

MOT Update

Testing transformation

With VOSA encouraging independent garages to apply for ATF status – while at the same time needing a second location for its MOT business – Redbourn MOT Centre opted to invest in test lanes that could combine car, van and HGV testing. PMM went along to take a look.

A village transport café, which later became a dairy, might not seem the most obvious place to site an MOT and HGV test centre but Richard Smith would often drive past the site, where Redbourn MOT Centre is now operating, and could see the potential.

The building was the right height and width, there was hard standing front and rear for parking as well as ample space for drive-through testing. It is in a great strategic location, a couple of miles from Junction 9 of the M1, on a busy roundabout frequently used by drivers from Dunstable, Hemel Hempstead, Luton and St Albans, as well as nearby Harpenden, where Richard lives with his family.

He has been in the transport business for most of his working life. He was a partner in local transport company Royton Express, which began MOT testing when class VII vehicles moved from VOSA testing into the private MOT test scheme. Once the dairy site came up for sale, Richard decided it would be the perfect opportunity to open a second test centre closer to home.

A long time coming

It has taken 18 months of planning and weekend working to transform the

Redbourn site into an MOT centre with first-class facilities. Much of the work has been undertaken in the evenings and at weekends by Richard, wife Jackie and mostly his son Neal (also a trained car and HGV mechanic) – both partners in the new venture.

Richard says: "We were determined not to compromise on quality. Neal did a lot of the site preparation and has a meticulous eye for detail. He is responsible for a lot of the bespoke fabrication in the testing centre, from mezzanine flooring to pit bridges and protective hand rails."

Redbourn MOT Centre can test Class IV, V, VII vehicles and HGVs, all in the same lane, and there is potential for a third lane to include motorbike testing. "It is unusual for an independent test centre to combine car and van testing with HGVs," acknowledges Richard.

"However, we had to start from scratch when installing the pits and test equipment and with VOSA closing more of its own test stations, it made good business sense to ensure we are capable of HGV testing."

VOSA has approved Redbourn as an HGV Authorised Test Facility but Richard is cautious about predicting how that side of the business will develop, mainly because of the way HGV testing is organised.



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Unusually the business focuses completely on testing, with no repair facilities. "We built our reputation with the slogan: 'No repairs, just a fair test,' and people trust us because we are not trying to sell tyres or create unnecessary work to gain extra business."

Fast testing

Richard plans to test large numbers of cars, vans and motorhomes so for this reason the site is designed for fast, efficient testing. Pits were chosen instead of ramps, with volume and variation in sizes of vehicle in mind. Raising and lowering of vehicles also takes up valuable time and a malfunction of equipment can cause lane congestion plus downtime. Both pits at Redbourn are 16.5 metres in length.

Bringing in the specialists

Richard's next step was to source the appropriate equipment, so for this he called upon the services of Buckingham-based specialist VL Test Systems, who supplied him with the test equipment. Additionally, the pits were supplied and installed by Premier Pits.

There are jack housings at each end of the pit to store the heavy and light air-operated lifting equipment and room at one end of each pit to house VLT's equipment that drives the play detectors, leaving more room in the test lanes. The connecting tunnels between each pit are two metres high, allowing plenty of room for movement of staff. There are also tool boards and test equipment at each end of the pit.

"I had worked with VL Test Systems before and found the equipment to be very reliable and the aftersales service second-to-none. At our Redbourn facility, the company has also given us invaluable advice on achieving our aims as well as guiding us through the key steps to gaining ATF status," says Richard.

Brian Beacon of VL Test Systems found working with Richard and Neal equally rewarding, stating: "It has been an interesting project following the conversion of the building. Everything has been done to the highest standard and a great deal of planning had gone into ensuring the right equipment was chosen and that the layout would

maximise the throughput and efficiency of the operation. The result is a testing station that is not only practical and fit for purpose but modern and eye catching as well."

Family friendly

It's not just the testing area that is state-of-the-art at Redbourn – the customer reception is smart and welcoming, with disabled and baby-changing facilities available. Additionally there is a glass-walled viewing area, complete drinks facilities, TV and toys for children.

PMM can certainly vouch for the warm welcome and the facilities really do convey a sense that this is an efficiently-run business with the interests of customers at its heart, whether they are car or van owners, or running HGVs.

MORE INFORMATION

To request a leaflet or brochure offering more details about the range of equipment and services available from VL Test Systems circle 073

