

PODIUM POSITION



KRM has built its success by focusing on fertiliser spreading and cereals drilling, and dealing with companies that also specialise in those fields

It is the mid-1980s and the UK agricultural machinery market is in the doldrums. But paradoxically it is that climate that provides Keith Rennie and his partners the chance to set up their own business and rule their own destiny.

At the time both Keith and Roger Robinson worked for AC Bamlett of Thirsk. Keith was Marketing Director having worked his way up from marketing assistant, the position he held when he

joined the company in 1976 immediately after gaining his first class honours degree in agricultural engineering from Silsoe College. The role involved helping the sales team with background information on the market and what the competition was doing. He chuckles. "In effect leaflet collector!"

Recounting the circumstances that led to the formation of Keith Rennie Machinery Ltd, he says: "Things came to a head in 1985/'86. Bamlett had invested

a lot of capital in developing machinery and product but the market and economic situation was not good and it had to call in the receivers.

"It was a shock to the system. We were working hard and selling but not enough for the banks. It soon became clear that Bamlett was not going to be sold as a going concern and product lines were sold off to other companies.

"We had to think about what we were going to do. One supplier asked Roger and I whether we were

going to another company; if so they would come with us as they wanted to maintain continuity within the UK.

"When the opportunity arose to form our own company, we thought this might not happen again. Even though the risk was lessened as the products were already in the market, we had to grab the chance and make it work. We also established from the beginning that our long-term aim was to specialise in fertiliser spreading and cereal drilling."

Those Bamlett products were the Bogballe range of fertiliser spreaders, Bredal lime spreaders, and Thyregod potato diggers and turnip harvesters. A business plan was drawn up and Keith and Roger were on the plane to Denmark.

"We visited each company and presented our plan of what we could do for them and what support we needed from them to do it," Keith says. "They all agreed. So that was it, we were off!"

Keith Rennie Machinery Ltd was formed, with Keith and his wife Marilyn, and Roger Robinson as shareholders and directors, and a service manager, Alan Dixon. Roger Robinson retired last year leaving the company in Keith and Marilyn's hands. The company started trading in November 1986 from a part of the original AC Bamlett site at Thirsk, with Keith handling sales in the North of the UK, Roger the South and Marilyn in charge of the office and administration.



"Our ethos has never been to stack high and sell cheap, but to offer products that provide benefits for the user in quality of build and performance," says Keith Rennie, with Marilyn his wife and fellow director.

"We were able to draw stock from the receiver to give us a starting point and continued to work on a whole-sale basis," Keith explains. "We were fortunate that many of the existing dealers were willing to support us and gave us a way in. There was also the fact that the products were already known, Bogballe as an innovative company and Bredal for its lime spreader. It was, and still is, a machine that gave contractors and farmers high capacity and proved to be extremely reliable. It was the product we hung our hat on initially."

As the names were well established there was an immediate parts business. That was also the case with the Thyregod lifters, although interest was not high in machines as the trend was tending towards multi-row harvesters.

All the product lines continued to be sold in red livery but with the KRM logo in black on a yellow stripe. "We wanted to present them as one brand and quickly establish the KRM name and that it was one supplier," Keith explains. The colour scheme is still used today, except on the fertiliser spreaders which are blue.

Specialist suppliers

For the first eighteen months, which also saw a move from Thirsk to Boroughbridge as the administrators sold the Bamlett site, the focus was on establishing the company. But to grow and make it more attractive to dealers there was the need for a greater product range. Also, the Thyregod range had to be replaced as the sales of whole goods went into serious decline.

"To achieve our initial objective to establish the company as a fertiliser spreading and crop drilling specialist it was our intention from the beginning to deal with individual premium companies that also specialised in those fields and pushed the frontiers of development," Keith says.

"Bogballe, for example, was the first



The new SM1909 drill from KRM is a new concept offering growers the opportunity to use one drill for sowing into a ploughed seedbed, into min-till repared seedbeds or direct into stubble.

to introduce a hydraulically driven twin disc spreader to provide a constant disc speed; it was also the first to link weigh cell measuring and electronic control to automate calibration and rate control.

"In late 1987 two things came together. We were able to take on the UK franchises for Roger drills and Falc power harrows. They both gave us an immediate income from the parts business and provided a combination drill at the time when use of the technique was growing."

By the end of the 1990s KRM had outgrown its premises substantially and it moved to its current site at Claypit Lane Industrial Estate, Boroughbridge, from where it started trading on 2nd January 2000. "We should have moved earlier, but it was a new century and a new premises," Keith comments. This provides the company with 1858m² of covered area where machines are prepared and assembled to individual customer specification.

It is also the administration centre,

now generally manned by Keith and Marilyn, and the base for the company's 10 staff; five salesmen on the road and five involved with preparation and parts, and service and support.

Due to changes in manufacturers' branding policies franchises changed during the 2000's. Now, in addition to Bogballe, Bredal and Falc, Keith Rennie Machinery Ltd's other specialist product lines comprise electrically driven pneumatic grass seeders, slug pelleters and grass harrows from APV of Austria. Since 2007 cereal drills have been sourced from Sola of Spain, whose range includes power harrow and cultivator-mounted models, trailed and box drills.

"We have a close relationship with all our suppliers, who accept a lot of our input to make the products suitable for UK conditions; we see them as our production companies, they see us as their sales team," says Keith.

Top three finish

It is this forward looking approach that has enabled Keith and Marilyn and their team to establish Keith Rennie Machinery Ltd and the KRM brand as a specialist supplier of quality fertiliser and lime spreaders, and cereal drills to the UK market.

Without boasting, Keith states: "We are recognised within the industry as a specialist supplier and we won't dilute that position, although it doesn't make it any easier when you're up against major European suppliers with full ranges!"

"Our other aim when we started out was to be one of the companies that contractors and farmers identified, when asked to name the top three fertiliser spreader and drill suppliers in the market . . . and we have achieved that."

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The KRM Bredal spreader is widely acknowledged by both farmers and contractors for its robust construction for long-life reliability and versatile spreading performance for lime and bulk materials, to precise fertiliser application and variable rate electronic control.