



A participant of the IMI's SMM Auto competition conducting checks to ensure the vehicle is in tip-top shape

Forging the future of the AUTOMOTIVE industry

The Institute of the Motor Industry is on a mission to be recognised as an authority in the retail sector

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While touring the grounds of the Automechanika exhibition, Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) head of business development Steve Scofield and IMI international business development manager Herbert Lonsdale strolled purposefully through the rows of exhibits. Automechanika Kuala Lumpur is in its ninth year featuring exhibitors from the automobile aftermar-

ket in Asean. This year there were about 230 exhibitors from 18 countries occupying about 7,500 sq m within four spacious halls in Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC).

Scofield and Lonsdale were in Malaysia to share the UK-based IMI's expansion vision with its partners here. Their visit comes on the heels of IMI's announcement in January of its intention to accelerate its progress within Malaysia as part its larger plan to head into new nations within the region. Malaysia has been IMI's most established base outside of the UK in the last decade. Chief executive Steve Nash released a statement that the current plan is "to leverage the same blueprint to expand our presence in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and China as well as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates".

History of IMI

The Institute of the Motor Industry is a "professional association for individuals working in the retail automotive industry". As an institution that has been around since the 1920s (back then, it was known as Motor Trades Association), it was an idea that came out over a dinner con-

versation on ways members of the retail motor industry can better serve their clientele. It was not long before the institute gained a foothold over the UK, spreading all the way from London to Yorkshire and Scotland.

After the depression and war, the institution changed its name to its current name in 1945. One decade hence, it was formally recognised and granted the coat of arms by the College of Heralds. According to IMI, the IMI coat of arms, or crest forms an "integral part of the overall identity" of IMI and appears on certificates awarded by IMI Awards. It is used as the authoritative stamp or signature of IMI.

IMI Now

The more than 90-year-old professional body has grown beyond a membership association to offer its own qualifications and accreditations. IMI's reach has extended beyond the UK to 13 other countries. With about 560 training providers worldwide, more than 250 technical and non-technical qualifications and accreditations are extended to more than 110,000 learners every year.

The association has identified the challenges the sec-

“We estimate that a trained technician is about 300% more productive and if you translate that to a bottom line number, that's very significant.”

— Herbert Lonsdale



PHOTO BY ANWAR FAUZ



The Automechanika Kuala Lumpur (AMKL) Mechanics Challenge tests mechanics across Malaysia employed by independent workshops to demonstrate their automotive knowledge



tor faces such as retaining talent, equipping talents with relevant skills, ensuring managers are skilled enough as leaders to drive change, and increasing consumer confidence in the sector players' customer service. It aims to rectify these issues by coming up with sector standardisations through its own professional development courses and industry researches as well as management competency frameworks, to name a few solutions.

An example of this is the IMI accreditation. According to the institution the IMI Accreditation is a practical, non-academic way to demonstrate individual capability, providing independent proof of current competence, knowledge and skills. This accreditation encompasses 17 automotive disciplines, from light vehicle inspection to sales. An individual who passed both knowledge and skills-based assessments will attain IMI accreditation that will last for three years. For the individual to remain on the IMI Professional Register, the person must re-accredit the status of current competence.

IMI in Malaysia

"We started researching Malaysia at the request of certain partners here and we've been working with the Malaysian government for some time. We started research in 2003 and we entered in 2005 and what we've seen in that time, we've gained many valuable partners and we've grown over time," says Scofield.

With the institution's more than decade-long presence in Malaysia, the non-profit body has been working closely with the local automotive industry especially with its players to set up IMI-approved centres capable of delivering its qualifications. This comes in light of the push for more automotive professionals to be knowledgeable in handling newer vehicles like electric and hybrid models. Scofield shares that IMI engages "as many people as we can so we can build the standards and the qualifications with the sector". Lonsdale adds that what with "the number of electronic control units (ECUs) in a modern motorcar is more than the Apollo spaceship, the concern is about ensuring that people have the skills to maintain the service of the motor vehicle".

IMI has 24 approved centres in Malaysia consisting of automotive companies such as Peugeot distributor, Nasim Sdn Bhd and community colleges such as Kepala Batas Community College and The Otomotif College (TOC). This follows an MoU with Malaysia's Ministry of Education that was inked last year to provide training support across a network of community colleges with the aim of enhancing the skills of 1,000 automotive training candidates with a specific focus on electric and hybrid vehicles. There are also plans to hold seminars as well as to set up an online forum to engage industry players in the future.

"We have a blend of offerings that fits all scenarios. Say, a young person who knows nothing about the sector, that's where the qualifications will fit. One of the challenges in the automotive sector is staying up-to-date so

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even a mature technician has got a real challenge to stay up-to-date with the technology. That's even more of a challenge when you start working in the independent sector like the smaller employers because they haven't access to the training provided by the bigger manufacturers so what we have developed for those mature people is an accreditation. That drives continual professional development (CPD) that keeps them engaged in training which is critical to the business while it keeps our training partner engaged because all too often, once technicians have gone through their training, they don't go back to the centre so we've got certain interventions that unpicks some of those problems. Accreditation is on a three year cycle, if they re-accredit, they lose that certification," says Scofield.

Fighting for the future of the automotive sector

According to Scofield, while IMI finds the industry in mature markets train technicians fairly well, it is not often the case in emerging markets. "We find the same themes running throughout the globe where there are always technical gaps because technology moves so fast but there is an even bigger gap around management capabilities and retaining sales people in the sector. We often lead with the technical qualifications in the market and we have done so in Malaysia and our ambition is to work on the soft skills as well so we can improve the capability of leadership and customer service."

Lonsdale adds that for a growing market like Malaysia, where the automotive economy is expected to grow "somewhere from 3.4% to 10% by 2020", the question is about training enough qualified technicians to be able to service that growth and maintaining the service quality of technical courses. "Return on investment (ROI) is very interesting in the market where some of the employers are facing the business challenges selling cars and then maintaining the after-sales services. It's always that conflict of if I train my people wouldn't they just go and work somewhere else but the thing is you need to

train people otherwise your business will suffer. And if you don't train and they stay, how bad will that be? So, you need to be able to train and look after them. We estimate that a trained technician is about 300% more productive and if you translate that to a bottom line number, that's very significant."



IMI already has a vast amount of experience training young people in the UK