spent two of those days carrying out the tasks that were set before returning for the awards ceremony.

TE: How did it feel to win?

DD: The team were all ecstatic at the win! It was a testament to their hard work and time spent learning their trade, so to hear that their efforts in the competition resulted in a win was very gratifying.

TE: How do you drum up interest for the Skills Challenge within the company, both upwards (management) and down (to potential contestants)?

DD: As a management team we discuss what skills are required and create a shortlist of individuals that we feel would benefit from the opportunity and experience that the Skills Challenge provides.

TE: Did you know the competitors personally? Is the relationship between you as team leader and them as a team, important when competing?

DD: I have known all the competitors for a number of years while in various roles at Lothian. I've worked closely with them in various depots, which

has allowed me to know the skills they would bring to the team and has helped to build that relationship. The performance and win is down to them, though! It also helps that I started at Lothian as an apprentice myself, so I have an understanding of what it means to be at the beginning of an engineering career, learning as you go.

TE: How do you arrange cover for the workers on the day of the competition? Do you have any tips for other operators about managing that?

DD: Like all bus operators, we work our shifts to ensure we have the required number of people for the vehicle numbers we operate. When we decide to take part in events such as the Skills Challenge, we make some shift adjustments to ensure all the work is still covered, with plenty of notice for everyone involved. It takes time and effort, like everything else, but it's worth it.

TE: Have you used the results of the Skills Challenge in any kind of training or development project after the fact?

DD: We are currently evolving our internal training programme to ensure it meets the standards required as we move towards the introduction of more zero-emission vehicles. The Skills Challenge will likely form part of this training programme for some individuals within our team and, in particular, our apprentices.

TE: Are you planning to enter again this year?

DD: We will likely be re-entering this year. Watch this space! **TE**

