

National Truck Driving Championships Veteran Tips

FedEx distributed this notice to all their drivers and included some valuable information, including a section by our own National Champion, Everett Macmaster.

NTDC veterans share some tips for state competitions

Overview

The first step to the national competition is to compete at the state level. To qualify for state competitions, you must be accident free for 12 months prior to entry; hold a valid CDL with endorsements for the class of competition entered; be employed or contracted with (a company) for at least 12 months; and enter in only one class of competition. These criteria may vary somewhat state to state. But if you're a safe driver and meet these basic qualifications, you're already a winner before you begin! Though each state runs its own show, most test your abilities through four different tests: a written examination, a personal interview, a pre-trip inspection and a field course – regardless of your competition class. Below, some FedEx NTDC veterans offer their advice on how to prepare for each portion of the competition:

Personal Interview

Wayne Crowder, a FedEx Freight line driver based in Louisville, Ky., was the 2004 National Grand Champion, Flatbed National Champion and Rookie of the Year. He also finished second in the Flatbed class at the NTDC in 2005. A 23-year driving veteran, Wayne was recently named as one of the America's Road Team captains for 2007-08.

The good news is you don't have to be a movie star to do well in the personal interview. And you're not giving testimony before a grand jury. Just remember to be yourself. During your personal interview, you're going to be asked some questions designed to gauge your attitude about safety, the industry and various enforcement agencies.

For example, you might be asked, "What does a green light mean to you?" A good response might be, "It means I want to proceed with caution and be ready to stop at any time." Examiners might also ask for your opinion about a particular topic. Good responses should always tie in safety. Most interviews will last about 10 minutes or however long it takes to ask and answer several questions. Avoid talking about a negative – even when encouraged to state a negative. It's important to study up on materials available in the Facts for Drivers Handbook. It's also smart to look your best, display confidence and demonstrate that you understand the topics – and show the high level of enthusiasm that FedEx contractors and drivers bring to the job every day at every location.

Multiple Choice Exam

Mike Nardone, now a maintenance manager for FedEx Ground based in Hartford, Conn., placed second in the Twins class at the 2004 NTDC. He won the national title in the same class in 1999 when he also captured the Driver of the Year honor. Mike logged nearly 3 million miles during his 27-year driving career, having spent 14 of them with FedEx Ground as a linehaul driver.

All states make competitors take a multiple choice exam that tests your general knowledge about trucking and your understanding of safe driving rules, first aid and fire fighting. The exam might ask you how many seconds it takes you to check your mirrors, or what percentage of people in the country depends on trucks to deliver their goods. You'll be faced with a broad array of questions, most of which are straightforward. Remember – you don't have to be the smartest person in the world. Your knowledge is being tested. Study the material in the Facts for Drivers Handbook, and don't sweat it! What's even better news is that you know most of the answers because you're a professional, and you use these materials each day.

Pre-trip Inspection

Everett Macmaster, a ramp transport driver with FedEx Express based in Portland, Maine, has earned five state TDC titles. A professional driver for more than 20 years – over 19 of them accident free, he won the 4-Axle national crown at the NTDC in 1998.

I think it's a safe bet that most of you will feel more comfortable with this portion of the contest. After all, a pre-trip is something you do most every day. Competition pre-trips, however, will be a little more intense as the testers will be planting safety hazards on the unit. Your mission is to find them all and loudly identify them as defects – in six minutes or less. You might say: "Defect – loose lug nut!" Other examples: you may find a missing emergency triangle, an out-of-date fire extinguisher, an inside flat tire, defective lights or a host of other possibilities. The key is to conduct as thorough a pre-trip as possible – and do it quickly. Remember: your comfort level may be higher during the pre-trip phase of the contest, but that's all the more reason to stay on your toes and consider every potential defect. The best way to prepare is to practice, practice, practice. That should be a slamdunk for most of you!

Field Course

Bruce and Kathy Shepherd comprise a contractor team that's been with FedEx Custom Critical for nearly five years. Bruce competed at the 2004 NTDC, and Kathy has competed against him at the Nevada state competition .

The first rule about field courses is that no two are quite the same. All of them, however, will be fashioned to simulate actual driving conditions you might encounter in terms of braking, parking, backing, maneuvering through tight spots and other typical conditions. During the field course, you'll be asked to maneuver through six scenarios. All six tests must be completed accurately and, of course, safely within a prescribed time limit. You might recognize a few, like backing up to a dock, navigating a serpentine barrel course, right turns, front bumper stops and 90-degree turns. Some drivers say they're nervous driving in front of an audience. But hey, you do this in front of an audience every day. Your audience is the motoring public, and they're watching you all the time.

Other States

Member **Pete Philbrick**, who lives in Arizona writes, "...I judged at the Arizona State TDC yesterday, it was a little different than the ones in Maine. There were nearly 300 hundred drivers registered and they had a package van class for the first time. The lady from the Arizona Trucking Assn was doing it for the first time and things were a little confused but that's normal. The drivers were allowed outside of the bull pen and I noticed a number of them at the sidelines watching intently as the other drivers went through the course, I remarked that they would never be allowed to do that in Maine. It was a good time overall and nice to be involved again, I have many fond memories of TDCs past."