

# MISSOURI TRUCK DRIVING CHAMPIONSHIP

---

*Branson  
Convention  
Center*



Inside, drivers waited behind black curtains, hidden from the audience's view. Some of them tapped their legs with anticipation while looking over the papers in their hands, and a few of them simply sat silent while others talked with their fellow competitors. However, the smiles on their faces when they met with their families after the course were undeniably consistent.

Amid these various evaluations, an announcer engaged the audience with trivia and prizes inside one of the halls where the skill course took place. Teams cheered and videoed from the sidelines as their family, friends and coworkers carefully drove around the room between the cones.

## THE COMMUNITY OF COMPETITION

Community is one of the most important aspects of life, and the Missouri Truck Driving Championship (MTDC) contributes to this comradery.

The MTDC, hosted by the Missouri Trucking Association, is held every year. It is an event where drivers, trainers and families across the state gather to participate and watch the competition. This year it was located at the Branson Convention Center, holding the interactive tests both inside and outside. The exams seen were pre-trip inspections (sponsored by Kelly Anderson Group), skill courses and written tests. The truck classes evaluated were four to five axels, flatbed and twin trailers.



*Skill  
Course*

One of the most remarkable aspects of the event were the various volunteers that helped run the whole weekend. Each of them gave up their own time to judge, measure, wave flags, captain teams and more. Two judges, from the Missouri Department of Transportation, who evaluated the pre-trip inspection exams, expressed their joy in volunteering every year.

"[The drivers] take pride in what they do," said Chris Bender, a pre-trip inspection judge. "It's fun to watch it."

Bender, who's been volunteering for five straight years, highlighted how seeing the same drivers come back and build relationships with them is one of the best parts of the judging. "It's fun to see them every year and make those connections."

Relating to the drivers appears to be a key part of enjoying the championship from the inspector's perspective. "Everyone's got nerves," said Jeff Payne, Bender's partner in judging this year. "One thing I have in common with them... is that I competed in the inspector competition. I know what they're going through," Payne said. Even though the inspector competition - equivalent to the driver's championship - is no longer held annually, Payne can utilize that experience to help the drivers feel more comfortable and calm.

Payne has also been a volunteer for the same amount of years as Bender; however, this year is his first time back since the early 2000s. "It's a lot more organized," Payne commented, referencing how the competition has differed now than from the past.





*Payne &  
Bender*



Even though the structure and technology have evolved for the MTDC, the passion and sportsmanship have not. "One guy, it's his twentieth year, and he said he still gets nervous every time," said Bender, referencing a driver whom they had just inspected. "This is his last year and... he was getting teary-eyed wrapping it up."

This championship means a lot to those who participate, both the drivers and volunteers. It is a community that lifts one another up and keeps the spirit of competition alive.

---

*Written by Sky Seaman (2022)*

*Photos by Sky Seaman & Abigail Tikunoff*



*Cones & "danger"  
tape was used to  
separate course &  
audience*

*A stuffed dog was  
used to indicate  
out-of-bounds*

