

PTE Roger Laing



WHEN A PASSION TURNS TO GOLD

By Judith Martin

With dad a mechanic, Roger Laing was always in tow when vehicles were being repaired.

A country kid, he grew up with grease on his hands, progressing from “torch holder” to “spanner grabber” as he became more attuned to what was going on.

Those early years trailing after dad paid off – he won Gold in the Automotive Technology category at the recent World Skills New Zealand National Competition.

The 3 Workshop Company soldier lives and breathes vehicles – any sort of vehicles – and while he credits his parents with his early-sown enthusiasm, it’s the time and effort the Army puts into training him that he says is mostly behind his success.

After five years at a Wairarapa boarding school he found barrack life easy. And when he began his trade training he was certainly more than familiar with the basics.

“From working with dad I sort of had a good bit of experience with it all, also a bit of a passion for four wheel driving. Being out in the bush and having something break is never ideal! So you occasionally end up with some, “temporary unorthodox” repairs just to get you home.”

The best bit about his job, he says, is sorting out problems. “Especially when you’re away from the workshop and you don’t necessarily have the correct tool for the job, but instead have to think outside the box to get something done”.

“It’s also really high quality training that the Army provides. I don’t know many civilian companies that would be willing to invest so much time into our training.”

When he finishes work each day, he tinkers with his own vehicles.

“I’ve got a few vehicles down here in Burnham, mostly broken or in various states of repair. The daily is currently a 1989 Hilux, with the 2.8L non turbo getting her along at a snail’s pace! There’s a pretty good scene for four wheel driving in the Christchurch area, and with plenty of tracks and trails all over the show it makes for a good weekend away from camp. The current four wheel drive project is a 1985 Suzuki SJ413, with the parts for upgrades being so cheap I’d recommend it to anyone looking for a bit of a bush basher.”

PTE Laing says he feels “pretty good” about winning gold.

***“It was a good competition alright. There were six stands so it really tests your general automotive trade knowledge, and although it was all light vehicles, the heavy vehicle mechanic training was still applicable to most vehicles.*”**

“The six stands we were tested on included engine electrical where a car was presented in a non-running condition and competitors had to follow a diagnostic process to get the vehicle running – then running smoothly. Second was a steering/suspension/wheel

alignment and brakes stand, where we all had to first inspect a car’s brakes for condition and serviceability, then disassemble, inspect and reassemble a master cylinder and brake calliper, followed by a suspension inspection and laser wheel alignment.

“Following this we had a RWD manual T40 Toyota gearbox to tear down and measure up then get back together checking synchro clearances, gear backlashes etc. That was the first day all done and dusted. Day two involved a vehicle body electrical stand, where we tested lights, power windows, and other vehicle systems for operation, repairing any faults we found along the way. We then stripped down and measured key tolerances on a 4AFE Toyota motor, giving a report of its general condition. The final stand was a 25 question theory test covering all aspects of the automotive industry.

“We were given two hours to complete each stand to the highest standard we could manage, losing points for simple things like not wearing the correct PPE at all times.

“The next step is the Worldskills International Competition in Russia next year where I will represent New Zealand in the Automotive Technology category. With this in mind I will have a comprehensive training package over a three month period at Trade Training School which should get me to the world-class standard of the competition.”

PTE Laing is grateful for the support his parents have given him, and also his mentor, Sergeant Major Leighton Hamlin, “for getting me onto it in the first place,” and to David Ford and Pete Haugvik, the apprentice coordinators in Burnham.