



Left to right: Christian Dülken, Mario Gomez Bastida, Ralf Schiller and Timo Niemann

Life as world champions

In May 2017, life changed at the Truck Center Isernhagen in Germany when a team of their technicians won Renault Trucks' RTEC competition. Now customers view them in a new way.

TEXT ROB HYDE AND MARIA SKÖLD PHOTO MARTIN BÜHLER



Christian Dülken works at Truck Center Isernhagen, which is wholly-owned by the Volvo Group.

THE LOCAL RADIO is playing pop music at low volume as truck technicians are quietly working away on everything from a local ambulance to a supermarket delivery truck. Sparks fly as some workers weld a chassis, while others whistle as they tighten hub bolts and nuts. This is the workplace of Ralf Schiller, Christian Dülken, Timo Niemann and Mario Gomez Bastida, who are the best Renault Trucks technicians in the world. Or, at least, the winners of Renault Trucks' Road to Excellence Competition, RTEC, which was held in May 2017.

"We never expected to get to the finals in Lyon," says the team foreman, Timo Niemann.

Competing in the finals involved a series of demanding 45-minute problem-solving tasks, everything from gearboxes to oil pressure problems. "We struggled with the first task, but then we worked out who had the best skills for each task and this strategy worked perfectly."

The first RTEC competition was held in 2015 with a limited number of countries participating. In 2017, there was a scale-up with candidates from 49 countries taking part in the competition, bringing the number of participants up to 5,285. After two rounds of theoretical tests, the best 24 teams met in the finals.

Mario Gomez Bastida

MECHATRONICS TECHNICIAN

"I'm from Rioja in Spain where unemployment is high, so I jumped at the chance when I saw that there were training programmes offered in Germany. That is how I came here. Renault Trucks really helped me by giving me German lessons. I started with nothing. Now, after three years, I'm still far from perfect but I can talk about specific technical problems and the tools required. I'm grateful for this experience. It's all been fantastic."

Since winning RTEC, the team members have noticed a fundamental change in their relations with customers. Ralf Schiller says that, although customers' fundamental needs have not changed, their view of the team certainly has.

"The most common customer question remains 'when will the truck be ready?'. This makes sense, time is money, so there's nothing new there. But what is different is that we now have customers coming exclusively to us because they've heard that we won the competition, or other Renault Trucks workshops have even referred them to us."

HE POINTS OUT that Renault Trucks' workshops already distinguish themselves from their competitors on a technical level.

"For example, others just replace gearboxes, whereas we repair them," says Ralf Schiller, proudly pointing at the gearbox components on his workbench. "But, on a customer service level, our team can now also offer something better. We can draw on what RTEC taught us and look



for creative solutions to difficult problems.”

It is hard to put your finger on the secret to the winning dynamics of this four-strong dream team. They have worked closely together for a long time. Ralf Schiller and Timo Niemann, for example, were both once supervisor to Christian Dülken and Mario Gomez Bastida.

But, for the team it is much more than that – it is about respect, trust and genuine affection. According to Christian Dülken, a key element of the team’s success is that they still enjoy working together and do not let either hierarchy or their competition victory change this.

“We treat each other equally and we’re also totally down to earth. At the award ceremony, for example, even when ushers made us sit at the VIP table and tried to make us wear ties, it never occurred to us that we were just about to receive a prize.

We were even using our phones to video the teams in 2nd and 3rd place, until they said ‘And the winning team is Hannover’. We were all shocked – but thrilled!” ©

SERVICE COMPETITIONS

- ▶ Road to Excellence Championship is Renault Trucks’ competition for workshop and dealership staff.
- ▶ Similar events are hosted by other truck brands in the Volvo Group: Gemba Challenge is open to workshop staff working with UD Trucks, while Mack Masters is the equivalent for Mack Trucks.
- ▶ Volvo Trucks’ VISTA was founded already in 1957 and is the world’s biggest competition of its kind.

5 QUESTIONS TO...

... **Laurent Fragnaud**, Manager Technical Training, Renault Trucks



Why has Renault Trucks launched the RTEC competition?

“It’s a great way to encourage teamwork and competence development! Each team has four members, ideally

one technician, one electronics specialist, one receptionist and one who works in parts. They are all responsible for securing the quality of the service and therefore have to work together.”

How does the competition help you achieve this?

“RTEC 2017 consisted of 70 difficult questions covering seven fields. The stations and questions were designed to increase the participants’ knowledge and enhance the need for collaboration between team members with different areas of expertise.”

Why is competence development so important?

“Our markets do their best to train and develop technicians so that customers get the best help possible from their workshops.”

How are the results used within Renault Trucks?

“The results tell us about where our strengths and weaknesses are. We can see areas in need of improvement for central and local organisations.”

What characterised RTEC 2017?

“It was a major event since it involved all 49 countries where Renault Trucks is present and the feedback has been very positive. We tried to focus the competition on specific areas in line with Renault Trucks’ strategy, like used trucks and fuel economy. Now we look forward to RTEC 2019!”