

## Test centre opens in SA

One of the established routines of the automotive industry is the practice of training apprentices to the point where they have enough knowledge and experience to pass a trade test. Until now the testing has been done at automotive engineering firms or accredited colleges, however, the first South African automotive machinist and engine fitter trade test centre has been registered in Brakpan, Gauteng, by Hendrik Cronje, a qualified trade test assessor.

Jakkie Olivier, CEO of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), describes the opening of Automotive Specialised Testing Academy (ASTA) as “historic”. He says, “For the first time ever there is a member-owned trade test centre in the country. We are excited about how this will introduce uniformity to the process of assessing apprentices.”



L to R: Assessor, JP Pereira, with owner of the Automotive Specialised Testing Academy (ASTA), Hendrik Cronje, and Sagrys Helberg.

Cronje, who has been working in the field for more than 20 years, said that his main motivation for establishing the trade test centre was to ensure there was uniformity in the work being done by assessors and mentors. He was also concerned about how the industry was coming under threat from overseas imports as some clients preferred to buy cheaper engines rather than pay for the existing ones to be refurbished.

The opening of the centre was not an easy journey for Cronje. The endeavour was an administratively heavy process, which required a lot of paperwork, and came with challenges regarding tax protocols and the correct filing of documents. Through sheer persistence, Cronje was able to overcome each of these obstacles, and finally register the trade test centre.

His first step was to purchase the premises, after which he bought all the necessary equipment for the apprentices. The machinery was signed off by merSETA, a training organisation that encompasses manufacturing, engineering and related services.

Now, with state-of-the-art equipment, modern premises, an industry-approved syllabus and qualified lecturers, the Automotive Specialised Testing Academy is ready to offer incredible opportunities for those who want to grow in the industry. This includes novices wanting to gain their first formal qualifications, and veterans looking to specialise or branch out in a different direction. The Centre also offers accommodation for students from out of town.



Assessor, JP Pereira (left) with Christiaan Oertel, a trainee at the Automotive Specialised Testing Academy (ASTA)

Cronje strongly believes that preserving knowledge is one of the key factors to growth and employment provision, and that this local trade test centre can ensure that there is a constant supply of trainers and apprentices who are familiar with the latest equipment and techniques, and are therefore able to use best practices nationwide.

Through all this Cronje remains dedicated to his work with ERA, the Engine Remanufacturers' Association, a proud association of the RMI. The group works to ensure that members supply clients with only the finest components and highest quality of workmanship in order to live up to their slogan - Hallmark of precision engineering.

Attie Serfontein, director of ERA, is convinced that the registration of ASTA is a significant milestone for the country. "A lot of people did not think this was possible, which makes it all the more meaningful. We are positive that this first trade test centre is the start of many similar initiatives."