

Andrew Blair

Skill: Autobody Repair

From: Belfast, Northern Ireland
Competed in: WorldSkills 2005, Helsinki
Result: Gold

Qualifications

- 5 GCSE's
- NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Car Body Repair
- City & Guilds LCGI



For Andrew Blair, entering the car repair industry was an obvious career choice. From a young age, tinkering with cars at weekends and during holidays was a way of life as his father and uncle both worked in the car repair industry. What he didn't expect was to be recognised as the best auto repair technician in the world aged just 22 when he won the Gold medal in Helsinki, Finland in WorldSkills 2005.

So how did Andrew come to win this prestigious award?

Says Andrew, "I was first introduced to competitions when I was at Blackwater House Training College studying for my Apprenticeship. I thought they sounded interesting and was soon hooked on competing as it felt good to get recognition for what I did on a daily basis. It was after winning a SkillAuto national competition that I was selected to take part in the WorldSkills competition in Helsinki."

And how did he find the training for a WorldSkills event?

Andrew knew from the start that he would need to work hard to stand any chance of success in Helsinki. "There's no doubt it was very time consuming and it took up a great deal of my free

time getting ready for the event. I don't think you can expect to take part in an international competition and not put the hours in. On the plus side it was very interesting and enjoyable and I learnt masses along the way. It was also a tremendous life experience and so I learnt far more than just how to do my job better."

What was WorldSkills like?

"It was incredible. There was an awful lot of pressure but at the same time it was really enjoyable. The sheer size of the place was what really stunned me. I had heard all about it but it was only when I got there that I could appreciate just what a huge event this was and how many people were involved."

How did you cope with the pressure?

"I went with the attitude that I was going to do what I did every day at work as well as I could and if someone was better than me fine, but at least I knew I had done my absolute best. Having this approach helped me as I felt that it took the pressure off. There was a time when I made a mistake but I told myself to sort it out, it wasn't the end of the world. I didn't focus on what the other competitors were doing either which also helped my concentration."

How supportive was your employer?

"My employers were excellent. They were fully behind me and there were no questions asked about all the additional time I had to put into training especially leading up to the competition. I really couldn't have done it without that support and it's something for which I'll always be grateful. In the month leading up to the competition I was only in work for three days because of the training and preparation and I was still paid for the whole month."

So does Andrew feel that winning Gold at WorldSkills has given him any benefits?

"Absolutely. Succeeding at WorldSkills has given a big boost to my career and put me ahead of others. Sadly, the company I was working for at the time closed down and while a lot of my colleagues were out of work and looking for jobs I had people phoning me and offering me work because they knew about my success at the competition."

What is Andrew doing now?

Since winning his Gold medal in 2005, Andrew has gone from strength to strength. With solid training behind him and an enviable reputation, Andrew has quickly progressed in his career and is now working as a Workshop Supervisor for Wrights Accident Repair. His aspirations don't end there however and he continues to set himself new goals.

"My aim is to be my own boss and own my own body shop in five years time. My experience has taught me to aim high and see what happens and there've been no down sides so far!"

Do you have any words of advice for potential competitors?

"Once you commit to WorldSkills, commit 100%. It doesn't only affect you either so make sure you have the full support of your employer and your family as they will help make it possible for you to achieve your best results."

And finally with WorldSkills London 2011 just around the corner what does Andrew feel will be the benefits to the UK?

"For me the biggest advantage of WorldSkills taking place in London is the fact that it will help to raise the profile of skills especially to young people who may be considering their options for the future. I certainly hope to be there, having experienced the excitement of a WorldSkills competition myself, I would love to enjoy it from an onlooker's perspective and cheer on the 2011 UK team."

For more information, please contact the PR Team, UK Skills: 020 7612 9260