

Time to make the most of surge in workshop demand

MOT Club managing director Ben Roberts has told *AM* he is "rooting" for franchised car retailers across the UK to deliver aftersales success from September's surge in workshop trade.

And he is confident a client base of more than 1,500 MOT test centres and 4,000 MOT testers – whose training, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) compliance and workflow management needs are all met by his business – are assured of robust foundations on which to build strong performance.

But as service centre workloads peak, the stakes have never been higher for DVSA scrutiny and the possibility of a compliance breach.

Roberts said: "It has felt a bit like the calm before the storm in recent weeks, but the volume is on its way and I'm rooting for our clients to make the most of it."

"This period of the year is a new challenge and is likely to throw up some serious issues for some operators, but I know our clients are as well prepared as they can be."

The MOT Club was founded by Roberts' father, Hugh, in 1999 and later became part of the Motor Trade Technologies group (MTT) when it was acquired by a London-based private equity company in 2005.

Roberts, originally a software developer and founder of the autoVHC, joined MTT as managing director and, in 2017, was part of a management buyout (MBO) which left the

business in the hands of him, his father and "a handful of fellow shareholders".

Based in Weston-super-Mare, the business now employs 33 people, with a team of MOT consultants spread all over the UK.

Software and web design

As well as its MOT compliance, training and support, the MOT Club offers software and web design to the automotive sector.

Roberts said his background in software prompted him to prioritise the creation of user-friendly tools to help dealerships manage their MOT compliance and performance in a straightforward, dashboard-style platform after the MBO.

The results have been impressive, but the system is being consistently evolved by a team of 11 developers nonetheless.

Roberts said: "Our SiteCheck website combined with our MOT compliance audits can provide everything the MOT site manager and group aftersales manage-

ment need to manage MOT compliance.

"The website can also be used to provide the compulsory MOT tester annual training and assessment to testers."

Roberts said the platform also drives cost-savings amounting to several hours a week through efficiencies that might not be otherwise realised.

He said: "As well as recording each tester's training history and exam result, it is a central store for things like MOT equipment calibration and Tester QC records. This makes life so much easier during a DVSA site review when you know everything is in one place."

"SiteCheck provides tools to analyse MOT statistical data, saving the MOT site manager a huge amount of time each month."

"The data recorded on the website also provides management with the reports and dashboards needed to manage MOT compliance across a group."

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BEN ROBERTS, THE MOT CLUB



Specialist training facilities are available such as here in Epsom



"This level of visibility makes decision-making much easier and shows the DVSA that a robust quality system is in place."

The MOT Club currently manages all aspects of MOT compliance and training for five of the AM100's top 10 car retail groups and recently added Pendragon and Hartwell to its list of members.

Acceleration in demand

It has seen an acceleration in demand from franchised car retailers as the importance of aftersales grows – a trend heightened by COVID-19 pandemic, according to Roberts – along with the DVSA's scrutiny of the sector.

Roberts said a September surge of MOT testing, and the accompanying servicing and remedial work that comes with it, has not been the only impact of the DVSA's efforts to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19.

"We're aware that the DVSA have been working very hard on its data while its inspectors were prevented from entering service centres," he said.

"The result is that now, during what will be a new peak for MOT testing across the UK, they know exactly where they need to focus their efforts."

Roberts said a failed inspection could bring a cessation order banning an MOT centre from operating for a month or more, resulting in costs running into the realms of "several thousands of pounds".

He added: "We often have panicked phone calls from non-members, asking for help when the DVSA have stopped them from testing. The reputational and financial cost of this loss of service suddenly becomes apparent."

"The worrying part is that a cessation order can so often result from a simple lack of attention. MOT non-compliance can result from something as simple as correct procedure not being followed or equipment being allowed to fall out of calibration."

DVSA inspectors can attend a test centre for unannounced inspections, mystery shopping exercises or will monitor operations from nearby to ensure compliance.

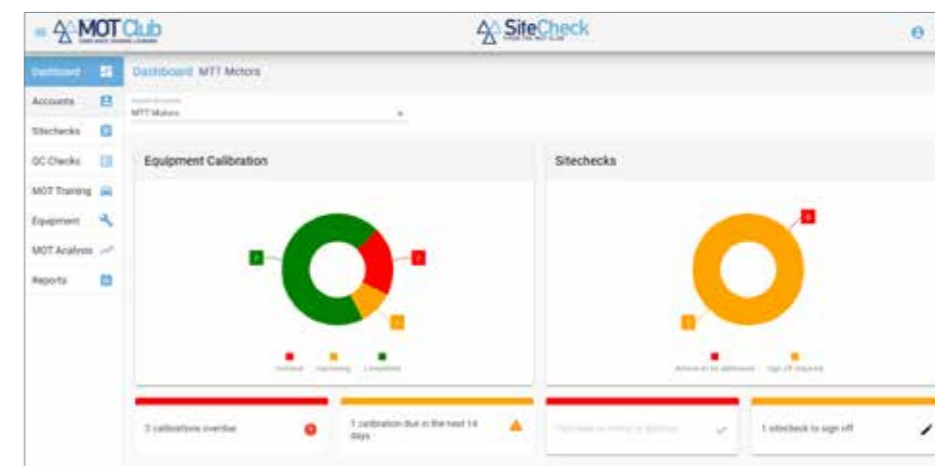
As part of its services, the MOT Club can follow the same process to ensure workshop compliance, visiting on a monthly or quarterly basis as part of its consultancy.

Roberts said franchised car dealerships operating with an "MOT site manager in name only" – a phrase often seen in DVSA reports – were at most risk of enforcement.

He added: "Our MOT consultants will provide the MOT site manager with the skills and knowledge needed for the role."



The MOT Club offers management training at its Weston-super-Mare HQ



Specialist training

Along with a suite of online training modules for MOT testers, the MOT Club has specialist training facilities in Leeds, Hinckley and Epsom. It also offers site manager training at its Weston HQ.

Around 20% of its training provisions also see its training team travelling to members' dealerships and test centres to cater for the needs of multiple technicians on-site.

Roberts said: "Well-trained staff at the coal face will protect the dealer's authority to test. A skilled MOT site manager who understands the quality systems needed and the MOT regulations will drastically reduce the DVSA MOT risk score for the dealer."

"The higher the dealer's risk score, the more frequent the DVSA visits will be."

He added: "Having the technology and the skills the MOT Club can provide on tap

can remove such problems and concerns at a time when workshops need to be focussed on getting back to business."

Roberts added: "Since Covid-19 and the acceleration in demand brought about by the peak for MOT testing, we have seen a shortage in MOT testers in the industry with many customers struggling to recruit qualified staff. This has led to an increase in our customers opting to upskill existing technicians and we have seen an increase in enquiries for our Level 2 Award in MOT Testing course."

"Initially, this posed a problem for us because we could only accommodate reduced numbers on the courses due to social distancing. Fortunately, we managed to open a new training centre in Leeds very quickly this year to help handle the increased demand."

For more information visit: www.themotclub.com
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