

SIMI ANNUAL REPORT 2009 - 2010



SIMI

SIMI



# Contents

4	<b>THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT</b>	21	<b>OBJECTIVE 7</b> INTERNAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS
6	<b>THE DIRECTOR GENERAL'S REPORT</b>	22	<b>OBJECTIVE 8</b> MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT AND REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEES
7	<b>OBJECTIVE 1</b> MOTOR TAXATION	28	<b>OBJECTIVE 9</b> MEMBERSHIP
10	<b>OBJECTIVE 2</b> OUR LINKS WITH EUROPE	30	<b>OBJECTIVE 10</b> PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY AND HUMAN RESOURCES
12	<b>OBJECTIVE 3</b> THE ENVIRONMENT	32	<b>SIMI MANAGEMENT BOARD</b>
13	<b>OBJECTIVE 4</b> REPUTATION OF THE INDUSTRY	33	<b>NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL 2009/2010</b>
15	<b>OBJECTIVE 5</b> COMMUNICATIONS	36	<b>SIMI EXECUTIVES</b>
19	<b>OBJECTIVE 6</b> TRAFFIC FLOW AND ROAD SAFETY		



## President's **statement**

The phrase, 'a lot can happen in the year' is very apt to my time as President, with 2009 being perhaps the most difficult year in the history of the SIMI. I always knew it was going to be a very challenging time, both in my role as Dealer Principal and as President of the Society, but I don't need to go into detail about how bad 2009 actually turned out to be.

At this stage, it's good to be able to look back on a challenging year for both the Industry and the Society and to recognise that it was a year which saw our industry gain concessions unlike any other sector of the economy. The intensive lobbying carried out by SIMI in the two previous Budgets eventually paid off with the introduction of Scrappage from the January 1. Four months on and, so far, the public's reaction to Scrappage has exceeded expectations. The lobbying strategy and campaign undertaken by the Society clearly showed that Scrappage would deliver for the Government in additional revenue, for the environment in reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and for the Motor Industry, by protecting jobs and stimulating trade. To date, Scrappage has succeeded on all three counts and we are well on our way to exceeding market predictions for new car sales this year.

I truly believe that we have now turned the corner and are looking ahead towards recovery, albeit a slow one. Again, as we had predicted, the increase in new car and light commercial vehicle sales is not only down to Scrappage deals, but Scrappage has made many people feel more comfortable about changing their car this year. We have also seen positive signs in the used car market, with trade considerably ahead of last year, with used car values improving and retailers actively looking for stock. The change to the Margin Scheme, and the transitional benefits negotiated by SIMI, have clearly helped encourage dealers in this regard. Beyond doubt, the concessions granted on Scrappage and the Margin Scheme have been responsible for the survival of many businesses in our industry that might otherwise have failed and we must acknowledge Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, for having the foresight to listen to our arguments and implement these vital policies.



Looking to the year ahead, 2010 presents us with some promising signs as well as some challenges. Significant changes in the VRT definitions for Commercial Vehicles and a desire by the industry to see a change to the current registration plate system are two massive issues, the outcome of which will affect everyone in the industry. Concerns within the Commercial Vehicle sector over the new definitions in the Finance Act have been somewhat allayed by the willingness of the State to engage with the Society on the issue. But work still remains if we are to achieve an acceptable solution. As was highlighted during the year in the Bacon Report, the Registration Plate system in Ireland produces a severe degree of seasonality in new vehicle sales, which causes serious working capital and other problems for dealers. We are proposing the adoption of an alternative system that would help alleviate this problem, while at the same time being acceptable to the other stakeholders.

The used car website, beepbeep.ie, which was launched in January, is a hugely important project for the industry this year. A specific used car Website by SIMI, for SIMI members, has been in demand for a long time and, although it is very early days in the project, feedback has been very positive. Significant resources have been invested in the site by SIMI and, in order, for it to be able to deliver enormous long-term benefits to members, I would sincerely hope that every SIMI member dealer will join with us and come on board. The true professional nature of those SIMI members who sell used cars is reflected by beepBeep.ie. With the added reassurance of Car History Check there is no doubt that beepbeep.ie has the potential to be the number one website for customers who are in the market for a used car from a reliable, professional seller.

The Motor Industry remains in a fragile place. However, we have more to look forward to positively than we had 12 months ago. One thing I have learnt during my Presidency is that we can achieve great things by working together, and I would urge members to come together and support your Society. It is first, foremost and always, a members' organisation: it is your Society. I wish all members every success in the year ahead and I am extremely proud to have served as your President during a year in which we achieved so much.

Mike Finlay  
President of the Society of the Irish Motor Industry



# Director General's report

At the time of the AGM in May 2009, we had experienced two negative Budgets within seven months, without any concession to the Motor Industry in consideration of the huge problems facing the sector. At that stage, we had seen the impact of the previous year's VRT and Road Tax changes exacerbated by an oversupply of used cars in the UK, with resulting price drops to add to the euro/sterling exchange rate impact. Both franchise and independent dealers had seen used car values virtually collapse here with huge write-downs in the value of their used car stocks. The numbers of used car units in dealer stocks were also, worryingly, at very high levels as consumer interest in car purchasing had slowed to a trickle.

The April Budget had contained a proposal to change the industry to the VAT Margin Scheme for used car transactions, but the timing and transition proposals were not beneficial for the sector. With the availability of finance continuing to contract, and the economic forecasts ever more gloomy, the outlook for the sector was at that stage extremely bleak. In some ways, that may have been very close to the lowest point for our industry, with many established motor businesses closing their doors, which had a knock-on effect on SIMI membership numbers.

Firstly, SIMI negotiated a postponement of the VAT changeover based on the cashflow negatives in the proposals. During the summer, and into the autumn, the hard work in discussions with Finance and Revenue paid off as the new VAT transition arrangement were finalised. During the final quarter of 2009, the full impact of the business downturn was highlighted with one business closure after another, including a number of very high profile and professional businesses. SIMI pressed the case for specific measures to aid our sector in a Budget that was always going to be very difficult. A huge campaign by SIMI - with meetings, submissions, scientific arguments, leaflets, media releases and lobbying events - was carried out right up to Budget Day.

The Budget in 2009 was a turning point that saw delivery of SIMI's two key strategies: the VAT Margin Scheme changeover and the Scrappage Scheme, which were both implemented from January 1, 2010. From that date, a sense of hope and confidence has returned to the industry and there is a very strongly-held view that for our sector the worst is now definitely behind us. A return to a more normal level of business, with some profitable trading and a genuine buzz of consumer activity has seen new and used vehicle business increases, and the aftermarket is also beginning to respond.

The first four months of 2010 have been extremely positive and neither snowstorms nor volcanic eruptions have dampened progress in the sector. The launch of the electric car project by Government is a reminder that for the Motor Industry we must always look forward. At the same time, the Finance Act contained technical changes in commercial vehicle definitions that hopefully can be modified before next year. In addition, concerns at the front loading of new car registrations, into the first quarter, based on our current registration number systems is raising another challenge for SIMI to deliver on.

The challenges for the sector continue to arise but the positive measures delivered in last year's Budget have set the industry on a recovery course that is already delivering increased employment for the first time in a number of years. These challenges we face are no longer about the survival of businesses and of the sector as a whole. We have, hopefully, left those dark days behind us and the new challenges are welcome in that they are a return to focusing on literally 'minding our own business'. The last year saw the Society's members embark on an exciting new car website, [beepbeep.ie](http://beepbeep.ie), which we hope will become the website of choice for car buyers. The future is already brighter and we can look forward with confidence to even more progress in the year ahead.

Alan Nolan  
Director General



# OBJECTIVE 1

## Motor Taxation

### Aims for 2010:

- To seek to ensure the most favourable environment for members to conduct their business in, in relation to taxation and the burden of compliance with other State requirements.
- To ensure that the industry has a voice and influence in the future direction of CO<sub>2</sub> taxation and environmental strategy.
- To ensure that future changes to the current VRT system are implemented on a phased basis that takes account of the potential effects on the industry and on the residual values of used cars in use in the State.
- To ensure that the State provides a stable and fair trading environment for the professional and compliant industry and to ensure that there is no advantage to non-compliant illegal and fringe operators.
- To seek, wherever possible, to reduce any unreasonable cost or administrative burdens placed on members' businesses by the State.

## Vehicle Sales

2009 was one of the toughest trading years in the history of the Motor Industry, with only 57,640 new car registrations, a fall of 62% on 2008 (151,607) figures last seen in the 1960s. Similar collapses occurred in the commercial vehicle market with light commercial vehicle registrations for 2009 reaching 9,267, down 69.1% down on the previous year and HGV registrations down 70% to 1,103. The knock-on effect saw over 70 motor businesses close and the loss of over 11,000 jobs.

There has been some improvement in 2010. While still not

at long-term economically sustainable levels, the increase in registrations gives hope to the industry. For the first quarter of 2010, new car sales were up 31% on 2009 at 42,554, while light commercial vehicle registrations have increased by 43% on the same period last year. Undoubtedly, the introduction of a scrappage scheme, which has been boosted by manufacturer and dealer incentives, has given the industry a stimulus.

As outlined in the SIMI Budget Submission, this is a win-win outcome, with improved sales increasing business for motor dealers and benefiting the Exchequer by an additional €57 million in VAT and VRT, while improving Ireland's environmental performance with Band A and B cars now accounting (CO<sub>2</sub>/km of 140g or less) for 77% of new car sales. The move to the VAT Margin Scheme with the transitional arrangements has encouraged trade in the used car market, with feedback from members that this part of the business is also ahead of 2009.

## Budget Submission and Bacon Report

Assisted by Goodbody Economic Consultants, the Society issued its most detailed ever Budget Submission. The key requests outlined in the Submission included:

- Introduction of a scrappage scheme in January 2010 to operate for 12 months – this was the key proposal in the submission, intended to help stimulate business, protect jobs, increase the Government tax take, and improve Ireland's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It was also proposed to extend this to hire drives and LCVs.
- Introduction of a VRT refund scheme for exported used cars.
- Initiatives to ensure that finance is reasonably available for businesses in the Motor Industry and for consumers wishing to purchase vehicles.

- Reform of the current registration number plate system.
- Carbon Tax should not be simply another burden on motorists: it should represent a shift from purchase taxes to usage.
- A review of the current two-tier Road Tax system, which is unbalanced.
- Clarification and consultation regarding planned reduction/removal of VRT.
- Retention of the lower VAT rate on service and repairs.

In addition to the Society's submission, a number of franchise dealers, concerned about the future of the retail Motor Industry, commissioned a detailed review of the industry by economist Peter Bacon. This report, *Strategic Review and Outlook: the Irish Motor Retail Sector*, was supported by SIMI Franchise members and was an additional key document in supporting the Society's arguments in its Budget lobby. The report contained six major recommendations to assist the sector in the short-term and ensure that the long-term economic and competitive disadvantages are removed, which were as follows:

- Introduce a revenue-generating scrappage scheme in December's budget. This scheme will generate net revenue for the exchequer in 2010, stimulate the industry, save jobs and reduce the pressure for significant pay cuts.
- Abolish VRT on a phased basis, following detailed consultation on the abolition method used with the Industry.
- Introduce a VRT refund system for cars exported from the country.
- Change the registration plate system by removing

or de-emphasising the year of first registration from the plate.

- Rebalance the Road Tax system.
- Delay changes to the VRT system, as it affects car rental companies, for at least two years.

## VAT Margin Scheme

In his Budget of April 2009, Minister Lenihan included proposals to change the VAT treatment of second-hand vehicles from the Special Scheme to the system operated throughout the rest of Europe, the Margin Scheme. The proposals would have seen the industry give up the right to reclaim residual VAT on second-hand vehicles, but would have yielded some compensating benefits in terms of cash flow and clawback. While there was some merit in the proposals and it was a genuine attempt to assist the industry, members voted against them on a 60/40 basis.

The Minister agreed not to include the provisions on the Margin Scheme in the Finance Act, but did indicate that if an alternative solution could be agreed by the Society and the Revenue Commissioners/Department of Finance he would consider it in the context of Budget 2010. Following discussions with the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Finance, a framework for the move to the Margin Scheme, including additional transitional benefits to dealers was drawn up, and put to retailer members at Centre Meetings in July 2009, with near unanimous support for the new proposals.

## Budget lobby

The Society's lobbying was a process that lasted 15 months, a period which saw three Budgets (Oct '08, Apr '09, Dec '09). The Society, throughout this period, kept scrappage high on the agenda, both with the media and politicians. In the months leading up to December 2009's Budget, the Society, with the support of members, held meetings



(L-r): Mike Finlay, President, SIMI; Jim O'Keefe, TD; and Sean Connick, TD at the Budget Lobby meeting in November 2009.

countrywide with the key political decision-makers. This was backed up by increasing activity in the media, both locally and nationally, promoting the benefits of scrappage from an industry, consumer, and Government perspective, culminating in a high-profile presence on RTE's The Frontline. The final element of the lobbying strategy was the Society's traditional pre-Budget briefing for politicians in Buswells Hotel.

## Budget 2010 – Success on Scrappage and VAT Margin Scheme

The efforts put in by the Society – with its most detailed ever submission, its most comprehensive lobby effort, and its extensive PR and media campaign – yielded



(L-r): Alan Nolan, Director General, SIMI; Tom Kitt TD; and Tom Cullen, Corporate Services Director, SIMI at the Budget Lobby meeting.

results. The introduction of a car scrappage scheme and the confirmation of the Vat Margin Scheme proposals in Minister Lenihan's Budget represented, in the context of the current economic conditions, a huge success for the SIMI, and it was hoped that it would mark a turning point for the industry. Details of the measures in the Budget include:

- Scrappage – a 12-month scheme for new cars in VRT bands A and B, with a scrappage relief up to €1,500 for cars 10 years or older.
- VAT proposals – moved to Margin Scheme confirmed, with transitional arrangements put in place.
- Reduction in standard VAT rate from 21.5% to 21%.
- Introduction of a carbon tax (4.2 c per litre petrol, 4.9 c per litre diesel).
- Extension of VRT relief on plug-in hybrids beyond 2010.
- Extension of the Employment Subsidy Scheme to a number of sectors, including the Motor Industry.





(L-r): Alan Nolan; Michael McGrath, TD; and Suzanne Sheridan, SIMI Press Officer at the Budget Lobby meeting.



(L-r): Alan Nolan, Director General, SIMI; Ciaran Cuffe, TD; and Mike Finlay, President, SIMI at the Budget Lobby meeting.



## Other Issues - Vehicle Definitions; Electric Vehicles

The Finance Act includes changes to vehicle definitions, with a move to EU definitions to support the new Type Approval systems and ensuring a more construction-focused, rather than Revenue Commissioners-focused registration system, to be implemented through NCT Centres. These provisions are planned for implementation from January 1st, 2011. However, the changes, as included in the Act, will cause many commercial vehicles to be moved from €50 VRT to 13.3% VRT, adding to the cost of these vehicles with the resulting effect of adding cost for businesses in Ireland. The Society is currently in discussion with the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners to resolve this problem.

In addition, April 2010 saw the announcement of an incentive for electric vehicles, with full relief from VRT for a two-year period, and a grant of €5,000 to customers purchasing such vehicles. This will come into effect from January 2011.

## Commission on Taxation

The Commission on Taxation issued its final report in September 2009. While their proposals are only recommendations, it will be important in the coming years for the industry to consider them in the context of any submissions. The report contained a number of proposals in relation to the Motor Industry, including:

- **Carbon tax** – while many of the proposals in the report would not be implemented in the short term, the carbon tax was included in December's Budget. Petrol companies were concerned that a carbon tax would be payable in the same way as fuel excise duties, which would increase their working capital requirements, although the Commission on Taxation did state that consideration be given to allowing for payment of fuel excise duties on a deferred payment basis, as is the case with other excise duties.
- **Scrappage Scheme** – the Commission acknowledged that a scrappage scheme focused on low emission vehicles does have some merit even in a non-car manufacturing country like Ireland.
- **VRT** – the Commission recommended the phasing

out of VRT over 10 years, although it did not suggest a date to start this process. VRT should be replaced with carbon taxes and road pricing. They did acknowledge that there is no easy way to deal with the existing car parc, but hoped that 10-year phasing would minimise this problem.

## Imported Vehicles

The provisions included in Budget 2009 over pre-registration checks for imported vehicles will become operational later in 2010. The competent authority appointed to undertake this work is Applus+, the new operator of NCT. It will see the introduction of a pre-registration examination of individual vehicles at NCT test centres and the proposed closure of the registering facility at VRO offices around the country. This would involve some important changes relating to how TAN holders and individuals will, in future, register cars outside of the ROS framework with Applus+ taking over the registration of vehicles on behalf of the Revenue Commissioners in the NCT centres. It is an inspection, not an NCT test.

## OBJECTIVE 2

### Our Links with Europe

#### Aims for 2010:

- To ensure members are informed and consulted on relevant European issues, including Block Exemption and environmental developments.
- To participate in relevant European Motor Industry organisations with a view to influencing future European Directives or legislation affecting the Motor Industry, including forthcoming Block Exemption and environmental developments.

#### Block Exemption

The last renewal of the Block Exemption Regulation was in 2002 with the current regulation (1400/2002) ending in 2010. In December 2009, the EU Commission published a draft of the new Motor Industry Block Exemption, which is due to come into law from June 2010. Following a consultation process, amended proposals were issued in March 2010.

These include an extension of the current regulation for car distribution for a further three years. At the time of going to press, the EU Commission is immersed in the final round of discussions on the details of the new Block Exemption Regulation provisions for both sales and aftermarket.

This is likely to see a shift towards more General Block Exemption principles with the removal of some motor-specific clauses, which may instead form part of a required code of conduct. The SIMI will continue to be very active on this issue, along with its European representative organisations, in particular ACEA, CECRA and FIGFEA.



Pictured at the Final Conference of the ECVET project in Paris (l-r): Didier Gelibert, Chef du Service Relations Internationales (International Relations Department Manager) and Margaret O'Shea, SIMI Training Manager.

#### **ACEA – the European Car Manufacturers' Body**

The European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA), founded in 1991, represents the interests of the European car, truck and bus manufacturers at EU level. The Society's representative on the ACEA International Liaison Committee is Director General Alan Nolan, along with Finance Director Brian Cooke. The Committee undertakes lobbying for realistic changes to car production regulations and the introduction of EU Directives in a manner favourable to the Motor Industry. ACEA is a key resource for the Society, providing valuable expert support, statistics and information to the SIMI on an ongoing basis.

#### **CECRA – the European Retailers' Body**

The Society has been represented by Director General Alan Nolan and Corporate Services' Director Tom Cullen, who have attended regular meetings with the Car, Industrial Vehicle, and Legal and Taxation Committees of CECRA. The Society's Training Manager, Margaret O'Shea, has worked with the Training Work Group of CECRA. In addition, she is continuing the work on ECVET, a European training qualifications project, involving virtually all of the member states and funded by the EU.



**FIGIEFA – the European Aftermarket Body**

Management Consultant, Paul Redmond, represents the Society on this body, which is an extremely active watchdog for the independent aftermarket sector in Europe.

FIGIEFA, representing the interests of 26 national trade associations of automotive aftermarket distributors from 23 countries, is continuing its Europe-wide campaign on the right to repair newer vehicles.

#### **AIRC – the European Crash Repair Industry Body**

Association Internationale des Réparateurs en Carrosserie (AIRC) was established in 1970 and is the global federation of leading national trade organisations, in the area of vehicle repairs. These member organisations together represent more than 50,000 vehicle repair companies in 14 countries. The Society's representative on this body is Paul Redmond.



#### **CITA - The European and World Vehicle Testing Organisation**

CITA is the body which advises the EU in relation to future vehicle testing developments and produces internationally-recognised and accepted operating standards and procedures for the testing of vehicles. The Society's Careers and Training Executive Yvonne Sliney, keeps in regular contact with CITA on behalf of the Society's Vehicle Tester members.

# OBJECTIVE 3

## The Environment

### Aims for 2010:

- To proactively develop policies and strategies that will contribute to the sustainability of private transport in Ireland.
- To effectively communicate to politicians, the administration and the general public, the importance of the Motor Industry as a partner in the development and implementation of practical environmental policies.
- To play an active part in educating motorists in relation to their potential to contribute to a reduction in vehicle emissions through eco-driving and other initiatives.
- To assist members to comply with their obligations under End of Life Vehicle legislation and to continue to work with the Department and other stakeholders to improve the operation of the system.
- To ensure that waste management and all other environmental legislation makes the required positive environmental contribution without placing an undue burden on business and that the legislation is enforced equally on fringe operators that currently seek to avoid their responsibilities.

### Environmental emissions from new cars

The environmental emissions from new cars have been reducing for some years. In 1995, the average CO<sub>2</sub> per kilometre for new cars in Ireland was 180g. By 2007, this had reduced to just over 160g, or by 9% since 1995. Significant changes occurred when the new CO<sub>2</sub> based VRT and motor tax rates were introduced in 2008. The average rating for new cars sold in 2008 as a whole was 159g/km but this includes new cars sold during the six months running up to the changes. By the end of 2009, the

average CO<sub>2</sub>/km for new cars registered in Ireland was 144g/km, this is a fall of 10% in less than two years while for the first three months of 2010, helped by the scrappage scheme and increased registrations in VRT Bands A and B increasing to 77% of new cars registered, this had reduced further to 135g/km. This emphasises that the key to improving Ireland's performance on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport is renewal of the car fleet, by increasing new registrations to replace older vehicles.

The European Motor Industry invests more than any other private sector in Europe, €20 billion (4% of turnover) per year in research and development, a great part of which goes to improved fuel efficiency and other technologies that enhance the environmental performance of cars. In fact, due to demands for lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, spending in this area accounts for 50% of R&D spend at European carmakers. Over the last decade, the industry has implemented more than 50 new CO<sub>2</sub>-cutting technologies into new vehicles. The past decade has also seen the introduction to the Irish market of new fuel-efficient diesel, petrol, hybrid and 'flexi-fuel' vehicles, which produce much lower emissions than older vehicles.

The Motor Industry will continue to improve its vehicles in terms of emissions, by introducing more technologies including, in the near future, more user-friendly electric vehicles. Vehicle improvements are ongoing. Next year will see the increased availability in Ireland of environmentally-friendly electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid vehicles. In December 2008, the European Parliament and Council approved new CO<sub>2</sub> emission rules for passenger cars, establishing the most demanding piece of environmental legislation the automotive industry has ever faced. The legislation requires a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> of an average of 130 g/km in cars registered by 2015.

In order to assist consumers with their buying choices, in advance of EU legislation, an updated labelling system for new cars was introduced by the industry in Ireland, whereby a label is applied to all new cars at point of sale and features seven colour-coded bands familiar to consumers from the energy labels already in use for certain electrical goods. The Society set up a system whereby members can easily produce the labels via the Society's Statistics Service.

### Other Environmental Legislation

The Motor Industry, in particular SIMI members, are subject to stringent laws in the area of waste management and reporting as required by EU Directives. Specifically, members comply with motor related legislation in relation to waste batteries, waste tyres and end of life vehicles.



The CO<sub>2</sub> labelling system.

# OBJECTIVE 4

## Reputation of the Industry

### Aims for 2010:

- To ensure that SIMI has a strong presence with both the media and consumers, and that the benefits of dealing with an SIMI member are well known and understood.
- To continue the development of entry standards and standards of membership, including code of ethics, and for SIMI members to ensure that our membership is representative of the professional and ethical Motor Industry.
- To underline the industry's commitment to customer satisfaction through the operation of the Customer Complaints Service and Standards Tribunal.
- To ensure members are made aware of their legal obligations, such as Consumer Law, Competition Rules etc.
- To maintain and enhance the reputation of SIMI and its members.
- To seek to differentiate SIMI members from those who do not adhere to the same high standards.
- To work with other stakeholders, including relevant State agencies, to eliminate unfair or illegal practices, such as clocking or roadside selling, that damage consumers and the legitimate industry.
- To grow the SIMI member-only car website – beepbeep.ie – so that it becomes the number one used car website for the public.
- To work to ensure that the Society's Car History Check becomes the industry standard for consumer reassurance and that the value of the service to members and consumers is enhanced through further improvements in the system.
- To encourage members to display the Society's logo and signage as universally as possible on premises, advertisements and stationary and to ensure that,

for consumers, the logo is synonymous with quality, professionalism and reassurance.

- To promote to consumers, and the industry, the importance of regular servicing and the value of a vehicle having a strong service history, as a key reassurance for future buyers.

## Consumer Complaints Service

The SIMI Consumer Complaints Service is a free service offered to members and their customers with the objective of resolving complaints without recourse to expensive and time-consuming legal proceedings. Clause 13 of the terms of the SIMI Order Form obliges customers to refer their complaints to SIMI if the matter cannot be resolved directly with the garage, provided the complaint falls within the scope of the consumer complaints service.

### Analysis of Complaints 2009

- 415 complaints received by the Society.
- 29% of which ruled to be outside the scope of the service.
- 43% of these ineligible complaints were the subject of new vehicle warranties.
- The remainder related to non-member garages (14 complaints related to lapsed members).

While complaints received in 2009 represented a 15% decrease compared to 2008, there was a similar number recorded in 2007. During 2009, 61% of the claims processed were received via the Society's website. Complaints submitted online increased by 1%.

A total of 294 complaints were registered of which 173 (59%) were resolved through the Society's intermediary efforts. A quick positive reaction or simple explanatory letter from the garage often resolves a complaint. The 294 complaints were registered by customers of 193 member

companies.

The type of complaint processed is summarised as follows:

- 55% related to mechanical and electrical defects of vehicles either sold or repaired by member companies.
- 34% of complaints related to a wide range of pricing, documentation and alleged misrepresentation issues.
- 6% of complaints related to previous history of vehicles
- 5% of complaints related to deposits.

Ten different member companies had four or more complaints recorded against them. It is important, however, to point out that, unlike in previous years, most of the complaints represented by these companies were dealt with expeditiously and resulted in only seven out of 45 being upheld by the Tribunal, all of which were subsequently resolved. It was, therefore, not necessary to apply any administrative charges per the rule adopted by the NEC in July 2008.

In many cases, there is a direct correlation with resolution of a complaint and the speed and manner in which member garages respond to the Society's notification that a complaint has been registered. Members are expected to respond to this notification within two weeks on the basis that ignoring complaints does not make them disappear but, in fact, often exacerbates the problems.

### Standards Tribunal

In 2009, 89 complaints (30% of the total processed and similar to 2008) were referred to the SIMI Retail Motor Industry Standards Tribunal. The Tribunal is chaired by an independent Arbitrator and includes industry representatives and a leading consumer advocate. Members are obliged to implement Tribunal recommendations when

they become effective. One of the strengths of the Standards Tribunal is its structure with independent members and Chair, and it does not operate under the direction of SIMI, therefore its decisions are not open to SIMI to seek to correct or overturn.

Of the 89 cases referred to the Tribunal in 2009, 53% resulted in a refund, free repair or compensation being paid to the customer. This percentage has been consistent for the past three years. Of cases referred to the Tribunal, 44% were either rejected as unreasonable or the Tribunal found that the garages' offers to resolve complaints were reasonable.

While the primary purpose of the Consumer Complaints/Standards Tribunal process is to help resolve customers' complaints when they arise, it is not designed to replace members' customer service responsibilities. We would remind members that resolution of complaints is their primary responsibility and the consumer complaints service should only be used as an alternative resolution process when their own efforts fail.

Non-compliance by companies to Tribunal recommendations are referred to the Management Board and NEC if appropriate. The Board dealt with two cases in 2009, one of which referred to a previous year and resulted in a termination of membership. The other case was satisfactorily resolved after the Board's intervention. Three other cases were referred to the Board but were resolved prior to the Board's intervention.

#### **Order Forms and Signage**

Based on the experience of consumers and garages using the SIMI Order Form and its terms and conditions, the Society, in association with its legal advisers, reviewed a range of issues relating to complexity, arbitration, deposits, vehicle history and discounting, and will be revising the format in 2010. Unfortunately, the number of non-member companies misrepresenting themselves to consumers by using SIMI Order Forms and/or signage is on the increase and the Society's legal advisers intend to aggressively pursue offenders during 2010.

#### **Vehicle History**

The SIMI Standards Tribunal is concerned that an increasing number of members are being caught out by consumers trading in vehicles that have been clocked previously damaged or written off. The National Consumer Agency maintains that professionals in car sales should exercise due diligence and take reasonable steps to ascertain that the odometer reading on the vehicle is actually correct. In their view, if the dealer takes steps to check this then he cannot be blamed, on the other hand, if he does not take such steps, he will be deemed to have failed in his responsibilities. The checking of a vehicle through a service such as the SIMI Car History Check would be regarded as conforming to due diligence requirements. Similar due diligence is expected from retailers with respect to service history, the number and type of owners (taxi) and crash history. Body damage discovered after the sale leads to concerns that the vehicle was previously crashed, even though the repairs carried out were cosmetic. Garages are advised to clarify the nature of any body repairs to the customer at point of sale.

#### **SIMI Logo and Code of Ethics**

SIMI continues to emphasise the importance of the SIMI Logo in differentiating members from others operating in the industry. The SIMI Logo and Code of Ethics are strictly for the use of members only. They clearly distinguish members as professional Motor Industry businesses, operating to high ethical standards. A non-member company implying membership of SIMI is in breach of the Consumer Protection Act 2007.



# OBJECTIVE 5

## Communications

### Aims for 2010:

- To develop the Society's profile with both the Government and the public through PR and other initiatives.
- To improve communications with members through visits to their business premises, local, regional, sector meetings and conferences, and through telephone contact, email updates and e-newsletters.
- To ensure that the SIMI website provides members with an effective source of quality information and that the public area of the site will enhance the reputation of the industry and assist in carrying the industry's key messages to the public and the media.
- To maintain *Irish Motor Management* as the official magazine of the industry.
- To grow the profile of beepbeep.ie and communicate widely and effectively its benefits to the public so that it becomes the number one website for consumers in the market for a used car.
- To enhance the Society's use of new media such as social media for both the SIMI and beepbeep.ie brands, in order to target consumers more effectively.

## Political and public lobbying

Over the past year the Society has increased the frequency of its press releases on issues key to the industry in addition to the regular releases on vehicle registration statistics. As part of the two Budget campaigns in 2009, the Society met with senior Ministers, including Finance Minister Brian Lenihan on three occasions. Local members' contacts proved vital in obtaining meetings with senior politicians. The Society's Budget lobby for the December 2009





Budget culminated with a pre-Budget briefing for TDs and Senators in Buswell's Hotel, where 70 members of the Oireachtas met the Society and many members from their own constituencies to hear the Society's submissions. Our Budget lobbying has never been more extensive and as a result, we were the only industry who got some incentive package in the budget. Our new and reignited contact with politicians will no doubt be of great benefit to us in future lobbying activities.

## Safe Car Campaign

At the end of 2009, in order to drive whatever business we could to SIMI members in the aftermarket sector, the Society ran its 2009 'Safe Car Campaign' with the aim of encouraging members of the public to get their car serviced at an SIMI member garage. This campaign ran online, through national and local press and radio, and through participating dealerships. The Society offered members of the public a free 'Safe Car Check' at participating garages. We will be looking at furthering our promotion of the SIMI servicing sector through 2010.

## Media

Over the past year, the Society's PR has taken a new focus. This led to the Society attaining its highest ever level of coverage in the media. At the forefront of this is the Society's Press Officer, Suzanne Sheridan, who is the point of contact for all media. PR had an extremely important role to play last year, playing a vital role in our Budget campaign. In order to get any incentive in the Budget, it was crucial that we communicated the benefits of scrappage as clearly as possible; to politicians, decision makers and the public. Following the announcement in the Budget that a scrappage scheme would be introduced, as well as other incentives including electric cars, the Society was able to generate a hugely significant amount of television, radio, press and online coverage regarding the benefits of scrappage for the industry, government and consumer. Over the past year, we have developed good relationships with key people in the media and we aim to continue this through 2010. Throughout the next year, our PR activities will be more targeted and frequent.

## Communications with members

The Society endeavors to communicate with its members through various mediums of communication technologies, email, internet, text messaging, e-zines and, to a lesser extent, post, fax and newsletters. We hope to reduce our need for postage greatly by this time next year, with the majority of members now conducting most of their communications online.





(L-r): Alan Nolan in conversation with Sean Ardagh, TD at the Budget Lobby meeting in November 2009.

Email updates to members have become a regular channel of communication, with the incorporation of our new Act database we now have the ability to send out mail-shots in a matter of seconds. Industry-related press coverage is emailed to members on a daily basis to keep them informed of the main issues reported on by the media.

The Society's newsletter informs members of the important agenda items being tackled by SIMI, our campaigns, and important changes within the industry. The newsletter covers a range of topics from HR issues, legislation changes to training and upcoming events. *Irish Motor Management*, published by IFP Media and edited by Bernard Potter, is the public voice of the industry and sets out to highlight issues of serious interest to SIMI members. *Irish Motor Management* is a key communications channel for the Society and is distributed to the media, decision makers, educational establishments, public service and members of the Oireachtas.



Chairman of the RSA, Gay Byrne, pictured with SIMI Operations Manager Emma Byrne, SIMI Press Officer Suzanne Sheridan and Kerry SIMI Retailer members at the launch of the Safe Car Campaign in Tralee.

### Communications with other organisations

The Society's executives have been in regular contact with officials in all of the relevant Government departments and with the key state agencies including FÁS, National Consumer Agency, RSA, Gardai, Data Protection Commissioner, Taxi Regulator, Financial Regulator, Central Bank etc. Contact was also maintained with the EU, Local Authorities and the many institutions and organisations which impact on the industry.

### Communication with the public

As the official voice of the Motor Industry in Ireland, the Society has continued to spread the word to the public that there is value and reassurance to be had when buying from an SIMI dealer by using print, radio and internet communications. Following a year of consistently falling registrations, the Society continued to highlight the good value to be had by consumers. With the introduction of the scrappage scheme this year, the Society continues to inform customers of benefits to be had in changing your car and also in buying used vehicles.



Consumers are also made aware of the benefit of dealing with an SIMI member, in the event of a complaint that both parties are unable to resolve, the Society has a consumer complaints service and arbitration scheme that is available to both parties to help resolve their dispute. Our website contains a consumer information section where consumers can find advice and information on the benefits of dealing with a member. The Society will continue to promote our logo as a symbol of reassurance and quality for the public when dealing with an SIMI member.

Crucial to the Society is the development and promotion of the SIMI logo as a 'quality mark'. For the next year, we aim, mainly through PR activities, to communicate with the public as to why they should do business with an SIMI member. Our aim is for consumers to instantly recognise the SIMI logo and associate it with the highest standards in the industry.

### [www.simi.ie](http://www.simi.ie)

Following the radical restructuring of the SIMI website, [simi.ie](http://www.simi.ie), which was completed in April 2009, we now have a website that is innovative, informative, easy-to-navigate and user-friendly. Since the launch of the website, there has been increased traffic to the site, from both members and the buying public. The National Consumer Agency has created a link to our site along with many other companies.

The website itself is an ongoing project as we will have to continuously provide up-to-date information and move with any technological advances. The website is a fundamental tool for both members of the public and the media as a source of information.

# OBJECTIVE 6

## Traffic Flow and Road Safety

### Aims for 2010:

- To assist in the development and promotion of policies aimed at improving traffic flow and at removing unnecessary or unreasonable burdens from commuters and other motorists.
- To support initiatives to improve safety on Irish roads.
- To support initiatives aimed at improving vehicle standards.
- To seek to assist in reducing injuries and deaths on our roads.
- To develop and support safety initiatives through the work of the Society.
- To work in conjunction with the RSA in particular on consumer campaigns.

## Road Safety

The Society continues to develop and support all initiatives concerning road safety in Ireland. In particular, the Society applauds the work of the RSA since its establishment in 2006.

While a total of 240 people tragically lost their lives on Irish roads in 2009, this is 39 fewer fatalities compared to 279 deaths in 2008. In fact, 2009 was the safest year on Ireland's roads since road deaths were first recorded in 1959. In 2009, the Government's Road Safety Target of achieving no more than 252 deaths per annum by the end of 2012 was also achieved, three years ahead of schedule.

There now seems to be a real willingness to change driving behaviour and attitudes in Ireland due to the range of measures implemented in 2009 across education, enforcement and engineering. Increased enforcement of

the NCT and VTN will also reap benefits in the long run, ensuring all vehicles on Irish roads are properly maintained and safe to drive. In 2009, the European Transport Safety Council ranked Ireland 6th in Europe for road safety.

A number of new test items were introduced into the NCT Test including E-marking on tyres and the opacity of vehicle glass and a vehicle Type Approval scheme, operated through the VTN network, was rolled out in

Ireland for this first time. The Type Approval regime will help ensure appropriateness of construction and modification of vehicles not designated in their original Type Approval by their manufacturer.

## SIMI Safe Car Campaign

In late 2009, we ran the 'SIMI Safe Car Campaign'. The aim of the campaign was to encourage motorists to get



The graphic is divided into three columns: 'Introduction', 'Free SIMI Safe Car Check', and 'About the free check'. Below the text are silhouettes of a car being inspected, a car on a lift, and a person working on a wheel.

Introduction	Free SIMI Safe Car Check	About the free check
<p>...the SIMI Safety of Road Motorists (SIMI) is a free service available to all road motorists in Ireland.</p> <p>...The service is available to all road motorists in Ireland.</p>	<p>...The SIMI Safe Car Check is a free service available to all road motorists in Ireland.</p> <p>...The service is available to all road motorists in Ireland.</p>	<p>...The free check is available to all road motorists in Ireland.</p> <p>...The service is available to all road motorists in Ireland.</p>

their car serviced regularly and we outlined the benefits of doing so. We did this by promoting the campaign on national and local radio, press, online and through participating garages. A press photo-call was held in conjunction with the RSA and provided supporting collateral material to members, as well as an advertising and PR campaign. Although the overall press coverage and response was disappointing a considerable number of motorists opted to have the free safety check which, in a high proportion of cases, identified some potential safety problems with the car. We also highlighted the importance of the SIMI logo as a quality mark and outlined why motorists should get their car serviced in an SIMI garage in particular. The Society aims, in 2010, to assist further in promoting the aftermarket sector by encouraging the public to ensure their service is up to date and to underline the clear benefits of getting service work carried out by an SIMI member.

## Traffic Flow

Reduction of traffic congestion is vital component in reducing Ireland's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Traffic congestion remains a key issue for members and car-owners, but strong investment has continued in the national road infrastructure. Significant progress was made during the past year with the opening of long stretches of motorway.

Work on the national road network is ongoing. The widening of the M50 is progressing and, with a number of completed sections now open, we can expect further dividends from this investment in the coming year. Now fully operational, the new Red Cow roundabout is completed resulting in traffic flow improvements at a notorious congestion hotspot. Other projects completed in the last 12 months included the N6 Galway to Athlone Motorway, the N8 Fermoy to Mitchelstown Motorway, the N9 Kilcullen to Carlow Motorway and the Waterford City Bypass. In total, a further 139km of either motorway or dual carriageway was added to Ireland's road network in 2009, with a further 272 km to be added in 2010. In spite of the economic downturn, €1.15 billion will be spent on Ireland's national roadways in 2010, with resulting long-term benefits in improved traffic flows and reduced journey times.

The Society also welcomed the significant improvements in the inter-city rail services and in the Dart, Luas and other commuter rail services. SIMI believes that car owners would willingly choose to use public transport, if an acceptable system were available, and we continue to support further significant investment in public transport. SIMI has been active in representing the views of the industry at recent consultations with regard to national transport strategy into the future.

# OBJECTIVE 7

## Internal, Administrative & Financial Affairs

### Aims for 2010:

- To ensure that the Society is managed in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, while ensuring that the service provided to members is of the highest quality.
- To seek opportunities to improve the finances of the Society, in order to provide a higher level of service to members.
- To review the Society's Strategic Development Plan and draw up a new five-year plan for the period 2010-2014 inclusive.
- To ensure all of the major projects undertaken are approved and delivered under the Society's Project Management System under which each project should be reviewed, as required, on a monthly basis.

### Financial Position

Due to the current economic climate, the financial accounts of the Society show that, for the first time in a number of years, the Society had an operating deficit. However, the Society's reserves continue to be very strong and this enabled the NEC to reduce membership subscription rates for 2010, following on from no increase in 2009. The Society is grateful for the time and effort provided by Honorary Treasurer, Tony Maher, in overseeing the financial position of the Society during his three-year tenure.

### SIMI Executives

The Society now employs 14 people whose variety of skills and experience serve to enhance our services to members.

Like many members, the Society reduced its staff in 2010, and SIMI executives agreed to a reduction in pay for the second year running.

### Membership

At the end of the calendar year 2009, the total number of members was 1,338, a decrease of 254 on the previous year. The Society's membership has been impacted by the negative economic climate, with the last 12 months unfortunately seeing a number of members across all sectors of membership cease trading.

### 2009 Breakdown of Membership by

#### Category

Franchise Dealers	454
Motor Vehicle Distributors	28
Wholesalers	59
Non Franchise Retailers	454
Motor Factors	36
Petrol and Oil Companies	5
Vehicle Body Repair Specialists	86
Specialist Trade Repairers	116
Petrol Filling Stations	20
Vehicle Recovery Operators	23
Affiliated Members	33
Associate Retailers	24
<b>Total Membership</b>	<b>1,338</b>

### Trustees

The Society's Trustees are: Matt Fagan (Past President, 1986/1987); Brian Murphy (Past President 1987/1988); and Brian Fanning (Past President 1988/1989).

# OBJECTIVE 8

## Membership Support and Representative Committees

### Aims for 2010:

- To develop and deliver information and support for members in all aspects of their business based on consultation with the relevant representative committees.
- To ensure that all support provided by the Society to members is of the highest quality, timely and cost effective.
- To ensure members are kept informed and up to date on relevant issues and developments through regular emails and newsletters.
- To ensure that the Society's response to members' queries or requests is delivered as soon as is practical. As far as possible, this should be on the same day, but, if a response requires research or further advice, a realistic target response date should be confirmed, which should be adhered to.
- To ensure that each sector of the Society is represented by its own committee with a focus on the needs of that sector under the overall aims and objectives of the Society.

This objective is reviewed at internal meetings between the Director General and Executive Directors, monthly, by the Management Board, and, quarterly, by the National Executive Council.

### Membership Support

Over the past turbulent year, the Society's senior executives attended many national and local meetings of

concerned members in the various sectors. July 2009 saw the Society run centre meetings over an intense two-week period. These were well attended, helped by the support of President Mike Finlay, Franchise Chairman Gerry Caffrey and Independent Retailer's Chairman Gaetano Forte. The start of 2010 has seen the Society increase its focus on meeting members in their own locality and at their own premises. This project is being led by the Society's Operations Manager, Emma Byrne.

Direct support, information and advice on general queries, and on company-specific issues was provided by the Society's executives. In particular, the change to the VAT Margin Scheme saw the Society's Finance Director Brian Cooke deliver regional VAT Seminars, both before and after the Budget, with 700 members attending. Expert advice was given to members on both this changeover and the introduction of the scrappage scheme by Emma Byrne. The last 12 months also saw increased advice given in industrial relations by HR Manager Margaret O'Shea. The SIMI website provides a valuable resource for members to access a vast array of information concerning, for example, sector-specific issues, legislative updates and statistical analysis. In addition, both electronic and hard copy newsletters were circulated to members on a monthly basis to keep them informed of important industry developments.

### Report from the Chairman of each of the Society's Sector Committees

Details of the activities of the standing Committees of the Society are outlined below, while progress on the services offered to members are reported under the relevant objective headings.

### *The National Executive Council & Management Board* Chairman: Mike Finlay, M A Finlay & Sons and President SIMI

The National Executive Council (NEC), consisting of members from all sectors of the Society and from across all counties, held four meetings during the year, with increased attendances on those of recent years. The NEC, which is the policy-making body of the Society, delegates the responsibility of directing the overall strategy and overseeing the financial, internal, administrative and membership affairs of the Society to the Management Board, which met nine times during the year.

### *Vehicle Importers'/Distributors Committee* Chairman: James Brooks, Kia Motors Ireland

The last 18 months were the most challenging for vehicle importers, with the economic crisis causing the collapse of new car sales in 2009. In response to this crisis, the Vehicle Importers were instrumental in their support for the Society's Budget Submission, drawing up the realistic scrappage proposals put to Government, which were substantially included in Minister Lenihan's Budget. This has positively impacted on this year's car market, with new car registrations up 31% in the first quarter of 2010. A sub-committee was established in 2009, to look at a significant upgrade to the Society's statistics service, while other areas of concern include the extension of the VRT incentive for hybrid vehicles and the proposals in the Finance Act to change vehicle categorisations and its impact on VRT, with the Society in discussions with the Revenue Commissioners and Department of Finance on these issues. Following the elevation of Eddie Murphy to Deputy President of SIMI, the Committee elected as its new Chairman, James Brooks of Kia Motors Ireland.



(L-r): Gaetano Forte, Chairman, SIMI Independent Retailers Committee; Emma Byrne SIMI; and Brian Cooke, Finance Director SIMI, at the SIMI Centre Meeting held in Dublin.



Gaetano Forte, Chairman (back row, far right) pictured here with members of the Independent Retailers Committee and SIMI Operations Manager, Emma Byrne.

*Franchise Dealers Committee*

Chairman: Gerry Caffrey, Gerry Caffrey Motors Ltd

Last year was a challenging one for the franchise sector, a year which saw the closure of over 50 franchise garages. The Franchise Committee continued to be very active, and was instrumental in the Society's Budget campaigns, which saw delivery on the VAT Margin Scheme and the introduction of the scrappage scheme. Both of these were delivered in a year in which other industries struggled to deliver anything for their sectors. With excellent relationships within the relevant Government departments and key political contacts built up over the last few years, the Franchise Committee plays a key role in supporting the Society with its objectives. Franchise Committee Chairman, Gerry Caffrey, and SIMI President, Mike Finlay, gave up



(L-r): Eddie Murphy, Deputy President, SIMI; Alan Nolan, Director General, SIMI; Mike Finlay, President, SIMI; and Brian Cooke, Finance Director, SIMI at the February NEC meeting.



**(L-r): Gerry Caffrey, Chairman National Franchise Dealers Committee; Wendy O'Rourke, Ferrybank Motors, Wexford; Alan Nolan, Director General SIMI; and Mark Boggan, Hugh Boggan Motors, Wexford at the Wexford Centre Meeting in the Ferrycarrig Hotel.**

several weeks of their busy schedules to help the Society deliver important messages and information to dealers all over the country.

The annual SIMI Franchise Dealers Conference, held in Kilashee House in November, saw an increased attendance. Economist Peter Bacon was the keynote speaker, who had been commissioned to write a detailed report on the Motor Industry during the year. Jonathon Meade, Franchise Conference Chairman, played a key role in delivering to members a highly relevant conference on a cost effective basis.

In 2009, the Committee supported a critically important project – beepbeep.ie, the used car website – a site specifically committed to professional ethical dealers. This project, launched in January 2010, provides a shop window for SIMI dealer's vehicles. Every vehicle will have a Car History Check certificate and every vehicle will come

with a warranty. Beepbeep.ie will display SIMI dealers as professional businesses that guarantee every vehicle that they sell.

The Committee was also responsible for the Revenue Commissioners' focus on Irish residents driving unregistered foreign vehicles. This problem is now almost completely eradicated.

Through the stewardship of Gerry Caffrey, and the support of each of the franchise dealers representing every franchise, the Franchise Committee has worked extremely hard to deliver in the most difficult circumstances. This focused approach will continue into 2010, where legislative changes, together with the turbulent financial markets and the used car market, will be key areas over the next 12 months.

#### ***Independent Retailer's Committee***

**Chairman: Gaetano Forte, Sweeney and Forte Motors**

Like other sectors, the independent retailers faced great difficulty during 2009 due to the economic crisis. In this climate, the Independent Committee continues to go from strength to strength, with the Committee holding regular meetings in order to ensure the interests of the independent members are focused on. The Committee discusses issues facing both independent sales and service dealers. During the year, the Independent Committee discussed a number of key issues including: availability of finance; beepbeep.ie; changes to the VAT system; Government issues; the used car market; and the Right to Repair campaign, among others. Committee Chairman Gaetano Forte also attended a number of centre meetings throughout the country. The Committee organised a seminar specifically for independent retailers, at no cost, to discuss industry issues and the changes to the VAT system. This seminar was very well attended and we received positive feedback.

#### ***Wholesalers' Committee***

**Chairman: Alan Lyons, Auto Diesel Electric**

The Wholesaler/Motor Factor sector is affiliated to the European organisation FIGIEFA ([www.figiefa.eu](http://www.figiefa.eu)), which represents the interests of 26 national trade associations of automotive aftermarket distributors from 23 countries worldwide. Their objective is to maintain free competition in the market for vehicle replacement parts, servicing and repair. The sector highlighted the Right to Repair campaign in Ireland in a series of trade advertisements in the autumn of 2009. The sector conducted extensive lobbying at European level through its affiliation with FIGIEFA on an aftermarket sector-specific block exemption regulation, scheduled to be effective from June 2010. The sector also communicated with the Irish Competition Authority on this issue and looks forward to a regime of enhanced protection for the independent aftermarket. The SIMI Wholesaler/Motor Factor sector continued its financial support for the European lobbying effort during 2009. Among the key issues addressed by the



Wholesalers Committee were the following:

- The Wholesalers' sector was active in developing a national automotive compliance scheme under the auspices of WEEE Ireland to comply with the waste battery regulation. The sector is continuing to participate in the ongoing management and direction of the scheme and is targeting improved compliance and waste collection.
- While there were concerns over the impact of the Car Scrappage Scheme, its necessity in stimulating industry activity was acknowledged. The sector requested SIMI to seek assurances that the certification of total vehicle scrappage would be enforced.
- The purchase and use by some garages of non-compliant equipment was highlighted by the sector during 2009. Compliance with the EU Machinery Directive (2006/42/EC) relating to CE marking of garage equipment placed on the Irish market imposed stricter requirements from December 2009, details of which the sector will be highlighting in 2010.
- The Euro 5 legislation relating to access to technical information will be monitored, in particular the development of administrative arrangements for securing full access for independent operators during 2010.
- A range of other issues including: seeking the restoration of the link between road tax renewals and car testing; VAT accounting practices relating to cross border trade; certification for members offering refrigerant courses; and the SIMI Safe Car campaign.

The sector also liaised with the independent Automotive Aftermarket Federation and the SMMT aftermarket section in the UK on matters of mutual interest.

#### **Vehicle Testers Committee**

**Chairman: Charlie Rogers, Rolor Commercials Ltd**

The VTN Committee within the Society continues to work on behalf of tester members and has met regularly over the past year. The scheme to test commercial vehicles has now been in existence for over twenty-five years and during this time there have been a number of significant developments. The last major development was the upgrade plan agreed with the Department of Transport, which was completed by the end of 2008. When the RSA (Road Safety Authority) was established at the end of 2006 it was given responsibility for the future development of the testing scheme. At that point they commissioned a fundamental review and evaluation of Commercial Vehicle Testing Policy and a report was delivered by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC). The RSA's target now is to further improve the roadworthiness of vehicles using Irish roads, to continue to improve the consistency of annual testing and to put a greater focus on encouraging operators to maintain and operate their vehicles to the highest standards. This increased focus should have the effect of enhancing the international (as well as the national) reputation of Irish vehicles operating in other countries.

Testers can expect to see a number of new developments within the testing scheme over the next few years. The RSA has recently signalled that it intends to press ahead with a new reform programme, which will incorporate many of the recommendations in the PWC report. Last year, the HGV manual was significantly upgraded and a similar upgrade is currently being worked on for the LGV Manual. The VTN Committee is also working on a plan for the early introduction of a formal ISO Standard for all test centres. Details are expected to be announced shortly. In the past year, we have also seen the formation of a type approval system in Ireland by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI). It has circulated existing approved NSAI dealers (Tachographs, Plating and Speed

Limiters) and some of these dealers have applied to become approved test centres (ATCs) for planned type approval tests. A small number of test centres have been approved so far and it is thought that it will be some time before this business achieves any significant volumes.

In order to be approved for this type of testing, test centres will have to gain the ISO 17025 standard. The NSAI will be consulting with the Revenue Commissioners on the Vehicle Registration System, which is also being reviewed. Type approval will be phased in for all categories of new vehicles over the next few years. In the future, one will not be able to register a vehicle from new in Ireland unless it is type approved or has an existing EC Type Approval Certificate (certificate of conformity) issued by the vehicle manufacturer. If a new vehicle being imported does not have an existing certificate, or if alterations are being made to it in this country, then the importer of the vehicle will have to apply to the NSAI for a Type Approval Certificate. The approved test centres will carry out tests as directed by NSAI on the vehicles concerned. As part of new registration developments there will also be a change in vehicle categories and the old categories A,B and C, as used up to now by Revenue. These categories will be now based on European Vehicle Type Approval Categories for Vehicles, as type approval becomes a core part of the new vehicle registration process.

The SIMI VTN Testers Committee will continue to work on members' behalf and take on board all these ongoing and future developments within the system. The RSA has made notable progress, since it was set up, in improving the safety on Irish roads and the Testers Committee is confident that, through its work with the Authority in the future, further progress will be made. Members will be kept informed of the new reform programme and the timeline for introduction as soon as it becomes available.



The Past Presidents pictured at the SIMI Annual Dinner earlier this year.

**Heavy Goods Vehicle Distributors Sector**

**Chairman: Bruce Archer, DAF Sales Ltd**

The HGV sector suffered significant decline in vehicle registrations in 2009, reflecting the collapse in the construction industry and the general economic recession. The sector is engaged with the NSAI on resolving the post-September 2010 registration of Euro V derogated vehicles, which may be a consequence of the decline in sales in 2009 and 2010. The sector lobbied for tax incentives for electric commercial vehicles and is reviewing proposed taxation reclassification of vehicles for taxation purposes reflecting type approval definitions.

The HGV sector dealt with a range of regulatory items during 2009 and consulted with the Road Safety Authority

on many of these issues. These included:

- Introduction of a type approval regime in April 2009.
- Vehicle and trailer braking regulations.
- Testing criteria for mirror retrofits.
- Proposed spray suppression regulations.
- Waste battery compliance.
- Euro 5 emission standards.
- Proposals for changing weight regulations.
- Revisions to EU Block Exemption rules.

**Vehicle Body Repair Specialists**

**Chairman: Nigel Pratt, Pratt's Auto Bodyshop**

A representative committee of the sector met on a regular basis during 2009. The committee was in regular

communication with Glass's on the introduction of GMX 4 estimating software system in May 2009. The Committee met with representatives of Glass's and reviewed a wide range of estimating and software issues associated with GMX 4. The Committee continues to seek adjustment to the current method of handling insurers' parts base reference sheets. The sector met with an Audatex representative and continues to assess the impact of the introduction of an alternative estimating system to the Irish market.

The Committee consulted legal advisers with respect to insurers' practices in the marketplace and participated in an AIRC submission to the EU Commission on the subject. Use of non-OE parts and trade discounting policies were also raised in the context of accident management

practices by insurers. The sector expressed concerns to the EPA on alleged incidents of non-compliance with solvents regulations, accompanying inspection procedures and the availability and use of non-compliant paints in certain parts of the country. The quality and use of non-OE parts was reviewed by the sector.

The sector liaised with the Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association (UK) on matters of mutual interest.

#### **Vehicle Recovery Operators Committee**

**Chairman: Eamon Kelly, Kelly Towing**

Once again, over the past 12 months, vehicle recovery operator members continued to promote a high level of professionalism and standards in performing their recovery role throughout the country. This has been an ongoing objective for the sector and will continue to be the main focus. Vehicle recovery carries substantial insurance overheads for best practice operators. However, some fly-by-night operators transporting high-value vehicles and carrying customers are evading some of these overheads. The vehicle recovery operator sector would encourage those engaging the services of recovery operators to be more vigilant and not to avail of the services of the cheap option, which, in the long run could prove very costly. Recovery should not be based on price alone and SIMI members need to be completely satisfied with who they are dealing with. During the year, SIMI Director General, Alan Nolan, conducted the opening ceremony at the official launch of the International Federation of Recovery Specialists, which was held in Tullamore, Co Offaly. This event was attended by many SIMI members and recovery specialists and proved to be one of the biggest events ever held in Europe. Also in attendance was John Hawkins, the well-known recovery industry expert from the United States of America, who conducted various demonstrations throughout the day. The Vehicle Recovery Operators Committee continues to be very active in maintaining its reputation of high standards and professionalism.

#### **Related Associations**

The administration of the Irish Motor & Cycle Trades Golfing Association is carried out by the Society under the management of Con Dalton, Secretary of the Golfing Association. Successful outings took place during the year at Royal Tara, Navan; Hermitage, Lucan; Mount Wolseley Golf & Country Club, Co Carlow; and Portmarnock Golf Links, Dublin. The members also travelled to Warrenpoint Golf Club, Co Down, to compete against members from the Ulster Motor Trade. Once again, a very successful and busy golfing calendar was enjoyed by all members of IMCTGA. The development and welfare of BEN – the Motor & Allied Trades Benevolent Fund – was also fully supported by the Society and its members during the past year. In addition, over €5,000 was raised at the raffle held at the Annual Dinner in March. Many thanks to all who supported BEN during the year. Once again, the Sligo Centre held a very successful BEN Ball and we would like to thank them for their ongoing support in this, their 38th year of the event. The Chairman and Committee gratefully appreciate all support received throughout the year. Unfortunately, for the first time in the history of the Dublin BEN Ball, it had to be postponed due to the difficult economic climate during the year. The hope is that this is only a 'one-off' and the BEN Ball will be up and running again in the near future.

#### **Annual Dinner**

The Annual Dinner returned this year to the Burlington Hotel in March. Members and guests attended this prestigious event for the industry, with increased numbers on the previous year. SIMI President, Mike Finlay, extended a warm welcome to all present and delivered an excellent pre-dinner speech, which clearly caught the mood of the industry as he was enthusiastically received by the gathering.

In his speech, he stated that there were still many significant challenges facing the industry, but was upbeat and positive



**L-r: Alan Nolan, Director General SIMI; Liam Kelly, Kelly Recovery, Co. Wicklow; John Hawkins, Vice President of Sales of Miller Industries; and Con Dalton, Manager Membership & Events SIMI in attendance at the IFRS event in Tullamore.**

about the direction our industry is now moving in. On the evening, there were 20 SIMI Past Presidents in attendance and they, and all guests in attendance, thoroughly enjoyed the event while mingling with their industry colleagues. On this occasion the after-dinner speaker was well-known rugby analyst and commentator, Brent Pope, who provided some enjoyable after dinner entertainment.

#### **Annual Ecumenical Service**

The Annual Ecumenical Service in remembrance of those within the industry who have passed away during the year will take place this year at the Church of Our Lady Queen of Heaven, Dublin Airport at 10 am on Wednesday, May 12th. This service will take place prior to the Society's Annual General Meeting in the Radisson SAS Hotel, Dublin Airport on the same day.

Members are urged to make a special effort to attend this short annual remembrance service. Invitations are also issued to families of members who were bereaved during the past year.

# OBJECTIVE 9

## SIMI Membership

### Aims for 2010:

- To ensure that the Society's membership is strongly representative of all sectors of the Motor Industry in Ireland.
- To maximise the number of professional companies in membership; while maintaining high standards.
- To ensure that all employees of SIMI are a resource to members and are updated on key issues affecting all sectors.
- To ensure that all services are provided for members are of the highest quality and are delivered in a cost-effective and timely manner; to enhance these services and to develop appropriate additional services for the benefit of members.
- To develop a strong income stream from membership services and ensure that membership fees can remain cost-effective.
- To ensure that every member receives an on-site visit from an SIMI executive
- To ensure the success of [beepbeep.ie](http://beepbeep.ie) as a benefit to members and to ensure its financial success.
- To provide all members with up-to-date industry statistics through a modern yet easy-to-use interface on the SIMI website.

For all sectors of the Motor Industry, 2009 was a very difficult year. There was a significant decrease in the number of people employed in the industry. By the end of 2009, over 11,000 people had lost their jobs (from the period 2008-2009) and 70 members went out of business, including a number of high profile dealerships. Membership subscription rates were not increased in 2009, while the rates were reduced for 2010, and arrangements were put in place to facilitate members paying their subscription in instalments.

In 2010, under the guidance of Emma Byrne, Operations Manager, the membership strategy will be focused on visiting all members of the Society. The aim is that all members will receive a visit on their premises throughout 2010 and 2011. During these visits the member will be updated on key issues affecting that particular sector/area. The representative will become the contact point for that member and will ensure that all issues raised during that meeting are followed up on. These visits will be supported by ongoing communication through letters, faxes and increasingly through email, text messaging, [www.simi.ie](http://www.simi.ie) and social media. Members will be aware of the Society's increased use of emails, [www.simi.ie](http://www.simi.ie) and social media, such as Twitter, to make contact with, and distribute information to, members far more quickly. There is an ongoing and important project to update the Society's database to ensure that the most current contact details are recorded. Along with support given to members on financial and human resources issues, we helped many members with advice on the scrappage scheme introduced in 2010. We also successfully lobbied the government to remove the scrappage insurance anomaly which excluded a number of members of the public from qualifying for scrappage.

## Services

### Human Resources Support

The Society offers a free support service to every member of the Society in all human resources areas including staff induction, contracts of employment, health and safety, industrial relations, provision of advice, consultation and representation.

### Financial Advice

The Society offers free financial advice on VAT, VRT and other accounting issues to all current SIMI members. Following the introduction of the new VAT Margin Scheme,

which was negotiated by the Society with the Government, three series of seminars were held nationwide in July, December and February. These seminars were free of charge to members, with over 700 members attending. We have also assisted a number of members over the telephone with any VAT queries they may have.

### Consumer Complaints Service

The Society's Consumer Complaints Service mediates in disputes between member companies and their customers and may request the SIMI Retail Motor Industry Standards Tribunal to recommend a settlement to the company. This service is offered free of charge and is a benefit to the consumer. It gives them an additional reason to purchase from an SIMI member.



The Car History Check website was launched in March 2007 and has proved to be a vital service for the Motor Industry. A web-based service, it allows dealers to check the history of a vehicle in a matter of seconds, using only its registration number. This comprehensive check, based on a number of official sources, is designed to provide peace of mind in relation to the vehicle's history. In 2009, we had a record number of checks on [carhistorycheck.ie](http://carhistorycheck.ie) with over 200,000 checks processed. Of Irish cars checked for finance, 60% had outstanding finance. Over 36,000 checks were performed on cars that were registered at some point in the UK, 5% of which were recorded as scrapped or written off and 11% were recorded as having outstanding finance. We continue to develop the functionality and data available to dealers. We have recently integrated [carhistorycheck.ie](http://carhistorycheck.ie) with [beepbeep.ie](http://beepbeep.ie). This allows dealers to

pre-fill vehicle information based on the registration number. All vehicles on the site will automatically be checked through the Car History Check system. Also, dealers signed up to beepbeep.ie will automatically get access to carhistorycheck.ie. All checks will be free of charge to beepbeep.ie participants with only Irish finance checks being charged on a 'per check' basis.

## SIMI Insurance Scheme

### *Commercial Garage and Risk Management Programme*

The SIMI Insurance and Risk Control Programme in conjunction with our insurance brokers, Willis with Aviva, has led the way in reducing costs over the last number of years and is now being availed of by an increasing number of members. The scheme is designed to fit the insurance requirements of a motor retailer and provides the most comprehensive cover on the market for Motor Industry businesses. Members have seen the benefit in recent years in the Government reforms of the insurance sector in which SIMI was an active participant. This benefit has been manifested in the most practical manner possible with significant reductions in insurance premiums, although the last 12 months has seen some increases in premiums.

These reforms have seen the establishment of the PIAB (Personal Injuries Awards Bureau), which is having considerable success with the passing into law of the Courts and Civil Liabilities Act 2004. The PIAB is now known as the Injuries Board ([www.injuriesboard.ie](http://www.injuriesboard.ie)), and since its establishment, competition in the sector has intensified. Reductions in insurance premiums have been evident in recent years.

According to the Injuries Board, they have "have now made over 32,000 awards since we opened our doors in 2004, amounting to €730m in compensation. By delivering these awards four times faster and with a low administration charge, the injuriesboard.ie model has delivered direct and indirect savings of over €300m to the economy. The Board's services

are delivered at no cost to the Exchequer as it is funded through fees charged, by and large, to insurers. In 2010 we will continue to deliver an efficient service without an increase in the fees paid by claimants or respondents."

### *Member Visits*

Going forward, dedicated Membership Executives will be on the road four days a week calling into members across the country covering every sector of membership. This is part of a renewed focus on membership and will allow members to connect with the Society on a face-to-face basis, especially those whom we may not have had much contact with over recent years.

The visits will comprise of an update on work currently being done by SIMI as well as the latest services being provided by the Society to members, such as beepbeep.ie, training courses, HR/IR advice, Complaints Service etc. There will also be an opportunity for members to highlight any issue they may have with their membership or with the Motor Industry in general, which, in turn, will help to enhance our service to members. The SIMI Executive will endeavour to answer all queries either on-site or through another executive in the SIMI office. These visits, which commenced in February 2010, will take place throughout 2010 and into 2011 on a county-by-county basis and will also incorporate visits to new applicants' premises.



The last year has, at the request of members, seen the establishment of an exciting new car website, beepbeep.ie. This industry-backed used car website, launched in January 2010 on behalf of all SIMI dealer members, is already having a significant impact in a crowded online market. Members are offered a total solution for listing their used stock on a competitive, consumer-focused website backed up by an intensive online and traditional media national marketing campaign. In addition to the main beepbeep.ie website, members are also taking advantage of the integrated Car

History Check facilities, printed stock lists, stock brochures and stock-search plug-ins for their own sites.

One of the key strengths of SIMI membership is the power of collective action. Change on the scale required does not happen overnight and beepbeep.ie is a long-term project that has been developed to drive a permanent online solution for the legitimate Motor Industry. Being acutely aware of the financial constraints on many members, we have endeavoured to keep the costs associated with beepbeep.ie relatively low. This is only possible with high levels of participation and we would encourage any dealers not yet enjoying the benefits of beepbeep.ie to sign up. The more members we have using the site, the more successful it will be.

### *Statistics Service*

Since 1992, the SIMI has provided key management information to members and key market data to the press via its Statistics Service. This is a service provided by the Society to its members. Reports on vehicles registered by Revenue are delivered to members regularly. As well as regular reporting, the Society also facilitates members with any ad hoc queries they may have. This service is constantly under review and the Society is committed to ensuring the data is providing members with a high quality, accurate statistical service which is frequently updated. As part of its ongoing review, the Society committed to a new online statistics system, which is in development and will be delivered in the coming months. The project involves two distinct elements: (i), improvement in the data processing system and delivery of statistics for data processing professionals, and (ii), a new web-based delivery platform for industry, media and public users. The intention is to provide a flexible, user-friendly system to satisfy member and media needs for the future. The new system will give members access to a fast and easy-to-use system that will be kept up to date with crucial reports for the industry. The Statistics Service also provides distributors and dealers with the facility to print the CO<sub>2</sub> labels that are required by law to be displayed with new vehicles.

## OBJECTIVE 10

### People in the Industry and Human Resources

#### Aims for 2010:

- To develop and implement policies to ensure that the Motor Industry continues to attract and retain the required number of quality employees.
- To develop (in consultation with the SIMI National Training Committee) and implement training programmes designed to enhance the skills and professionalism of people in the industry, with funding support wherever possible.
- To work with FAS, FETAC, HETAC and the various colleges and other training professionals to improve the quality, availability and delivery of training in Ireland.
- To seek to address the challenges of cost, release and travel that can mitigate against training and development of employees in the industry.
- To develop co-operation in Europe on training, standards and qualifications.
- To support members in all human resources areas, including employment law, industrial relations, health & safety, and the provision of advice, consultation and representation for members at Rights Commissioner Hearings, the Labour Court and Employment Appeals Tribunal hearings.
- To develop a national strategy in relation to wages and conditions of employment through the work of the National Labour Committee.
- To highlight the development opportunities for young people in the Motor Industry through the promotion of career paths for employees in this sector, aimed at both attracting new entrants and at encouraging the retention of existing employees in the industry.

### Training in the Industry

As a consequence of the economic downturn, redundancies and general trading difficulties, 2009 saw a reduction in the demand for some of the standard short courses, such as sales training programmes, normally delivered by the Society. However, other training activity and training initiatives continued in 2009.

### Finance CPD

Since 2008, the Society has offered a series of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) modules for individuals who fall under the scope of the Financial Regulator's Minimum Competency Requirements; those who sell or provide advice on financial products such as payment protection insurance. To comply with the regulations, 60 hours of CPD must be completed over a three-year cycle. In 2009, approximately 100 participants attended Finance CPD courses. This training has continued in 2010, with the first CPD modules for 2010 held in March and April.

### VAT Margin Seminars

In early December 2009, the Society launched a series of workshops to give members an insight into the implication of the impending changes to the VAT Margin Scheme from January 2010. These important information seminars, presented by SIMI Finance Director/Secretary Brian Cooke, were held in Sligo, Athlone, Kilkenny, Mallow, Dublin and Donegal, and were attended by close to 700 delegates. Following confirmation of the Budget changes, further VAT Seminars, incorporating the Scrappage Scheme, were held in the same locations in February 2010. Updated Training Courses on the new VAT system run by BDO are scheduled to commence in May.



Pictured at a SIMI VAT Margin Seminar are (l-r): Stephen Usher, SIMI Membership Services Executive; Brian Cooke, SIMI Finance Director; and Emma Byrne, SIMI Operations Manager.

### Motor Industry Managers Programme

The application submitted by the Society and the Irish Management Institute to HETAC, the Higher Education Training Awards Council, for accreditation of the Motor Industry Managers Programme was approved. In the future, those who successfully complete the programme will receive a Level 7 award on the National Framework of Qualifications.

### ECVET European Credits for Vocational Education and Training

In 2007, the Society was invited to become a partner in a project set up by the European Commission. The aim of the project was to develop practical solutions to allow for the validation and recognition of learning outcomes gained in one training context/country to be recognised and incorporated in the trainee's National Qualification System. The finalisation of the project in November 2009 was marked by an international conference in Paris at which Margaret O'Shea, the Society's Training Manager made a presentation. Joe Clarke, Chairman of the SIMI Training Committee and Paul Linders of the Franchise Dealers Committee also attended.

## ECVET European Network Supporting Team

The Society is currently involved in another European Commission project which was launched in late December 2009 and will continue into 2011.

## Mobility/Work Experience Placements

As a result of the consistently high standards of performance of Irish apprentices in Worldskills and Euroskills events and the Society's involvement in EC projects, from time to time we are approached by training centres and Motor Industry organisations in other EU countries who would like their trainees to have the experience of working in Irish companies. In recent months, SIMI member companies have played host to apprentice motor mechanics from France, and a group of Romanian Motor Industry trainees. The Society has also organised a study visit for a group from a training centre in Gothenburg, Sweden and another from a training centre in Brittany, who plan an exchange with an Irish Institute of Technology.

## Industrial Relations and Human Resources Management Service

In the challenging times for the industry over the last 12 months there has been a significant increase in the number of calls to the SIMI Human Resources (HR) Service from members in need of advice and assistance. The main issues of concern that the service has dealt with have been in relation to the restructuring of businesses and the resulting need to reduce staff levels, implement pay cuts or reduce working hours.

During the last year, there was a noticeable rise in the numbers of cases taken by former employees against

members on the grounds of unfair dismissal, unfair selection for redundancy etc. The Society has continued to advise and represent members at the Labour Court, Employment Appeals Tribunal and Rights Commissioner hearings. The HR Service continues to provide members with advice on all aspects of compliance with employment law, health and safety legislation and human resource management. Through the SIMI newsletters, the SIMI website and the magazine, *Irish Motor Management*, the Society will provide updates to members on relevant changes or developments in employment regulations. Advice can be given in confidence by telephone, email or in person.

## SIMI Job Search

In late 2009, the NEC voted to launch an 'SIMI Job Search' service to put industry professionals who may have lost their jobs in touch with member companies who wish to recruit experienced Motor Industry staff. Since the beginning of 2010, the Society has seen an increase in the number of vacancies in member companies and are currently inviting experienced Motor Industry job seekers to forward their CVs to SIMI.

## Apprentice of the Year 2009

The competition for the title of 'SIMI Automobile Apprentice of the Year' took place in DIT, Bolton Street in May 2009. The overall winner for 2009 was Darren Quille from Cameron Stevens Motors, Naas. Darren was presented with his trophy by the then Deputy President of SIMI, Mike Finlay at the ceremony.

Later in the year, Darren vied with Colm Corcoran, the 2008 Apprentice of the Year, for selection as the Irish Automobile Technology Apprentice representative for the 2009 WorldSkills competition in Calgary, Canada. The competition takes place every two years. Colm was selected and went on to win the Gold Medal in September with a final score of 94% (a new record in the competition). He

also won gold for the 'best of nation' award and finished third overall in the competition.

Ireland's previous record of success in the Automobile Technician category of the WorldSkills competition is an enviable one. In 2003, Jonathan Strang won the Gold Medal. In 2005, Ross Wasson also won the Gold Medal. And, in 2007, Kieran Larkin won the Bronze Medal. This record emphasises the high standard of the apprenticeship system in Ireland and demonstrates the success of the co-operation between the Motor Industry and the educational stakeholders (Department of Education and Science, FÁS and the Institutes of Technology) in producing exceptional automobile technicians. The Society recognises that the current level of apprentice in the Motor Industry family of trades has dropped significantly – from 415 FÁS registered apprentice mechanics in 2008 down to 158 in 2009. As the industry begins to recover from the downturn of the last few years, it is important that employers in the industry continue to invest in the training and development of skilled technicians for the future. The Society will continue to work with FÁS and other government agencies to promote and support training and employment within the Motor Industry.



Pictured (l-r): Darren Quille, Cameron Stevens Motors, Naas being presented with the Apprentice of the Year trophy by Mike Finlay, the then Deputy President of the SIMI.

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Membership Services  
Executive



**Suzanne Sheridan**  
Press Officer



**Lisa Joyce**  
Statistics Officer



**Teresa Fagan**  
Customer Services Officer



**Paul Redmond**



**Lydia O'Donnell**  
Administration

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Dublin 2

**Auditors**

Ernst & Young, Harcourt St., Dublin 2

**Solicitors**

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**Insurance Brokers**

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**Publishers**

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