

Memories of an Irish Competitor

By Paddy Carpenter

In 1963 as a fourth year Sheet Metal Work Apprentice employed in Córas Iompair Éireann (CIE), I competed in the National Apprentice Competition Final, which I won and was selected to represent Ireland at the 12th International Apprentice Competition to be held in the College of Technology, Bolton Street (COT). This was a great honour for me, my family and my work colleagues in CIE. I was joined on the team by two other CIE apprentices, Thomas O'Brien in Foundry Moulding and George Mc Crane in Industrial Forging.

I started intensive training for the competition both in CIE and in Bolton Street College under the guidance of Mr. Tony O'Toole, my Sheet Metal Work teacher. The technical training was accompanied with classes in cultural activities, like Irish dancing and singing under the guidance of our team leader Mr. W.J.N. O'Brien, a lecturer in Bolton Street College and Seán Og Ó Tuama, a teacher in Capel Street Technical School. We spent many hours practicing the singing of THE CRAFTSMAN, a song composed by Leo Maguire, a music teacher with the City of Dublin VEC, and set to the music of O'Carolan, which was to be the theme song of the competition. We also were visited by the An Taoiseach Mr Sean Lemass TD, who stressed the importance of technical education for economic growth and wished us well in the competition.

All the competitors were accommodated in the Franciscan College in Gormanston for the duration of the competition and were given a Garda motorcycle escort when travelling to and from Bolton Street College. There was a great atmosphere among the international group staying in Gormanston, with activities organised by M.J. Doogan and his son M.C. Doogan who were both PE teachers with the City of Dublin VEC. They were ably assisted by Nicholas Corish who although he was in charge of ensuring that we all got on the bus on time in the morning, also organised swimming lessons and activities in the college pool. Among the activities and events was an exhibition match of hurling by the Dublin and Wexford minor hurlers and a visit to Croke Park for the Leinster football final between Dublin and Meath.

The competition Opening Ceremony was a very big event held in Gormanston College and attended by many dignitaries, including Ald. Sean Moore, Mayor of Dublin and the Minister for Education, Dr. Patrick Hillery TD, who declared the competition open. All the teams had marched into the hall, behind their national flag, dressed in their uniforms. This really brought home to me, that I was now representing my country and while it was a great honour it was also a big responsibility. The band of the Eastern Command played music during the ceremony, which was followed by a very nice lunch sponsored by the ESB.

The following morning was a very anxious time for me just before the start of the competition. However, when I was handed the envelope containing the test drawing I relaxed and immediately started to concentrate on the task. The test was 24 hours long to be carried out over 5 days. There were three other competitors in my competition from Spain, Portugal and Great Britain. Being a small group, we got on really well although the only one I could talk to was Anthony from Great Britain. During the competition all the competitors got their lunch in Clerys on O'Connell Street.

After the competition we were taken by train on a sightseeing trip to Cork and Kerry. The three-day trip south was really appreciated as most of us were tired, having worked very hard during the previous five days. The trip was most enjoyable, and the hospitality shown to us by our hosts was appreciated by all. On the return journey to Dublin, we visited a Bord Na Mona Peat Briquette factory in Croghan and a Peat Bog in Derrygreenagh, which everyone found very interesting. Meanwhile back in Dublin the tests were being marked by the judges.

The closing ceremony and medal presentation was held in Dublin Castle with the President Eamon de Valera presiding over the event. While I knew that the quality of my work was good, I still did not know where I was placed until the MC called the next trade as Sheet Metal Work. My heart was thumping as I heard him announce that I had won a silver medal. As I walked to the podium to receive my medal from the President, I felt enormous relief and a great sense of joy and pride that I had won a silver medal for Ireland. That medal is still one of my most cherished possessions.

That night all the competitors and officials were guests of the Organising Committee at a farewell dinner in the Intercontinental Hotel. The competitors spoke about how they had enjoyed the competition and the hospitality shown to them during their stay in Ireland.

Although it is almost fifty years since the competition, I still have very fond memories of that time, and the friendships made with colleagues on the team. The competition was a wonderful experience for a young person and the memories of my participation have remained with me.