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Blenheim boys of Epsom under the hood

20 November 2026



Sixth form students at Blenheim High School in Epsom are getting a practical introduction to car maintenance thanks to a partnership with a motor dealership located just across the road.

Shelly Motors, the family-run Kia dealership on the Longmead Industrial Estate, opposite the school on Longmead Road, is putting its mechanical expertise to work in a six-week programme designed to give young people the confidence to look after their own vehicles.

Technicians from the dealership will guide Year 12 and 13 students through everyday motoring tasks, including checking tyre condition, changing a wheel, topping up essential fluids, replacing windscreen wipers and checking lights.

For many sixth formers, learning to drive is an important step towards independence. Yet while driving lessons prepare young people for the road, they do not necessarily equip them with the practical skills needed when something goes wrong with the car.

The programme is particularly timely as winter approaches, bringing shorter days, slippery roads and increased demands on vehicle maintenance.

But the initiative has another potential benefit: introducing young people to careers in an automotive industry facing a continuing shortage of skilled technicians.

A trade looking for the next generation

The Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI), the professional body for the sector, has warned that automotive apprenticeships remain around 20 to 25 per cent below pre-pandemic levels, despite the industry's growing need for skilled workers.

Its 2026 research indicated that apprenticeship starts in the first part of the 2025/26 academic year had fallen by 6 per cent compared with the previous year. Nearly two-thirds of new starters were under 19, illustrating the importance of attracting school leavers into the trade.

The employment prospects remain significant. The IMI estimated that there were around 18,000 vacancies in the UK motor trades during the July to September 2026 period, with vehicle technicians accounting for the largest share of advertised positions.

The changing nature of motoring is also transforming the skills required. Modern technicians increasingly need expertise in electronics, computer diagnostics, hybrid technology and electric vehicles, alongside traditional mechanical knowledge.

Automotive apprenticeships offer an alternative to university, allowing young people to earn while gaining recognised technical qualifications and workplace experience.

While Shelly Motors' programme is not itself an apprenticeship, meeting working technicians and learning what their jobs involve could encourage some students to consider this route after leaving school.

Learning beyond the classroom

Tony Scrivener at Blenheim High School welcomed the opportunity to offer students practical experience alongside their academic studies.

"It is wonderful to be able to run an enrichment like this at the Sixth Form. Enrichment encompasses many elements at Blenheim and giving the students an opportunity to take part in this six-week programme is very exciting for us. We believe in the whole student, not just the academic, so thank you to Shelly Motors for your help in delivering this!"

Kelson Gray, Operations Director at Shelly Motors, said the collaboration was about both road safety and opening students' eyes to employment opportunities.

"It's really important for all drivers to know the basics when it comes to vehicle maintenance, and this collaboration ensures students at Blenheim High School develop the right skills from an early stage. Talking to our technicians also makes students better aware of potential career options in the automotive industry as they progress through their education."

The initiative builds on an existing relationship between the school and dealership. Since 2024, Shelly Motors has

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sponsored the Chelsea Blenheim FC female football team, helping to fund kit and equipment.

The latest collaboration brings that local support into the classroom and workshop, illustrating how businesses and schools situated only a short distance apart can make practical contributions to young people’s education.

For students who go on to become mechanics, it could be an early introduction to a future career. For everyone else, knowing how to change a wheel or spot a potentially dangerous tyre may prove just as valuable.

Lionel Blackman

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