

# On the double

HRVS Group picked up Sales Team of the Year and Aftersales, Workshop and Maintenance Provider of the Year

By **Christopher Walton**

THERE IS PROBABLY some old business idiom that the salesman sells the first truck, and the workshop sells the second one. Or, something like that. Impressively, HRVS Group has that equation sussed.

Winning Sales Team of the Year and Aftersales, Workshop and Maintenance Provider of the Year at the Commercial Motor Awards last November, HRVS proved that selling and service go hand in hand when it comes to caring for the customer.

“That is something we have lived and died by for the past 10 years,” says HRVS Group operations director Keith Sims (pictured, facing page). “For us the two awards are so intertwined it is exactly the kind of thing we want.”

Servicing what is best described as the north of the Midlands and the southern part of the north of England (Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, South Yorkshire and Lincolnshire) with new and used MANs, HRVS has carved out such a niche for itself that nearly two-thirds of all MAN sales and

rentals in the region come through its seven dealerships.

But there is more to HRVS than just MAN, it is also the largest Isuzu truck dealer in the UK, offering the full

Isuzu pick-up range, and it also specialises in Kässbohrer trailers, Caterpillar plant equipment and LDV vans.

“Traditionally, HRVS was very much an aftersales provider,” says Sims. “In the past six years it has become a sales organisation, with the portfolio of sales activities growing on an annual basis. You can’t have a successful sales prospect without a robust aftersales proposition.

“The industry is getting more and more challenging when it comes to providing a good aftersales solution,” he explains on our visit to the dealer’s Ripley site in Derbyshire. “The main reason for that is the issue that has taken second place to the driver shortage and that is the technician shortage. It is a really bad situation. The best estimate is that we are 4,000 trained technicians short in the UK. So, to maintain and grow the aftersales proposition has become very challenging.”

## Retention issues

What this has meant for HRVS is that it has really had to look at everything, from the apprenticeship programme to what the business does in regards to training and staff retention.

“For us retention has become quite challenging,” Sims says, adding that competition comes from manufacturers offering technicians perks such as company cars. “HRVS spent £317,000 last year on training, which is something we are not anticipating to be any lower this year. It may be greater because we are at the crossroads where we are maintaining electric vehicles – which come with different skills. We’ve gone from mechanical engineers to



## Impressive sales

On the sales side the Commercial Motor Awards judges singled out the impressive take-up of finance and R&M through its sales team, and this year will see more face-to-face interaction with customers.

“We do customer surgeries for our customer base – we did one in Stoke-on-Trent [in January] where we did a round-up of current legislation with speakers from the FTA and other companies in that area. So we were discussing emulators and cheat devices and what is coming up in the world of technologies with vehicles. We feel this engages the customer absolutely perfectly and MAN’s philosophy is customer first.”

Sims says that HRVS has an eye on what impact GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations, which come into force in May 2018) will have on the business, as its marketing has been traditionally email-led.

“Now we are going back to the customer on a one-to-one basis. The customer surgery was so well accepted that we are going to do it throughout the network. For us this incorporates aftersales, but it is also good for our customer base so we can share topical subjects and display our range of vehicles. It is a fantastic time to interact.

“HRVS is all about passion,” Sims stresses, “we are certainly not the biggest but we like to feel that we have delivered a good service”.

Hopefully, HRVS will put that philosophy to the test against the best in the country at the Commercial Motor Awards in 2018.





electrical engineers. The whole model of the aftersales business is being looked at. For a forward-thinking organisation we do not want to be a follower of strategy in the aftersales world – I want to lead and that’s the way we want to keep it.”

### Aftersales commitment

The commitment to aftersales is even felt at the top of the business. Sims explains that everyone in the senior management team at HRVS has come from an operational background. As a result, the team knows what is required as a service provider and as a customer.

“Every person in the business gets five days of training a year. Some get more – master technicians get 25 days’ training a year. We are finding this is needed to maintain the level of technical knowledge required at the pace we are going at,” he says.

“With MAN there is the first electric vehicle coming through, a 26-tonner [revealed at IAA Hanover in 2016, the TGS variant has a weight range from 18 tonnes to 26 tonnes]. This is a challenge we are going to have to take head on, and we already have some knowledge with LDV having the



### Success second time around

• **Shortlisted, but not** victorious, as Franchised Dealer of the Year at the inaugural Commercial Motor Awards in 2016, HRVS more than made up for it in 2017, picking up two awards: Sales Team of the Year; and Aftersales, Workshop and Maintenance Provider of the Year.

• “We went to the first Commercial Motor Awards where we were shortlisted and in year two we were substantially more successful. To win two categories was astounding,” says operations director Keith Sims.

• “The future for us is the Commercial Motor Awards. Although we are aware we can’t win it every year it is certainly something we will always support. The Vox in Birmingham was fantastic. It is a breath of fresh air being outside of London.

• “The quality of people at the Commercial Motor Awards 2017 gave so much credence to the event. Everything was great, the ceremony is not too long, it is set right, is pitched right and is pulling in the right targeted audience. It is a fantastic event and we are pleased to support it. If 2017 is anything to go by it is the go-to event for anybody in our industry.”



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EV80. Everything has different technologies behind it, but there is a level of acceptance,” he adds.

Sims points to a little bit of apprehension in regards to how vehicles are powered, particularly as the electric vehicle is “a quantum change”.

“The internal combustion engine is gone and this is a complete rethink. It has caused apprehension with skilled technicians. A lot of what we are doing is passing these skills on, but reassuring people that there are a number of years where the internal combustion engine is going to be powering vehicles. However, this is adding an extra layer of apprehension to the skills shortage,” he says.



### Tailored solutions

This anxiety clearly hasn’t held the business back. Across the group it offers three twin-lane ATFs, full bodyshop and paint facilities, full tachograph and speed limiter centres and access to more than £2.5m of physical parts stock across the group.

In winning the award the judges particularly liked how HRVS Group had increased the take-up of its in-house maintenance packages considerably in 2016/17, mainly down to tailoring solutions to give customers what they want instead of them having to choose from a generic package. ■

