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MOT Computerisation roll-out is complete

31 March marked the official end of roll-out of MOT Computerisation.

This means that every MOT test carried out in testing stations in Great Britain is now entered onto VOSA's secure central database. There are over 15 million records on the system already, and this number is growing by an astonishing half a million records every week.

It was only a year ago – 18 April 2005 – that the first testing stations were connected to the live system. The end of roll-out is a huge achievement for everyone involved, in particular the staff at MOT testing stations. NTs have put an enormous amount of time and effort into working with it.

The system – to date

Feedback – from AEs and NTs at our MOT seminars or via MORI research – has shown that over 90 per cent of garages are satisfied with the new system. In addition, more than 80 per cent consider it to be more professional and wouldn't want to go back



to the old manual method. One tester, from Portishead Service Station, said: "I much prefer it to the old handwritten system. I like the fact it is very secure. I particularly like being able to print off a daily report so I can see what's going on!" Another tester, from Hi-Q Tyreservices in Birmingham, commented on the speed of the new system.

As you will have seen from the last issue of *Matters of Testing* or at this year's MOT

seminars, this is only the beginning. We are working on further improvements to the system, both in terms of the service it provides and future upgrades to the hardware. Trials are already being carried out on flat screens, faster printers, broadband connectivity and hand-held devices that let you record the results as you carry out the test.

Looking ahead

We are also looking at the possibility of electronic MOT reminders and internet booking services for motorists. Services such as these can only further enhance the industry's reputation with motorists.

Thank you!

Thank you for all your hard work and support so far. It is important that we do not stand still and I believe we can all look forward to the future development of MOT Computerisation with considerable confidence.

Stephen Tetlow,
Chief Executive, VOSA

Vehicle tax made easy

Over the last few years, we've told you about many of the benefits MOT Computerisation will bring to testing stations and motorists. But there's one important benefit that we haven't heard a lot about up until now – buying your car and bike tax online or over the phone.

Earlier this year DVLA launched their electronic vehicle licensing (EVL) service with the help of supermodel and car fanatic Jodie Kidd. According to new DVLA research, many motorists fail to re-license on time because either they're too busy during the working week, or because they've lost the relevant paperwork. In response to this, DVLA launched a new online and telephone tax disc renewal service.

How the service works

The new service runs alongside the existing Post Office re-licensing facility, meaning that motorists who prefer to use electronic

channels no longer need to find paper copies of their MOT and insurance certificates in order to buy their tax discs.

Instead, they can access the service via the phone or internet, using

- the unique reference number on their V11 reminder; or
- the V5C reference number and VRM.

The system then checks insurance and MOT validity via its external links to the MOT and insurance databases. A tax disc is then dispatched within three to five working days.

It's quick and easy!

The service takes less than five minutes to complete and can be used automatically by owners of newer vehicles. Those with cars or bikes over three years old will need a computerised MOT certificate, which is now available from all testing stations in the UK. HGV and PSV customers can also use the service.



DVLA's new postcard: Jodie Kidd advertising the electronic vehicle licensing service

MOT Computerisation is obviously an important part of the EVL system as it enables DVLA's computers to check that vehicles over three years old have a valid MOT before they issue a new tax disc.

To use the new service, simply log on to www.direct.gov.uk/taxdisc or call **0870 850 4444**.

VOSA

Vehicle & Operator Services Agency

From the team

Welcome to *Matters of Testing* 31

There's so much to tell you in this issue that we've had to crowbar it all in.

Trikes and quads are becoming increasingly popular, and the Enquiry Unit has been receiving more and more calls about them. As many trikes and quads have a motorcycle pedigree, we have decided to expand the motorcycle section to include them – giving you a one-stop dedicated reference point. We have renamed the section *Bikes, trikes and quads* (see page 6) to reflect this.

There's also a two-page special on smoke meters, with advice on how to maintain them and avoid 'error readings'. Turn to pages 4 and 5 to read all about it.

Those of you who have been thinking about joining a VTS council will be interested in our feature with Steve Reynolds from Selby Ford (see page 5).

And if there's something you'd like to share, be it a horror or funny story, or if you just want to know the answer to a question, then get in touch at the usual address. If we're not covering a key area then let us know that too. After all, it's your paper.

On that note I must say a big thank you for all your letters and e-mails – particularly from the jokers among you. Last month's competition certainly brought one or two creative geniuses to light. I have entered you all into the draw for this month's competition (see page 8).

See you all in July.

All the best, Claire



Send your letters to:

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News in brief

Avid *MOT* readers will no doubt recall an article last summer about the National Consumer Council's (NCC's) report on regulation of the car service and repair industry. The report, called *At the crossroads*, challenged the industry to self-regulate for consumers before the NCC asked the Government to impose a consumer protection scheme. One trade body has a code in place and another has one on the way. The British Standards

Institution (BSi) has published a 'publicly available specification' (PAS 80:2005) for automotive garage services (excluding the MOT). Garages whose services meet this specification and are evaluated by BSI will be entitled to display the widely recognised 'kitemark'. We hope to bring you more on BSI's specification in our next edition of *MOT*, and we will be inviting other agencies, including SMMT, VBRA and MVRA, to describe their codes.

Horror story

Several of you have sent in pictures of damaged front suspension springs, so we've chosen two for this issue: a Mondeo and a Mégane. The scenarios here are slightly different, but both could have had the same disastrous result.



Mondeo

Amazingly, neither of the presenters had heard or noticed anything too unusual about their vehicles and one was even using theirs to take the kids to and from school. Imagine what could have happened if either of these tyres had suffered a blowout?

The RfRs

So what are the RfRs? The coil springs are fractured and are not correctly located in their seats – so will fail (2.4C MOI/RfR 1 and 2).

But what about the tyres? They may have damage or excessive wear caused by rubbing the spring. Even if they do not, they may be fouling part of the vehicle (4.1, C2), especially during the lock-to-lock check (2.2.D1a). Don't forget that other components, such as brake hoses, may also be affected.

The NT should also carefully consider whether it is safe to complete the test, especially when testing the braking performance. The tyre has already suffered undue stress and could easily blow out during the brake performance test, causing further unnecessary damage to the vehicle.



Mégane

In both these instances the NTs found similar problems with the other side of the vehicle, but the damage was not so obvious. Several sections of the manual were invoked, so the moral is to take a close look at all components, including those in associated areas. If possible, pull back rubber boots, etc and always use the lead light (or torch).

One final point

Some vehicle owners fit shorter coil springs to lower the vehicle, which in itself is not a problem. But when the vehicle is jacked up with the suspension (front or rear) hanging free, the springs may come out of their seating. The manual is quite specific about this: it is only an RfR if the spring does not relocate itself without assistance when the vehicle is lowered to the ground.

If you still have concerns about this type of spring, then pass and advise. With computerisation, the record will stay on file for the life of the vehicle.

Many thanks to all those who sent in pictures. Please keep them coming.

Are you being served?

You've got a problem; you're frustrated; or maybe you're simply lost. Whichever it is, the MOT Computerisation Service Desk is ready to take your call.

The trained staff will try to deal with your query as quickly and efficiently as possible to minimise any disruption to your work. You can reach them on **0845 071 1973**.

Help speed things up

In any business, time is money and you don't want to waste precious business hours on a phone call. By following these simple pointers, you should be up and running in no time.

- It may seem obvious, but always try to resolve the problem yourself by checking in the user guide.
- If you are unable to solve the problem yourself, then give the service desk a call. Before you do, make sure you have the following information to hand:
 - VTS number;
 - your user ID (you'll find it on your smart card);
 - a description of the fault (including the error message, if displayed); and
 - the incident number (if you are enquiring about an existing incident).

If your problem cannot be resolved immediately, you may be asked some security questions. You gave the answers to these questions when you applied for your smart card.

Having this information readily available will help us to answer your query as quickly as possible and reduce the call waiting times for the next caller.



Improving the service

We are still aiming to reduce call waiting times and length of time it takes us to deal with problems – after all, we want to get you testing again as quickly as possible.

New technology is available that will allow us to take more calls during very busy periods without you hearing a busy tone. We are constantly looking at ways to ensure that during peak hours we have the maximum number of agents available; trained agents from the Siemens helpdesk help us to cover these 'power hours'.

Please remember...

We are dedicated to improving the service we give you and ask that you do all you can to help us to help you. That way we'll always know the answer to the question 'are you being served?'.

Fee collection times are Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5.30 pm, excluding bank holidays. Any transactions made after 3 pm will be dealt with the following day (excluding weekends and bank holidays).

Did you know?

On average, the service desk handles 1,000 calls a day, Monday to Friday. The agents solve 90 per cent of callers' problems during their first contact with the garage. Of the remaining 10 per cent, the more complex problems are passed to the internal technical group for resolution or, in the case of hardware problems, to third parties. Last October, for example, the service desk handled 26,889 calls and achieved a first time fix rate of 96 per cent.

Seminars come to a close

After another hectic few months, VOSA's eighth round of seminars has come to an end. Jayne Peel takes a look at this year's hot topics.

What were the seminars about?

This year's seminars covered MOT Computerisation (of course!), as well as other projects, such as IDELSY, a European project to investigate the reliability of interrogating ECUs for test purposes, European on Board Diagnostics (EOBD), automated test lanes (ATLs), retest procedures and headlamp aim.

We also gave some feedback on the success of the VTS councils in making positive changes to the VTS scheme, and we completed the seminars with a look at the latest MORI surveys.

Your questions

The question and answer sessions were the favourite part of the night for our 'top table' team, and you didn't fail to give us some very probing and thought-provoking questions to answer or take away for further discussion. Well done to those of you who asked a question!

Invaluable feedback

We have enjoyed meeting so many of you during the last three months. The feedback you have given us, particularly on MOT Computerisation, will prove invaluable when we carry out the post-implementation review later in the year.

If you didn't get a chance to ask your question, e-mail it to us at mattersoftesting@vosa.gov.uk and we'll be happy to answer it.



Diesel smoke meters: are

Until recently, smoke meters hadn't changed since their introduction in the early 90s. But vehicle technology has moved on considerably in that time, resulting in cleaner vehicles. John Fitch finds out more.

Why do we need new smoke meters?

The original meters were tested with the vehicles that were available at the time. Most of them emitted much higher levels of smoke, so very little work was done to ensure the meters read the same with lower smoke levels.

The new, more accurate, smoke meter

The new specification requires a much closer correlation between meters, which is necessary to maintain consistency between garages. It also requires smoke meters to be more accurate – and the allowable zero drift parameters have been reduced. This has led to certain garages finding problems with the new-style meters, including zero drift errors or actually getting a vehicle to register smoke.

The possible problems do not necessarily mean that the new meter is at fault. However, you may have to disallow certain tests as a result of the new accuracy requirements.

What does this mean for you, the MOT tester?

In theory, nothing should really change, although Fast Pass should make things quicker and smoke readings may be slightly lower. However, in practice there are a number of minor problems – see below.

Possible problems

High zero drifts

High zero drifts seem to cause certain meters to void the test. To avoid this, it is essential to follow closely the guidelines laid down in the *MOT Inspection Manual*.

The test must be carried out when the engine is at full operating temperature. Leaving the vehicle idling for half an hour before the test will warm it up, but it is important to pre-condition it to clear any residue from the exhaust system before connecting the smoke meter.

Nowadays it is not only necessary to test the proper performance of the smoke meter, but also to save time on the duration of the test.

All new-style smoke meters have a Fast Pass option built in – so remember that failing to perform the pre-conditioning almost certainly means that the Fast Pass result will not occur. Even the cleanest of vehicles has a build-up of smoke and particles in the exhaust pipe that will get blown out at the first acceleration. This is done without the smoke meter attached.

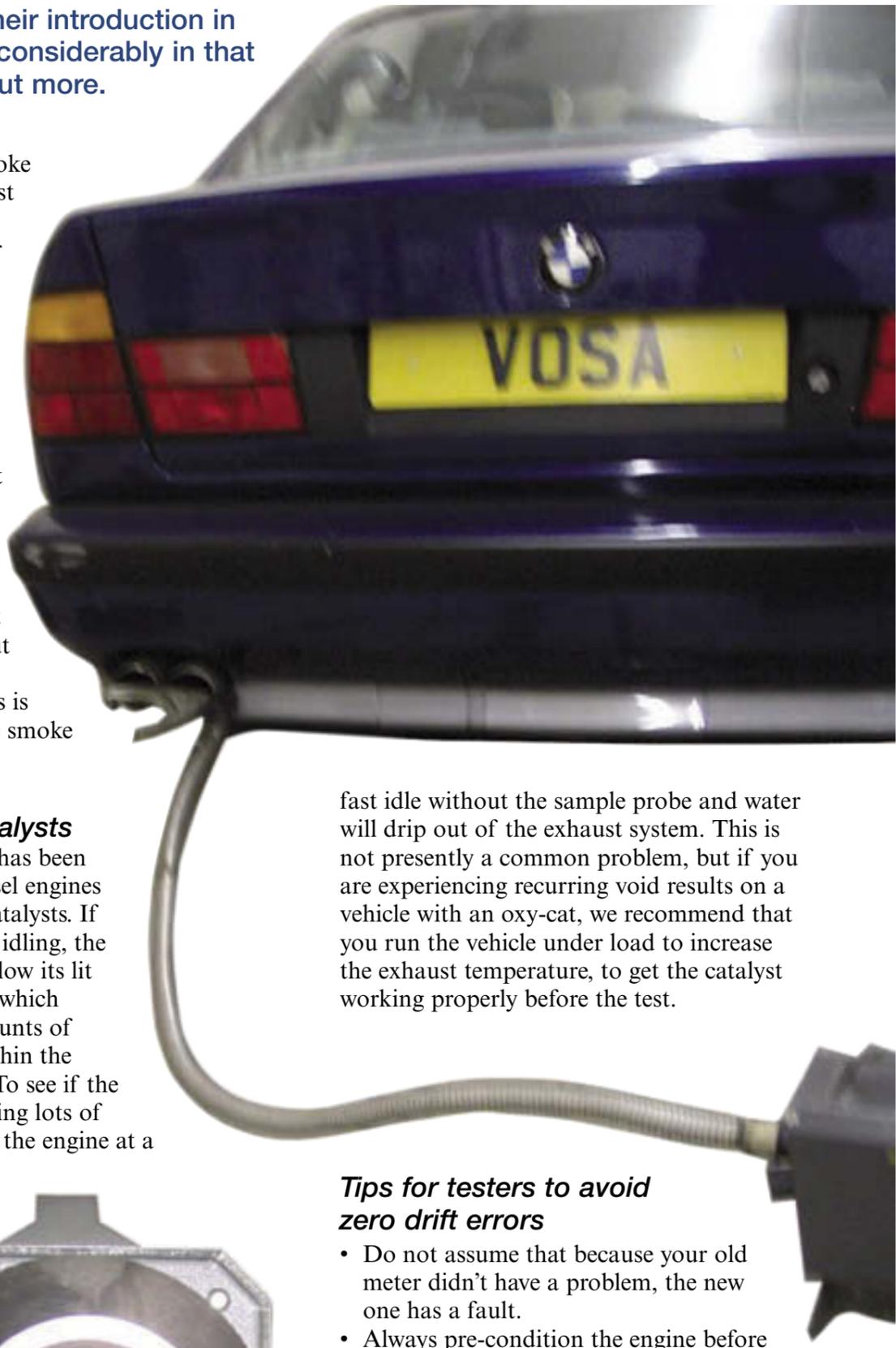
Oxidation catalysts

A separate issue has been identified on diesel engines with oxidation catalysts. If the vehicle is left idling, the catalyst drops below its lit off temperature, which causes large amounts of condensation within the exhaust system. To see if the vehicle is producing lots of water, simply rev the engine at a

fast idle without the sample probe and water will drip out of the exhaust system. This is not presently a common problem, but if you are experiencing recurring void results on a vehicle with an oxy-cat, we recommend that you run the vehicle under load to increase the exhaust temperature, to get the catalyst working properly before the test.

Tips for testers to avoid zero drift errors

- Do not assume that because your old meter didn't have a problem, the new one has a fault.
- Always pre-condition the engine before performing a test. Make sure it is warm and purge the vehicle for 30 seconds at half throttle to clear any water and large soot particles from the exhaust before connecting to the smoke meter.
- If you get soot (or water) on the lenses, clean the sample tube of the smoke meter at the same time as the lenses. If it's possible, and safe to do so, blast the sample probe with compressed air. A particularly dirty vehicle, or one with high levels of condensation in the exhaust, can leave deposits in the smoke meter, which can recur on the next test or even the next vehicle.
- If the vehicle has a diesel oxy-cat fitted and the first test produces a void result, it probably means that the catalyst has



you having problems?

dropped below its operating temperature and is producing water instead of steam. Warm the vehicle up with load applied (ideally on-road) and then re-test, making sure the smoke meter lenses have been cleaned after the void test.

If none of the above solves the problem, call the manufacturer for assistance.

The meter didn't register an acceleration

The other issue with the new specification meters is that they have to measure a smoke pulse. In the old days the meter only had to measure for a few seconds while the accelerator was depressed. If the tester did not press the pedal, a 0.00 result was invariably returned. This was clearly not a valid test, and as such would have been repeated by the MOT tester.

Vehicle technology has moved so fast that there are now vehicles that produce no visible smoke. So to ensure that the test is properly carried out, meter manufacturers have included a second 'trigger', to test that acceleration has been conducted. In most cases this is temperature or pressure, and it works in the background, so the tester will not know it is happening. When the result is issued, it is certain that acceleration was conducted.

However, in very rare cases, the inbuilt triggers do not work and RPM must be set up to register the acceleration. If your meter tells you it cannot see a smoke pulse, please use the RPM options available on virtually all of the current smoke meters.



A date for your diaries

Remember, all VTSs are required to have the new specified diesel smoke meters from 1 January 2009 (see SN6-2003).

Talk back

Over the last year we have been developing VTS councils and encouraging you all to get involved. We now have more than 30 members across the country and are always keen to hear your views.

Matters of Testing caught up with Steve Reynolds, from Selby Ford in the North East, to find out how he got onto his local council and how he's finding the council meetings. "There was an item in *Matters of Testing* inviting anyone interested in joining to contact VOSA," Steve explains. "Richard Dixon sent out invitations and meetings were held around the country. That's how the various regional groups were established."

Feedback

Feedback is useful for VOSA, and Steve thinks it's worthwhile for council members too: "I know VOSA consults various organisations but it's hard to beat grassroots feedback. The council has discussed a wide range of topics, including automated test lanes, computerisation (naturally), problems encountered in testing vehicles with undertrays, how often we come across insecure batteries and the problems of recruiting apprentices, mechanics and testers. But the agenda is very flexible and the staff from VOSA have been willing to listen, even though they're tied by legislation, as we all are."

"If VOSA gets feedback on insecure batteries, for example, and it turns out a lot of testers are coming across this problem, VOSA can look into whether or not it should be included in the MOT," says Steve. "Undertrays can make testing difficult and it's been interesting to find out where VOSA is coming from on this."

Recruitment issues

So does Steve think we need to worry about recruitment? "It's a big problem in the industry," he agrees. "Everyone you talk to seems to have the same problem. Mechanics are hard to find and youngsters don't want to come into the business. It strikes me they'd rather be at college than get their hands dirty doing spanner work. And vehicles are getting more and more complex and reliant on electronics. You just wonder if there will be an even bigger shortage of technicians and testers in years to come."

Tips for making testers' jobs easier

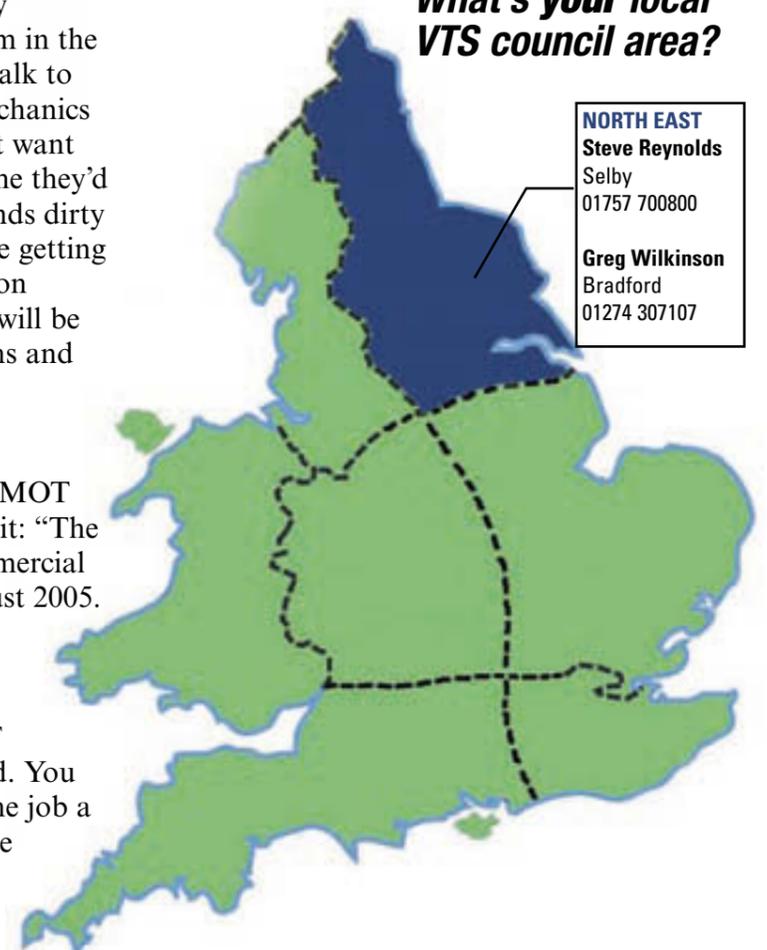
Steve has just installed a new class 7 MOT bay at Selby Ford. He's pleased with it: "The MOT bay is part of a new light commercial vehicle workshop we opened in August 2005. It will take a little while to get to full capacity, but it's progressing well."

And of the lights built into the MOT platform, he says: "They're very good. You still need hand lamps, but it makes the job a lot easier with the extra light from the fluorescent tubes."

How to get your views across

Steve is happy to take calls from any VTS council member. You can reach him on 01757 700800. "The idea of the council is for VOSA to get a wide feedback via its members", says Steve. "But of course, AEs and testers are also encouraged to write to *Matters of Testing* or VOSA's HQ at Bristol."

What's your local VTS council area?



BIKES, trikes and quads



International motorcycle testing

Those of you who attended last year's MOT seminars will remember a speaker talking about the European Roadworthiness Directive (96/96/EEC).

This Directive determines the scope of statutory vehicle inspection for the whole European Union and is the minimum standard that is required under EU law. In Britain the term used to describe the annual test is widely known as 'MOT'. Internationally this is known as the 'Periodic Test Inspection' or PTI for short.

Testing two- and three-wheelers

Believe it or not, the Roadworthiness Directive has never covered two- and three-wheeled vehicles and some member states do not test these vehicles!

Within CITA (the international vehicle technical inspection committee), attention is now turning to these types of vehicles. One of the working groups (WG6) has been tasked with formulating a new Recommendation that could be adopted by



any organisation conducting annual tests of two- and three-wheelers. Because VOSA has extensive experience of testing bikes and trikes, we have been asked to produce a first draft for discussion. Time is tight but we hope to have an agreed Recommendation to put before members at the CITA conference in Hanoi in October this year.

Experience counts

In Britain we have been testing these vehicles for over 40 years – and there aren't many member states that can match or exceed that experience. We aim to use this experience

to influence the adoption of a new Recommendation – one that has the approval and agreement of the whole testing community, from those just introducing two- and three-wheeled testing to those who are a little more practised.

It's difficult to imagine, but the test you're doing today, in Great Britain, on that sports tourer, moped or trike may well set the international benchmark for others to follow in the future!

Testing narrow track vehicles

Narrow track vehicles, particularly quadricycles and tricycles, are becoming ever more popular and are the subject of an increasing number of calls to our Enquiry Unit. These vehicles may be Class 3 or 4, but because they don't always fit safely on the approved pit or hoist, Special Notice 2/2003 made provision to test these vehicles using other suitable equipment.

Despite this provision, *Matters of Testing* is aware that some testing stations are simply refusing to test these vehicles. This can cause problems for the presenter in obtaining a test certificate, and may result in them having to travel many miles on a vehicle that is not particularly suitable for anything other than local use. It may also be preventing you from gaining a new source of customers!

Reasons for refusal

Clearly some testing stations will not be able to test these vehicle types due to the layout of their test facility, i.e. the headlamp aim standing area is on the hoist or straddling the pit. If this is the case, then refusing to test is justifiable.

Many narrow track vehicles cannot be roller brake tested because they have a fixed drive axle; therefore you are required to carry out a decelerometer test. This is normally straightforward, but on some of these

vehicles the larger type decelerometers cannot be safely carried. In these cases you would have to refuse to test.

Matters of Testing hopes to bring you more on the subject of attaching decelerometers in the next issue.

Decelerometers

If you are in an area where narrow track vehicles are common and your headlamp aim facility allows the test to be properly conducted, it may be worth investing in one of the modern electronic decelerometers. They are not particularly expensive and can be fixed to almost any vehicle.

The list of acceptable equipment can be found at: www.transportoffice.gov.uk/motgaragesandtesters/applyingtobeanmottester/moreinformation/equipmentrequired



Please remember: always take great care when conducting decelerometer tests, especially on the public highway.

Make the most of the opportunity!

It's worth remembering that because quads and trikes are exempt from emissions testing and often do not have seat belts, they are generally easy to test and therefore present a good business opportunity.

LETTERS

Dear *Matters of Testing*

I have a query that I feel is worthy of inclusion on your letters page.

With the growing use of electro hydraulic steering systems on modern vehicles, is the alternator light being on when the engine is running a reason for failure? It could be argued that, in this type of system, the alternator is the power supply (drive unit) for the steering.

However, it can also be argued that even when an alternator light is on, the vehicle's charging system can still be operational, or, that any damage to the associated wiring of the steering system should also be included in reasons for failure.

I eagerly await your reply.

Yours truly,
I N Ainsley

Thank you for your letter – you have raised a valid point, which is worth discussing.

The testing of power assisted steering (PAS) is covered specifically by section 2.3 of the inspection manual. The checks in this section apply to all types of power steering and must be carried out with the engine running. The NT checks for operation by testing the 'feel' at the steering wheel, as well as testing for security and leaks. These checks are supported by checking for any stiffness or tightness during the lock-to-lock check, as stated in



section 2.2 1e. This is why it is important that the NT assesses the steering operation personally, by turning the steering wheel from lock to lock.

So, should we include an inspection of its associated wiring and the alternator light as part of the annual test? You have raised some doubt as to the reliability of the function of the alternator lamp and it may be that the steering assistance is still functioning correctly (whereas an ABS lamp specifically indicates a fault with that system). If this is the case, it could mean that a vehicle component would fail for an unassociated item, and it would be difficult to justify this as a reason for rejection.

It is common for manufacturers to locate these types of assistance under dash panels or other inaccessible places and to route the wires in looms that are usually hidden by protective covers. This, coupled with the fact that no dismantling is allowed during the test, can make it very difficult to identify and assess the appropriate wiring.

We feel that the procedures already detailed in the manual have proved to be effective and reliable when testing all types of PAS. That said, we are aware of the increasing use of electrical assistance for the steering action and other important components, many of which may have a dedicated warning lamp or a fault log within the ECU. VOSA is currently investigating these types of steering by communicating directly with the manufacturers. We are also involved with a European project, known as IDELSY (see page 3), so we will be able to tell you more in future issues of Matters of Testing.

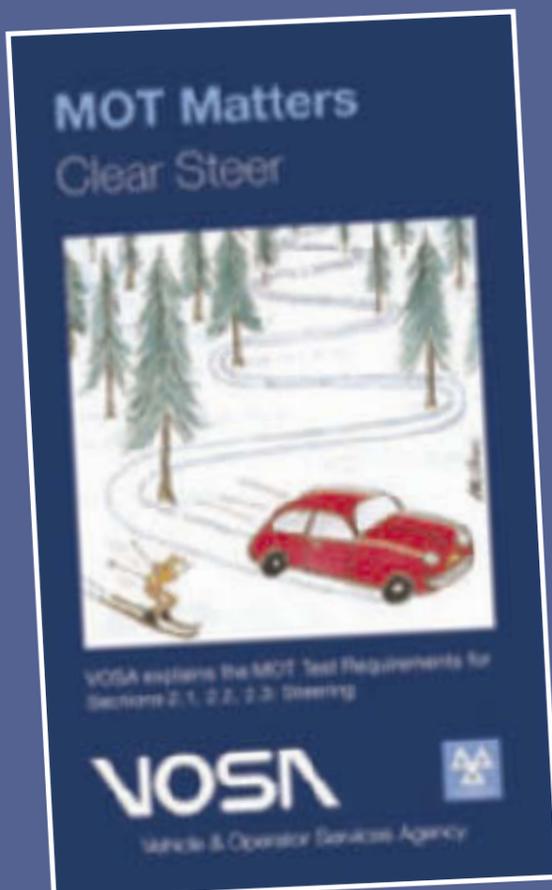
I hope this suitably answers your questions but if you have further comments, please contact me via Matters of Testing.

John M Corcoran
Policy Development Engineer

Our latest DVD

The DVD enclosed with the last issue concentrated on suspension testing. Suspension and steering are closely connected and contained in one section of the manual, so to maintain this continuity we are following up the previous DVD with one about steering systems.

Good old Tom is back with Robert Digings to steer you through the procedures for checking all types of steering systems: rack and pinion, boxes, fork and power assisted.



Special Notices

SN 1 – 2006

This special notice, recently sent to all VTSS, had a print error in Item II, which was about motorcycle tyres. The eagle-eyed among you may have noticed that DOE was used for the American standard. In America the Department of Transport is responsible for setting legislation and the abbreviation should be **DoT**. Please amend your records as soon as possible.

SN 1 – 2006 (all classes)

Item Subject

- 1 Mismatches
- 2 Motorcycle tyres – motocross or similar
- 3 New DSM calibration procedure – update
- 4 Temporary pages – *The MOT testing guide, sixth edition* and *The MOT inspection manual (car and light commercial vehicle testing)*
- 5 Requirement for access to data sources

SN 2 – 2006 (all classes)

Item Subject

- 1 End of roll-out

