

the LOOP

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South Staffordshire Plc

KKR's infrastructure fund sells 25% of South Staffordshire Plc to the Mitsubishi Corporation

KKR's infrastructure fund has completed a 25% sale of South Staffordshire Plc to the Mitsubishi Corporation.

The Mitsubishi Corporation is a global trading company that operates businesses across a variety of industries, including a number of water businesses and related water technology in the Far East, Middle East and Australia.

Following the completion of the sale Mitsubishi has appointed Satoru Tamiya as a director on the Board of South Staffordshire Plc, and seconded two employees to the Group to effectively contribute to the delivery of our business

goals and share examples of good practice.

Nagi Suzuki is currently working in the Regulation team with Philip Saynor on a long-term placement with South Staffs Water, and Go Muromoto is working in SSI and Echo on developing new business opportunities. This will include introducing new technologies to the UK, working with other Mitsubishi companies in the UK and supporting potential overseas opportunities.

Adrian Page, Group Chief Executive, said: "There will be an opportunity to learn from them and to jointly develop new business in the UK and abroad.

"Other than these opportunities there is no impact of the sale on the operation, employees and the service we provide."

KKR retains its majority ownership of the Group.

Seedy Mill gets modern makeover

Imagine, if you will, what would happen if you put a modern turbo-charged engine into a Model T Ford? The results would be interesting, if somewhat unpredictable. Well something similar is currently under way at Seedy Mill Water Treatment Works.

Seedy Mill is South Staffs Water's second largest water treatment works. It takes water from Blithfield Reservoir, treats it and sends it to customers in Burton, Walsall and the area in between.

The works were originally built in the 1950s and, despite numerous modifications and extensions, still basically operated using the same technology and processes.

Since then, however, water quality requirements have changed dramatically as science has improved.

To address this a new 21st century ultraviolet light treatment process is being retro-fitted into the original 1950s structure.

This process uses ultraviolet light to disinfect the water as it passes through, and ensures any bacteria or viruses are destroyed.



This has the advantage of reducing the amount of chlorine needed to kill the bugs, and as a result, there is less chance of taste problems with the final water.

The plant has been installed by IWS in partnership with South Staffs Water and is now one of the largest of its type in the UK.

It has been designed and built in a fraction of the usual time required and is a new benchmark for excellent co-operation and collaboration between the two companies.

Challenges which had to be overcome to deliver the project included major modifications to old concrete structures, and ensuring that water would still flow through the existing pipelines without restriction when the new process was introduced.

In addition, water quality parameters which the works has never measured before, are now being used to successfully control the new process.

In short, this Model T Ford is handling its turbo-charged engine with gusto!



Hydrosave New Technologies keep Heathrow flying safely

Heathrow Airport is the busiest passenger airport in Europe and ranked 12th in the world with an average of 1,400 flights taking off and landing each day.

The 12km² facility is protected by a fire main which pumps surface water stored in a lagoon at the south eastern end of the site through pipework ranging in diameter from 4 inches up to 24 inches at a pressure of 5 bar.

Historically, maintenance has been on a reactive basis due to the risks associated with isolating sections of the pipework, and limited knowledge of the asset's condition.

During the summer of 2015, Hydrosave performed Injection Repacks - a method to stop leakage from a live valve using our patented ValvePAK™ system – in two deep chambers which were causing issues to the road system, and were deemed to be critical by Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL).

Following the success of this project, HAL instructed its Tier 1 partners to identify other Hydrosave services which could assist them in maintaining and operating the fire main system.

Within the past couple of months, Hydrosave has successfully performed two valve releases using its bespoke HydroV system, and carried out an in-situ repair of a 16 inch gate valve.

The latter involved removing the internal components of the valve and reassembling the body to ensure the asset was safe, while IWS Accrington re-engineered the damaged internal components.

Once finished, the valve was disassembled once more, the new parts installed and the valves reassembled. This procedure was completed within the chamber and there was no requirement to isolate the pipe other than for a one hour period while the bonnet was off.

The savings based on cost of repair against the traditional procedure of digging and isolating the valve is estimated to be in the region of £20,000.

Based on this success, Hydrosave is now in the process of surveying a further 163 valves in the British Airways section and a further 50 valves in other parts of the airport.

The strategy is to assess the condition and then address any issues using HydroV, ValvePAK™ or SSI Specialist Services.

This is one example of a breakthrough into a large organisation using our new technical services division SSI Test, Inspect, Consult.



Outstanding Leadership and Management Award for Echo's Karen Banfield

Echo's Bristol based contact centre director Karen Banfield was recently recognised in the 2016 Bristol and Bath Women in Business Awards. Karen received the award for Outstanding Leadership and Management; having faced fierce competition from a number of other well deserving finalists within the category.

Speaking about Karen's achievement, the judges said that her "clear leadership and the high staff retention rates achieved in such a flexible working environment really stood out as reasons why she won."

Karen, who began her career as a customer service advisor and worked her way up the ladder, added "I am absolutely delighted to win the award for outstanding leadership and

management; particularly having seen the other two finalists in this category. It means a great deal to be recognised and I feel particularly fortunate to have been included in an awards process that recognises the achievements of women in business."

Karen Banfield, Echo



New client wins and further award recognition

Echo Bristol has recently embarked on several new client partnerships and launched new campaigns for existing clients.

- Echo was chosen to manage The Standards & Testing Agency helpline which provides targeted support and advice on tests and assessments across the national curriculum, from the early years' foundation stage, up to Key Stage 3.
- RAF Museums has appointed Echo to assist with its 'Names on a Plane' campaign, which aims to raise money to transform the museum's visitor experience, marking the organisation's centenary. Echo is managing the campaign helpline, and dealing with day-to-day enquiries and queries around online donations and orders.
- Echo has been working with The Electoral Commission for the past five years and as well as handling the information helpline ahead of the



UK May elections this year, has also been appointed to run the 2016 EU referendum campaign helpline.

- The Society for Education and Training (SET), a professional membership organisation that supports practitioners working in the post-16 education and training sector, has chosen Echo to provide its first line membership enquiry service for members.
- Bristol based OVO Energy has selected Echo to handle its out of hours emergency calls.

The Echo Bristol team has also recently received yet further recognition, being shortlisted for five South West Contact Centre Forum Awards – outsourced contact centre of the year, best use of technology, Robert Carter-Edwards in the contact centre of the year category, Nathan Barton in the support manager of the year category and Simon Thatcher for trainer of the year. The awards ceremony takes place in June and we wish all the finalists the very best of luck.

About Echo Bristol



Echo's multi-tenanted contact centre operation is based in Bristol city centre, where around 100 staff are based. The operation currently manages 26 separate multi-channel customer contact campaigns on behalf of a wide range of clients including The Financial Times, The Standards and Testing Agency, The Electoral Commission, The Dogs Trust, Barchester Healthcare, National Apprenticeships Service and The Guardian.

New research reveals **what customers really want** when it comes to customer service...

Echo recently surveyed 1,000 people in the UK to reveal their customer service preferences and thoughts.

The results were outlined in a new research report: *Maintaining the human touch in customer service: what your customers want in a world full of contact channels*. The report can be downloaded from the Echo website and has been of great interest to the media, receiving 52 separate pieces of coverage in a wide

range of industry and general business press publications.

To read the report visit: www.echo-ms.com/knowledge-centre/research/maintaining-the-human-touch-in-customer-service

In May, Echo launched a new research report entitled *Counting the cost of debt recovery*. Visit the Knowledge Centre area of Echo website to download the report.



Growing the business together

Business development is a great example of where we can all contribute valuable information and insight that can lead to new business growth. How can you help?

Well, your own customer service experiences, personal connections and relationships could all help in the identification of potential new clients. For example:

- Do you have contacts within previous employers who may be interested in hearing about Echo's customer contact services?
- How about family and friends – do they work in a relevant role, or know anyone who does?
- Have you recently suffered a really bad contact centre experience? Tell us who it was with, and what went wrong. They may well be in need of our expertise!

In short, you can help us grow simply by sharing what you already know with us. Pick up the phone (01922 728716) or email us at ask@echo-ms.com. Thank you!

Echo team members recognised at prestigious industry awards ceremony

We are delighted to announce that Kevin O'Neill, Customer Liaison Team Manager at Echo's Northern Ireland site, won the silver award for 'Customer Experience Champion' at the CCMA UK National Contact Centre Awards on 18 May.

Kevin leads Echo Northern Ireland's Customer Liaison team, who adopt a customer-centric approach to collections for our client Northern Ireland Water; visiting customer premises and working through issues face-to-face to deliver not only customer service benefits but also revenue increases.

We'd also like to congratulate Kerry Hastings, Lead Training Advisor at our Walsall operation, who was shortlisted as a finalist in the hotly contested Learning and Development Champion category. Kerry was recognised by the CCMA for her role in leading learning and development within our Walsall contact centre, which has been pivotal to continued success throughout a period of change.

The UK National Contact Centre Awards, now in its 20th year, recognises individuals in the customer experience industry who are role models, striving to ensure their workplace is professional and industry leading.





Dinner Dance fundraiser tops the success of last year

In January, South Staffs Water held another successful WaterAid Dinner Dance fundraiser at the fabulous Hilton at St George's Park, home to the FA training ground.

The evening was packed with entertainment, starting with a champagne reception followed by the classic True or False game, a three course meal and an auction. We also welcomed back the live band 'Punch the Air' to close the evening.

A new fun touch for the evening was the photobooth, where guests were invited to dress-up and have their photo taken.

Another exciting addition to the evening was guest speaker Graham Poll, a former Premier League referee. After the meal, Graham revealed what goes on behind the scenes - and what it takes to control 22 millionaires running around a field. Plenty of laughs were had by all and the talk was a real treat for all the football fans in the room.

Overall, we raised an impressive £24,960, doubling the amount last year. This was achieved mostly through the generosity of all our sponsors for the event. We were also able to double all money raised on the evening by taking part in WaterAid's Deliver Life Campaign which is match funded by the UK Government, meaning every £1 raised, up to £5 million, would be doubled.

A huge thank you to all of our sponsors on the evening, particularly IWS our diamond sponsor, and KKR our platinum sponsor; without whom we would not have been able to raise such important funds for WaterAid.

Thank you also to Steve Perks, Customer Liaison Manager (SSW) who did a fantastic job MCing the

event and being our auctioneer. And, Caroline Wakelin WaterAid's Water Industry Partnerships Manager – Midlands and East Anglia, who provided an inspiring talk giving us an insight into the Deliver Life campaign and how it is helping those in developing countries.

Finally, thank you to our volunteers on the evening and organisers of the event: Leanne Allen, Alice Horton, Chris Watson (SSW), Emma Redfern (SSI Services), and Laura Middleton-Padgham (WaterAid) for working hard to make this event a success.

 **WaterAid**


South Staffs Water



Left to right: Dame Floella Benjamin, Martin Vickers and Sir Christopher Pitchers – Chairman of Trustees for Beating Bowel Cancer.

Martin Vickers receives national award for his charity work

Martin Vickers, head of Capital Investment Delivery at South Staffs Water picked up an ‘Achievement Award’ from the charity Beating Bowel Cancer at their annual ‘Patient Day’ on 16 April.

Martin was presented with his award by the charity’s Patron, actress and TV presenter Dame Floella Benjamin at the event, which took place at the Royal College of Surgeons in London.

The day is dedicated to bowel cancer patients and their families, who come together to hear the latest developments in tackling the disease, attend workshops and meet others in similar situations.

Martin, a father of four and grandfather of two, visited his GP five times in 9 months suffering from extreme tiredness and looser stools before finally being referred to hospital for tests. He was eventually diagnosed as having stage 3 bowel cancer and underwent three months of chemotherapy and radiotherapy to shrink the tumour before it was surgically removed. This was then followed by a further six months of chemotherapy and a second operation.

The last six years of recovery have been a long journey, however, Martin is now in full remission from the disease and is a regular fundraiser for Beating Bowel

Cancer. He even celebrated his five year ‘all clear’ by taking part in a world record breaking tandem parachute jump in 2014 in aid of the charity.

Talking about his award, Martin said: “I’m proud to be able to give something back to the charity after the tremendous support they gave me when I was first diagnosed with bowel cancer. Their information and support was invaluable at a very difficult time for me.

“I feel extremely honoured and proud to be receiving this award. Raising awareness of the disease and its symptoms is so important to me and if I can reach out to as many people as possible through my fundraising and other activities I’ll have made a difference.”

Martin was nominated for the award by Beating Bowel Cancer’s community fundraiser, Sajedah Patel. She said: “As well as his parachute jump, Martin has taken part in our Decembeard fundraising campaign for the past four years and assisted four of his friends

last year in a Coast to Coast bike ride. He is always up for anything and has got his colleagues at South Staffs Water to volunteer their time for charity collections and regularly shakes a bucket for us. Overall Martin has raised more than £15,000 for us to date.

“He really is inspirational and truly deserves this award for all his efforts and determination. We can’t thank him enough”

Bowel cancer is the UK’s second biggest cancer killer. Each year more than 41,000 people are diagnosed with the disease, but if caught early, more than 90% of cases can be treated successfully.

If you have any queries or concerns about bowel cancer, you can visit beatingbowelcancer.org



Jason Keeps Right On

In 2014 Jason Stephenson from OnSite pledged to do a challenge every month from October 2014 to September 2015. His mission was to raise funds and awareness for Huntington's Disease (HD) and Cancer Research.

Huntington's disease is a hereditary disease that affects the central nervous system. Jason's wife Jane was diagnosed with the condition in 2012. It has already taken her father and uncle and now affects her older brother and some cousins. There is also the prospect that their daughter may contract the disease. Here Jason tells the story of a year that's been challenging in more ways than one:

Wow, what a year that just flew by! Because of commitments at home some of my challenges had to be altered, but I did it and completed a challenge every month. I have even decided to carry on...

October 2014

- Completed the Birmingham Half Marathon dressed as the Honey Monster. Very warm!

November 2014

- Charity football match - I play for Sheepy Old Boys who only play in matches to try and raise funds. This match raised over £2000 which was used to take my family on holiday to Turkey in August. The final score was Sheepy Old Boys 1 - Sheepy Farmers 0.

December 2014

- Completed Santa runs on two consecutive days.

January/February 2015

- Completed the Tour of Sufferlandria (TOS) – from the relative 'discomfort' of my own home. The TOS requires you to ride a stationary training bike on nine consecutive occasions, ranging from one hour to three hours. During this time you watch a video course of cycling tours and compete with people all over the world.

March 2015

- Completed five half marathons - Coventry, Milton Keynes, Silverstone, Forest of Dean and Warwick.

April 2015

- Cycled from St Andrew's Football Stadium in Birmingham to The Stadium of Light in Sunderland, covering 250 miles over three days. I am a Birmingham City supporter and my late father was a big Sunderland fan.

May 2015

- Completed the biggest obstacle race in the world – known as the Dirty Weekend at Burghley House in Lincolnshire – with Mark Abbot from OnSite. We tackled more than 200 obstacles over 20 miles of tough terrain.

June 2015

- Completed the Woolacombe Half Marathon; played football with the Sheepy Old Boys in Germany (lost 4-2) and completed the Worcestershire Way Walk - a very hilly 30 miles with Steve Brown from OnSite.

July 2015

- This month was a mini triathlon with my daughter Devan, which included a one mile swim, a 20 mile bike ride and a 5km run.

August 2015

- I was on holiday for most of the month but fitted in the Atherstone 10K, plus I completed a 10 mile hike in 45 degree heat to the ghost town just outside of Olu Deniz in Turkey.

September 2015

This was the hardest month as I completed three challenges that were immense!

- Man vs Mountain - a 20 mile run from Caernarfon Castle on the north Wales coast to Mount Snowdon. I went up and down the mountain before completing an obstacle course and a swim in LLanberis.
- Knight of Sufferlandria – this involved completing 10 cycling videos back to back on a turbo trainer, all of which were at least an hour long! I started at 4am and finished at 3pm and cycled a distance of 145 miles.
- Completed the Loch Ness Marathon which was 26.2 miles of stunning scenery but the highlands are hilly!

October 2015

- I completed the Birmingham Half Marathon again dressed as the Honey Monster complete with Budgey smugglers - and beat last years' time by 40 mins.

It's been an interesting and unusual year. I have raised nearly £4000 for charity and have had to finish work to become a full time carer.

I want to thank everyone who has sponsored me and a special thanks to everyone at OnSite and Perco who supported me over the past few years. Good luck to you all.

You can still sponsor me at uk.virginmoneygiving.com/keeprighton

Here's to the challenges that lie ahead!

Jason Stephenson

£250
HOLIDAY
WINNER



Collage of photographs produced by Jason to showcase his year of fundraising.





Cancer...we're coming to get you (again)

Everyone knows someone who has been affected by cancer and for me it's a little closer to home.

In 2006 my life took a turn for the worst when my mom, Sue, was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. She underwent a hysterectomy and began an intensive course of radiotherapy. After 3 months we were told that the cancer had gone. Hallelujah!

But in November 2009, mom found a lump on her breast and we were told that she had stage 2 breast cancer. In 2011, following intensive chemotherapy we were told she has beaten the disease for the second time. Woo hoo. This woman is incredible!

Then in August 2014, the day after my brother's wedding, tragedy struck again when my mom suffered a mini stroke. Arriving at her house to see how her hangover was, I noticed her face had started to droop. She couldn't string a sentence together or lift her arm, thinking this is more than just a hangover, I immediately remembered the FAST TV advert, and dialled 999. After a few days in hospital mom had made a full recovery and was allowed home. Three weeks later she was back at work.

So, two rounds of cancer and a mini stroke and mom was still smiling. Surely there couldn't be any more for the world to throw at us... Right?!

Wrong! On 26 April this year my mom received more bad news that the cancer was back and this time it was in her vertebrae. Secondary breast cancer in the bones. I'll be honest, this knocked me to the ground. I was not expecting these results. What has my mom done to deserve this?!

Before we got this news my friends and I decided to do 'Pretty Muddy Race for Life 5k' at Weston Park,

£250
HOLIDAY
WINNER



Kay Reid (far right) and friends taking on the 'Pretty Muddy Race for Life 5k'.

Staffordshire, to help raise money for Cancer Research. Now I had even more incentive to tackle the course and raise as much as possible, so that hopefully one day, there will be a cure for this disease.

On Saturday 30 April we arrived at Weston Park as the heavens opened. After 10 minutes it was gone but this meant that the course had just got a whole lot muddier. There were six of us going by the team name of 'Dirty Divas' and after raising over £700 between us, we were ready to get down and dirty. And that's just what we did.

The first few obstacles weren't too bad. A hop over some bright pink inflatables and a leap over the "Durdles" into a small slippery muddy foot pool... simple! But when we had to crawl under cargo nets over mud pits, then

wade through ankle deep mud and up a slushy muddy hill things got a whole lot tougher.

Finally, the end was in sight and two obstacles were in our way - the mud pool and the inflatable slide.

Two men with buckets were throwing water over the women as they attempted to cross. "If you don't commando crawl you get the bucket" they bellowed, so me and my friends jumped in under the net and commando crawled to the other side. We were soaked... EVERYTHING was wet! The only thing left was the slide. In wet muddy clothes we queued for 20 minutes. It was at this point I had to remind myself why I was doing this. The six of us went down together, landing in another muddy pool!

Now, TOTALLY covered in mud, we picked ourselves up out of the pool (and fell back over again) and made our way to the finish line! WE DID IT!

What a fantastic experience we had. I would definitely recommend it and cannot wait to do it again next year. Maybe next time we will tackle the 10k.

If you would like to donate then please go to www.justgiving.com/kayreid

Kay Reid
Group Services





Left to right: Dharmender Rai, Jasvinder Sira, Amy Clark, David Lord, Mark Bunting, Jon Wood and Mark Hatton.

Wolf Run a howling success for charity

A team of intrepid runners from Group Services took part in the Wolf Run in Warwickshire on 9 April.

The team took to the mud to raise money in support of Jonny Dean's Fundraising Events, raising £1,333 in the process. Jonny Dean was nine months old when he was diagnosed with a neuroblastoma and his family are raising money to send him to America for preventative treatment.

Despite the cold, wet weather all members of the team managed to complete the 10 kilometre run, which takes place over wild, muddy terrain and includes a number of gruelling obstacles. It wasn't easy and it wasn't pretty at times, but huge congratulations to the entire team:

- Mark Hatton
- Jon Wood
- Mark Bunting
- Amy Clark
- David Lord
- Jasvinder Sira
- Dharmender Rai

Despite the first person finishing in just over an hour, the GS Alpha Wolves team took their time to fully enjoy the course (going down the water slide twice) and completed it in just over two hours. David deserves a special mention for being one of only 30 people to have completed the monkey bar obstacle (although, due to his height, it could be argued that most of the bars were within easy reach for him).

The team particularly enjoyed watching Amy and Mark H looking like Bambi on ice as they tried to run in the mud, and David's dive bomb into the final mud pond at the end which showered the team (and some of the spectators).

For more information about Jonny Dean visit www.facebook.com/Jonny-Deans-Fund-Raising-Events-1461966944111817/?fref=photo





BEFORE



AFTER



Journey under the knife for Becky

When she was 15, Becky James, who now works in Purchase Ledger at South Staffordshire PLC, had an accident which left her with a bump on her nose. Fed up with feeling insecure about her appearance Becky finally decided to take the plunge and on 20 December went under the knife to have rhinoplasty surgery. Here she tells her story.

After finally making up my mind to have surgery on my nose the next step was to break the news to my partner and family, because I knew they wouldn't agree. However after a few disagreements I got their blessing and my journey began.

I started by googling plastic surgeons and eventually arranged a consultation with 'MYA' in Birmingham. I was asked what procedure I wanted and why, and having explained my reasons, was told the surgeon, Dr Frati, would perform a 'Closed Rhinoplasty' on me.

When I got home, I searched online and found lots of good reports about Dr Frati. People had even nicknamed him 'the hands of God.'

I took my partner along with me for my next consultation, because I wanted another opinion. Dr Frati explained he would have to break both sides of my nose and make two incisions. I would also need to be off work a week.

We were happy with the consultation so I decided to set a date.

On 20 December my big day finally arrived and I went to the First Trust Hospital in Preston for surgery having fasted from midnight. Typically, the night before had been the staff Christmas party.

My surgery wasn't until 4pm, so there was a lot of waiting around while they checked my blood pressure and what meds I was on. Dr Frati went over some last minute details then finally they were ready .. wow... ok...I thought, here I go!

I laid down on the bed so the anaesthetist could inject me with something that would make me "feel a bit drunk." At first I felt sick then I started to feel a bit tipsy... and then... GONE!

I woke up two hours later feeling very cold, shivery and sick with a sore throat. I had a splint on my nose and felt very congested, but not in pain.

My first night was hell... I couldn't sleep because I had to sit in an almost upright position to prevent me lying on my side and potentially disfiguring my nose. My nose kept bleeding and I felt anxious about what it would look like.

Fortunately when I got home I had my very helpful six-year-old daughter and mom to look after me, which was lovely. We celebrated Christmas as normal but I didn't enjoy Christmas dinner because I couldn't taste it. On Boxing Day my nose was terribly itchy, but this was good because I knew it was healing.

Ten days later I went to get my splint removed. It was nerve-wracking and I barely slept a wink. The nurse moistened the tape around my nose then peeled the splint off.

Then there was the unveiling. Lots was going through my head: What if I don't like it? What would I say? It took me a few minutes to pluck up the courage to look in the mirror but I loved it straight away and the bump had gone. Wahy! I was told the swelling can take up to a year to go down, but a lot will subside after three months.

It still hurts a tiny bit around the bridge if it's accidentally knocked and my inner nostrils itch like crazy from time to time. There are also two red dots either side of my nose where the surgeon had to break and reset it, but overall I am one very happy Becks!

My only regret is not having it done sooner. I love my new nose and I no longer hate having a photo taken. My advice to anyone thinking about having cosmetic surgery is to weigh up the pros and cons. There are many risks involved, but in my experience it has been well worth it.

Becky James
Group Services



A year in the Dojang

by Paul Madigan in Group Services

October 2014, my son was at the Tae Kwon-Do Association of Great Britain (TAGB) grading centre in Bristol being examined for his 1st Dan black belt. He was 10 years old...and it got me thinking...

Over the years he'd been training at the local club in Lichfield, and progressing through the grades, we saw his ability, attitude, focus, determination and perseverance grow.

He earned his black belt, not just on that day in Bristol but over the four years of learning the Korean martial art. Partly as an incentive to keep him training and partly for my own wellbeing following a medical condition I was recovering from, I decided to give it a go myself.

Starting anything new can be daunting, but once I'd made the mental commitment to train twice per week things started to come together.

Beginners start with a white belt (10th Kup) progressing through 10 gradings to reach black belt (1st Dan). From there 2nd Dan can be achieved three years later, 3rd Dan a minimum of 3 years after that, and on so the 9th Dan Masters have been in training for a long time.

First the basics: simple stances, punches and blocks built into a series of steps, called patterns, progressively increasing in complexity from belt to belt.

Gradually kicks are also introduced and incorporated into the patterns as sparring techniques are developed. Sparring itself is semi contact, with head, hand, foot, and shin protection. Now, grading is one thing, but what better way to challenge yourself than in competition?



North Midland championships (2015) at the Derby Arena.



Top: Paul Madigan (far right) wearing his bronze medal at the North Midland championships 2015, standing next to gold medallist James Hill (who used to work for Aqua Direct).

Below: Paul Madigan (on the left) won second place at the British Championships 2015 standing with Gold medallist Darrin McDowall (Prestwick & Ayr).

The English Open at the Worcester Arena was my first competition in March 2015. I had been to a few previously as a spectator, but it was a very different experience as a competitor, checking screens and listening for running orders while watching and supporting other club members and then finding space to warm up and get used to the feel of the floor. Looking to gain as much experience as possible, I opted for both patterns and sparring, earning second place in both.

Bitten by the competition bug, I entered the Welsh Open Championships at the University of Cardiff in May, a week after earning my 8th Kup (yellow belt). I was probably too eager to try my new pattern and missed out on a medal in both patterns and sparring.

Over the following months I entered three regional competitions: Midlands, South East and North Midlands, amassing three silver and four bronze

medals before the culmination of the year's events, the British Championships at the new Derby Arena at the end of November. As Europe's largest martial competition, attracting an estimated 1,200 competitors, it lived up to its billing.

Competition was intense. My pattern went well putting me into the play off, but a slight mistake cost a placing. Sparring followed and I found myself once again in the final, this time against a 6th Kup (green belt). After a good start I took a punch to the ribs and never fully recovered, picking up only a couple more points, coming away with the second place trophy. Once the adrenaline had subsided the onsite medics diagnosed a burst capillary in my eye and broken big toe! Sore but delighted.

Back in Lichfield, two final events brought the year to a close. I gained my 7th Kup (green stripe) belt at December's grading, then at the club's presentation evening I was awarded the competitor of the year trophy.

As the New Year starts, focus returns to preparations for the biggest event in the Tae Kwon-Do calendar, the 2016 World Championships which are coming back to England and are to be held at Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena in July. I can't wait!

All in all, 2015 was one of the most rewarding, active and healthy years I've ever had and I haven't regretted the decision to follow in my son's footsteps into the Dojang for one moment.



1:1min interview

Andrew Smith, Contracts Supervisor, Omega Red

1) What's the best part of your job and why?

Being relatively young myself and coming through the apprenticeship scheme with Omega, I like to try and progress the engineers younger than myself with the hope of them creating a successful career for themselves.

2) What's the worst part of the job and why?

Trying to schedule jobs onto the engineers' labour board (square pegs and round holes!)

3) Describe your journey to work.

Relatively short with not much excitement.

4) What was your first ever job?

Apprentice lightning conductor fitter for a competitor.

5) What's your dream job?

Professional footballer.

6) What personal items decorate your desk/place of work?

My Newcastle United mug.

7) What's the proudest achievement in your current job?

Becoming the senior supervisor for the Omega Nottingham branch.

“Stay safe, stay sharp.”

8) Where did you go on your last holiday?

Tunisia (won't be rushing back there).

9) What was the last album you bought?

Ed Sheeran.

10) What's your favourite film and TV programme?

Favourite films are the Rocky films and favourite TV programme is Prison Break.

11) What's your favourite quote?

“Stay safe, stay sharp”.

12) Who do you most admire and why?

From a working perspective it would be Dave Willetts who brought me to Omega as a young spotty teenager. (He has given me a tenner to say this).



Andrew Smith, Omega Red