

Paul Watson: A real driving force in the technician profession

When institutions like Siemens, Ford, IET, and Solid Edge recognise the value of a project enough to become an official partner, then you know you are onto something special, and that's the case with The Greenpower Challenge¹, which is organised by the Greenpower Education Trust. The trust is a UK-based charity with an outstanding record of inspiring students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related subjects through motorsport. The challenge, where students design and build an electric car to race, has become an acknowledged success on a number of levels for Eyemouth High School (EYHS) thanks to the vision and efforts of their technical technician – Paul Watson.

Paul began his technician career on the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) in the late 1980s. The training on this apprenticeship covered both technical and IT disciplines. His commitment and efforts during his apprenticeship years led him to be rewarded with the offer of the first technical technician post at EYHS in the Scottish Borders, where he is still based to this day.

As well as covering technical and IT needs within the school, Paul has always helped to run extra-curricular clubs, initially becoming involved with the Duke of Edinburgh award by running a Woodworking Skills unit for pupil participants. From this initial start, Paul's extra-curricular efforts grew over the years, further supporting links with college courses and feeder primary schools with STEM-related activities and events.

A fortuitous visit by Borders College to Eyemouth in 2018 introduced Paul to the world of Greenpower and the challenge of building and racing electric kit cars. Paul was hooked on the idea from the offset, envisaging how this could be used to encourage and stimulate pupils' interests in engineering and the technical disciplines. When Paul presented this idea to the Senior Leadership Team of EYHS, they could also see the merits and benefits of the Greenpower initiative for the school.



However, as always, there was the question of funding, but this did not deter Paul. He was determined and successfully raised funds in order to allow EYHS to purchase their first electric kit car. Seeking help from Tesco via their community grant scheme and perhaps taking the lead from Formula One, sponsorship packages were created. These packages gave businesses the opportunity to have advertising space on the car, with a welcome pack including a team-signed and framed image of the car, invitations to functions at the school and regular updates.

From the initial beginnings, and thanks to the efforts of Paul and the ongoing support of EYHS, the project continues apace; EYHS now have two cars in different racing categories. But Paul will always say the success is due to the pupils' efforts and sees himself very much in a supporting role. Rarely will you actually see a photo of him with the team!

[1] <https://www.greenpower.co.uk/schools>



To him, success is not just about technical proficiency but also about the life skills of teamwork, communication, planning etc., that the pupils learn along the way.

Like many engineering heroes, Paul is a most unassuming individual, preferring to let students and their work take centre stage. But his enthusiasm and pro-activeness have not gone unrecognised, and he has been acknowledged with awards, both in the workplace, #YourPartAwards and externally within the community as the Rotary Eyemouth and District Community Champion for Special Service.

When you speak to Robin Chapman, the Head Teacher of EYHS, about Paul, words and phrases such as 'an amazing contribution', 'much valued' and 'brings real quality' come into the conversation repeatedly, and the senior management team at EYHS have fully supported and enabled Paul in his career.

The impact of the cars does not stop at this stage. The cars are not just kept and utilised for technical or other STEM subjects. Paul's desire to leverage the maximum benefit for the school and its pupils has meant that these cars have been used in other departments, for example, art for design aspects and music for background tracks in social media videos. So, this is not just a technical success story but one owned by the entire school community.

But it has to be said that trophies are nice, and the team added to their already extensive trophy collection with a "home" victory, winning the Jim Clark Trust EV Trophy at Thirlestane Castle; at the Sir Jackie Stewart Classic in June 2022 and future plans see further racing in September. Furthermore, it is hoped to organise visits to primary schools to further promote this STEM-related area in the near future.

A final word on Paul's achievement. Thomas Edison is reported to have once stated that "there is no substitute for hard work", and this is certainly the case here. Paul's commitment, expertise, and time underpin this success. Be it driving to events, updating social media, running workshops, and supervising builds; Paul regularly goes 'above and beyond'. He sees this as a down payment on those unsung heroes that he encountered during his education, who imparted to him their expertise and life skills. We are fortunate that many people in our society, like Paul believe in trying to give something back to the community where they live and work. This is something we should all be grateful for, and it is nice to be able to say a simple thank you to one such hero!

The article was written by Caroline Butler

