

The future of mechanics in an electric car world

People may question whether there will still be a future for mechanics as the electric car movement continues to make headway. Electric cars are not the only threat to traditional mechanical skills, however.



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As cars become ever more sophisticated, technological ability becomes a necessity for the people working with them. As we progress further, it's likely that artisanal skills will be replaced by skills like coding and data analysis.

But, according to Pieter Niemand, national director of the Motor Industry Workshop Association (MIWA), this doesn't mean that the need for artisanal skills will disappear altogether.

"True, electronic cars are set to become a more common feature on our roads in the next 10 years or so. But the reality is with vehicles becoming increasingly more complex, workshop technicians, or mechanics as we know them, will not only have to be able to work on brakes, suspension and the like, but also have the necessary tech skills to manage high tech cars which are literally becoming like a computer on wheels. There is no doubt the motor industry has much to offer enthusiastic young, bright people eager to learn and wanting to make money," says Niemand.

He says as technology becomes ever more advanced – and not only in relation to electronic cars – it's imperative that

mechanics invest in upskilling on an ongoing basis. It's the responsibility of employers and employees alike to ensure that they remain abreast of the latest developments.

As much as a third of the curriculum has been updated already, and it's vital that mechanics are familiar with these changes. "The good news is that opportunities for such upskilling abound," says Niemand.



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That's reassuring for petrol and motor mechanics. But opportunities remain for diesel mechanics, too. While it's true that opportunities in the motor sector may change as advancements progress, especially in the light vehicle space, there are many other areas where diesel mechanics can add their skills, such as marine diesel engines, fixed base diesel engines, and diesel locomotives.

The medium and heavy vehicle space will certainly remain in need of mechanics' skills, as the long distances undertaken by these vehicles mean that there is always a great need for repair and maintenance work. Added to this, the lifespan of such vehicles is significantly longer than their lighter counterparts.

Also important to bear in mind is the cost factor, which makes electronic technology out of reach for many South Africans. It may, therefore, be more prudent to focus on the soft hybrid market, and for mechanics to upskill themselves with these vehicles in mind.

In the meantime, MIWA in conjunction with the RMI has done much to ensure that premium quality training is available for members of the automotive aftermarket industry. The RMI has also set up a self-employment project known as the New Venture Creation Project, which provides training modules for learners, allowing them to complete a 138-credit qualification which is accredited by merSETA.

A large number of participants on this programme operate businesses where the core activity is mechanical. MIWA recognise and acknowledge the support and assistance for these entrepreneurs

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