

Derlon Ltd - The Derlon 2006 4wd

Derlon Ltd was established by Derek Lonsdale in 1968. Derek was a part-time farmer in the northwest of Ireland who inherited Greenhill Farm, a small dairy farm of 100 cows, from his father. He worked as an engineer for a local company and spent all his free time farming. He was often frustrated by the amount of time it took, with many machines built primarily for larger farms, that were expensive and not suited to the tasks and spaces of small farms.

In 1968, Derek decided to use his engineering skills and developed the Derlon 1. A compact, functional, and sturdy tractor that was better suited for small farm work and affordably priced. His profit margins were very small but Derek's passion for business was immaterial compared to his passion for small farming and he was determined that he would survive the ever-increasing threat emerging from new hi-tech large farms that were putting many of his friends & family out of business.

The Derlon 1 struggled to break even for the first 5 years. Derek using his own contacts for sales and generating enough revenue to employ a small team of skilled welders, mechanics, and fitters in a small, converted barn on the edge of his farm.

However, a shortage of farm workers in the early 1970s (the availability of wages that were 3-times greater in the flourishing UK oil industry was too great for workers to resist) meant that demand for tractors grew phenomenally.

By 1976, sales of the Derlon 1 had quadrupled and Derek was employing 30 workers in his production facility and a full-time salesman who travelled throughout Ireland and the UK liaising with retailers who bought at a wholesale price. Derek soon had very little time for his farm but was fortunate that his 16-year-old twin sons, Sean & Barry, had inherited his passion for farming and were able to keep Greenhill Farm going.

In 2005 Derek retired to live in the Mediterranean and his sons took over Derlon Ltd. Sean and Barry were keen to grow the business and realised that many of the Derlon 1 tractors that their father had sold were now becoming obsolete and would need replacing. They retained their father's design brief and the updated Derlon 2006 was launched in December at the affordable wholesale price of £21,000. Retailers were contracted to sell at a max. 10% markup price.

In 2024 Derlon Ltd remains a family-owned SME that employs 50 people and has a turnover of £10m. Sean and Barry remain as joint owners. Sean's 2 children are employed as in-house sales managers and Barry's 3 children are employed as the company accountant, production manager and company secretary. Greenhill Farm no longer exists.

Thanks to extensive government grants, it is now the site of a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility that includes the recent addition of 2 large production sheds that are not yet in use. The Derlon 2006 is still the focus of production with only small alterations (such as 4 wheel-drive and a safety camera for reversing) to its design specification. It remains an affordable compact, functional, and sturdy tractor for the dairy industry.

Sean and Barry want to retire in 2026. If they want their children to inherit their business, they will have to grow their turnover by expanding their operations beyond Ireland & the UK, in the next 18-months.