

# THE PIT LANE

The ongoing rise in vehicles' first-time pass rate at MOT is a welcome development. Ian Norwell goes into the pit lane to establish how transport managers can maintain the momentum - and their good repute

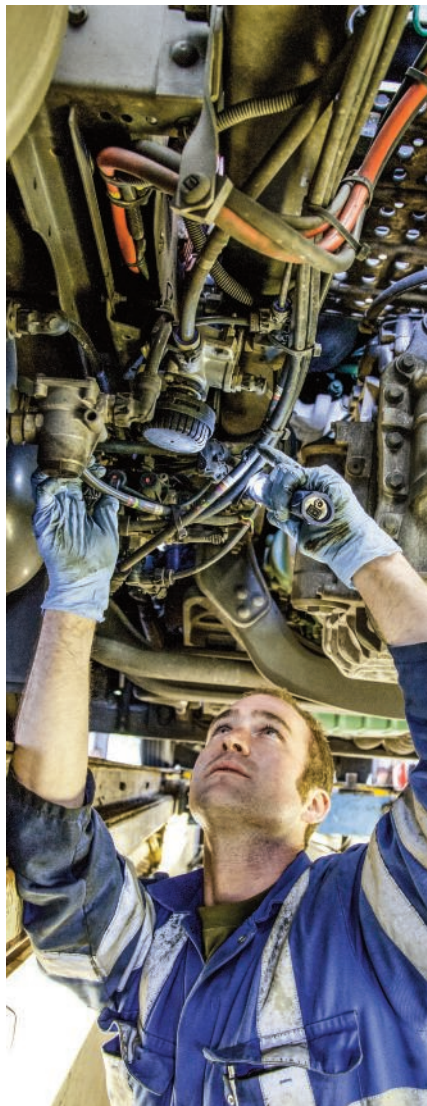
**A**s a barometer of the well-being of the nation's trucks, MOTs have come into sharp focus in the last decade. And while the broad picture is now encouraging for HGVs - rather less so for vans - the pressure continues from all sides to improve the numbers.

Why? Because operators watching their OCRS (operator compliance risk score) need clean sheets to impress the DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency). So franchised dealers and independent workshops increasingly see pass rates as business critical.

## ROADWORTHINESS

But it wasn't always like that. DAF service director John McMenamin recalls senior traffic commissioner Beverley Bell in particular berating the industry for its underperformance, especially in terms of its MOT statistics. For him and others, one of the challenges became shedding any image that the industry might be in truck repairs primarily to make money - as opposed to ensuring roadworthiness, quality and safety.

McMenamin remembers arranging a tour of DAF's Leyland plant. "We wanted Mrs Bell to see the quality standards that imbued our truck manufacture, as well as the efforts of



our network to raise standards," he states. For him, that was the start of a programme of change. With a backdrop of inadequate first-time pass rates, a CV aftermarket group was set up under the aegis of the SMMT (Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders) and Brian Hanham, then customer services director at DAF.

This drew manufacturers together to set up a system where vehicle preparers would be identified and poor performers revealed. That introduced accountability and raised standards, effectively by making MOT pass rates the pre-eminent measure of dealer performance.

## MEDIOCRE PERFORMANCE

So what happened? Well, the days of moaning about high failure rates due only to headlight aim are well and truly over, and the industry is generally regarded as having come a long way. "When I think back to just five years ago, average first-time pass rates across franchised and non-franchised repairers were in the mid-70s per cent, with mid-80s considered very good indeed," recalls McMenamin.

"Those numbers today would now be seen as a spectacular failure." Indeed so, and following the introduction of OCRS, even 85% was suddenly seen as mediocre.

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Getting the right equipment also contributed to transforming the numbers. Sam Whittaker, customer services director for Mercedes-Benz trucks in the UK, believes that was obvious. "We bought the same equipment as the local testing station, and first-time pass rates instantly lifted." He also confirms that it's been Mercedes' policy for over three years to automatically include an ATF

easiest way to give a customer away to a competitor." And that commercial imperative - coupled with a quality ethos, decent test equipment and skilled technicians to use it - has ultimately been instrumental in driving up standards.

What about that training? DAF's McMenamin concedes that takes time and money. "We saw irtec accreditation as a vital step to getting standards up,

figure that frustrates many in the industry, including SMMT commercial vehicle affairs manager Nigel Base. "To say vans are out of the quality loop is an understatement," he says, adding that the problem is deep-seated in the retail sector, which accounts for roughly half of the van market. "This market is unregulated, and it's the worst place to have a three-year threshold before MOTs apply," insists Base. "That needs to go."

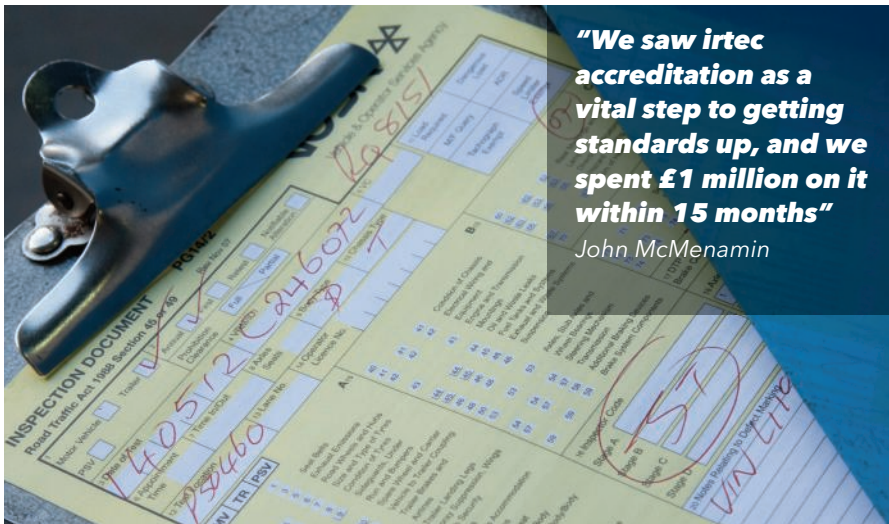
That said, for the other half - which comprises large professional fleets (often, with trucks as well) and franchised truck networks with vans in their portfolio, such as Iveco, Mercedes-Benz and Renault - it's a much better picture. Professional standards are as high here as anywhere.

As Mercedes' Whittaker says: "We have an increasing number of customers who view first-time pass rates as a vital sign of their health and safety. DPD has 1,000 vans and 100 trucks, and they are one of our most loyal and challenging customers. They have a strong image and they push us hard to maintain it, expecting a 100% pass rate."

#### POWER OF R&M

So where does all this leave fleet engineers? If they run their own workshops, they need to shoot for the same first-time pass rates as the franchised networks. That means investing in the right equipment (taking their cue from the test stations), and training technicians long after their apprenticeships.

That said, as the complexity of vehicles increases, more are giving up the unequal struggle and concentrating on service delivery. With a two-year R&M contract on a 6x2 tractor adding around £1,500 to a sale, I can see why so many go for it. [IE](#)



**"We saw irtec accreditation as a vital step to getting standards up, and we spent £1 million on it within 15 months"**

John McMenamin

(authorised testing facility) lane in new franchised sites. As a result, this OEM's network now regards a 95% first-time pass rate as the starting point.

But what about other drivers for improvement? In setting up the ATF (authorised testing facility) approach, DVSA chief executive Alastair Peoples started a long, shrewd game that has since worked better than probably even he expected. Incoming trucks to a test lane at a ministry station are commercially uninteresting, but those turning a wheel into an ATF at a dealer represent potential customers for new truck sales and service.

As Alan Coppin, brand service director at Iveco, puts it: "If you are not running an ATF, your customers are going elsewhere for their MOTs. If it's another franchised dealer, that's the

and we spent £1 million on it within 15 months," he explains. But, as a result, all 1,550 technicians in its network are now accredited. Meanwhile, Coppin is going the IMI route and says Iveco will be 70% there by year end.

Just as with telematics, when suddenly there was no hiding place for drivers, so it is now with technicians. And he adds: "Each technician gets a PIN, and their rates are easily examined. We can identify retraining needs and address them swiftly." But how the dealer networks are going about training is not what matters here: it's the fact that they're all on the case.

Well, almost all. As the gw goes down below 3.5 tonnes, the tale of MOT first-time pass rates becomes far less worthy, with figures currently languishing at around 50%. That's a