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staff and suppliers for their support
over the last 40 years.

The cutting edge in trailer technology

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Here's to another great 40 years

Enda Cushnahan
 CEO, SDC Trailers

A 40th anniversary is a special landmark for any company and provides an excellent opportunity to look back at our achievements as well as pay tribute to the people who have worked so hard to build SDC into the highly successful company it is today.

I have been with the company for half of those 40 years and it is a privilege to now serve as its chief executive officer. I see my role as building on the legacy of our founder Seamus McCloy, who started out repairing trailers in a shed next to his house, and taking the company forward into another 40 years of success.

Whatever Brexit may bring, UK plc needs its manufacturers and exporters to succeed on world as well as domestic markets like never before. So my plea to the UK government is first give us clarity on what Brexit will look like in March 2019 and second do not place barriers to export in our way.

With SDC now part of the global number one trailer company CIMC I am more confident than ever that we will take our leadership of the UK and Irish trailer market onto a wider stage, building on our superb design engineering and manufacturing capability.

We employ almost 900 highly skilled staff at SDC and while our trailers have a deserved reputation for quality, reliability

and toughness it will be the commitment and passion of those people that will ensure the company continues to thrive and grow.

While designing and building innovative products such as the revolutionary kinetic energy recovery system trailer will always be our core business, SDC has become much more than a manufacturer. We can now genuinely claim to offer our customers the complete package for all their needs, from specification and acquisition to the maintenance, repair and disposal of their trailer fleets.

It is of course the faith our customers have shown in SDC over the years that has enabled the company to grow at such an impressive rate, and we will never lose our focus on delivering a bespoke transport solution that precisely meets the needs of each operator. We do not build standard products for stock – every trailer on our production lines in Toomebridge is built to order for a specific customer.

It has been a great journey so far so thank you to all our staff, customers and suppliers who have made it possible, and here's to another 40 years. ○



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Editor: Steve Hobson

Design and layout: Gareth Burgess

Business development manager: Emma Tyrer

Managing director: Andy Salter

Tel: 020 8912 2170

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SDC celebrates 40 years of manufacturing success



SDC Trailers is celebrating its 40th anniversary and the story of the company's progress from a small shed to the UK's leading trailer builder is a great example of a UK manufacturing success.

SDC Trailers was established 40 years ago by welder and fabricator Seamus McCloy in a tin shed beside his house in the village of Bellaghy, Northern Ireland.

McCloy had worked for another trailer manufacturer in Belfast and decided to set up SDC as a business initially repairing trailers before expanding into the manufacture of bodies for cattle trailers, coal lorries and milk floats. "He also made bodies for rigid vehicles and crew cabs for local authorities," says Enda Cushnahan, who was appointed CEO of SDC Trailers in 2017. "Then in the mid-1980s he made his first foray into articulated vehicles with the change in legislation from tandem to tri-axle trailers and he got involved in fitting third axles."

Before this could happen however, McCloy had to find bigger premises, and in 1982 he acquired his first factory in nearby Toomebridge, Co Antrim.

▲ An overview picture of Headquarters at Toomebridge

"Growth in business resulted in capacity constraints at the shed in Bellaghy and this prompted Seamus to purchase a greenfield site in Toomebridge, three miles from Bellaghy," says Cushnahan. "This site is known today as Plant 1 and is home to the group's headquarters. In 1982 there were 17 full time employees, today there are nearly 900."

After being asked by several customers to convert tandems to tri-axles, McCloy knew it was time to start building his

own trailers.

"In 1983 Seamus decided to try his hand at semi-trailer design and manufacture," says Cushnahan. "His first semi-trailer was a tri-axle lowloader built for P J O'Kane Transport up in Garvagh."

Other customers in those early days included well-known Irish hauliers like Malachy Skeath, Drennans, Derry Bros, McGeehan Bros, East West Transport and Nevile Charrold – this latter customer would develop a much closer relationship with SDC a decade later.

1985 was a watershed year, as that is when SDC built its first curtainsider for Miller Transport, and in that year there were a total of 20 new curtainsiders built.

"That is now one of the most popular products in the SDC portfolio," says Cushnahan. "Today we design and manufacture 4,000 curtainsiders annually."



▲ SDC GRP ENXL Boxvan launched in 2018

Although technology has moved on in the intervening decades, SDC holds to the principle of designing and building exactly what the customer needs for their particular operation.

“That’s one of our USPs,” says Cushnahan. “Now 30 years on we still set ourselves the challenge of trying to translate what the customer wants rather than building an off the shelf product. Each trailer on the production line is being built specifically for a customer.”

That includes being able to specify dimensions, flooring, tyres, axles, curtains, roof and doors to exactly suit the application. “We provide transport solutions, not just build trailers,” says Cushnahan.

SDC Trailers continued to grow at a phenomenal rate, and in 1992 a new workshop and shot blaster was built at the group’s headquarters in Plant 1 to cope with the rise in new business orders.

1994 saw the landmark acquisition of Nevile Charrold in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, giving the firm a foothold on the UK mainland and accelerating SDC’s growth in the UK market. The Mansfield plant remains one of the most important in the SDC group today.

SDC was already supplying Derry Bros Refrigeration with fridge chassis and curtainsided trailers in the late 1980s, and this operator had a base in Warrington, Cheshire.

“Brendan McIlvanna, who now owns BMI Trailers, was involved in sales at SDC at that time and he was posted to an office in Warrington to promote SDC Trailers across the Irish Sea,” says Cushnahan. “Curtainsiders and platform trailers were then being shipped complete from Toomebridge. Warrington became known as the ‘crow’s nest’ and Brendan was occasionally called the ‘pest in the nest’!

Back in the 1980s SDC was not the force it now is in UK trailer building, so McIlvanna had to

work hard to build the firm’s reputation against competitors that would then have included the likes of Fruehauf, Boalloy and Southfields.

The Nevile Charrold acquisition was a major milestone on this journey, giving SDC a range of high quality tipping trailers and a base in the UK.

“Mansfield at that time was at the heart of the coal mining industry,” says Cushnahan. “We had a rail head there and Nevile Charrold would have been manufacturing alloy bodies for the coal and mining industry.”

In 1993 – 1996, Des O’Connor now chairman of Trailer Resources Ltd, joined the SDC team as Sales Director to assist with the development of the UK sales strategies.

A couple of years after the acquisition, McCloy built a large extension to the Mansfield plant, increasing it from 15,000sq ft to 70,000sq ft. “Seamus could then send chassis out of Toomebridge tri-stacked to save on cost,” explains Cushnahan. “They

would then have the bodies put on in Mansfield.”

In 1996 SDC expanded beyond the borders of the UK to take on the continental giants, exporting its first trailers to Germany and Denmark, and exporting has long been one of SDC’s strengths, bringing revenue, jobs and financial security to its local communities.

After almost 20 years of growing the business, in 1997 the McCloy family sold SDC to Powerscreen International, a global firm making rock crushing and screening machinery. In September 1998 Powerscreen sold on SDC to Retlan Manufacturing, a financial vehicle owned by the Donnelly family, and Powerscreen director Mark Cuskeran moved with SDC to become its financial controller and later CEO.

In the year 2000, Don Campbell was appointed as Managing Director and played an integral role in the growth of the company in the early 2000’s. ▶

MEET THE BOSS

Enda Cushnahan CV

Chief Executive Officer SDC Trailers,
2017 - present

Finance director, SDC Trailers,
1998 - 2017

University of Ulster,
accountancy graduate,
1993 - 1996

Finance man Cushnahan has been with SDC for most of his career, taking over the top job when Mark Cuskeran moved on in 2017.

Like most businessmen in Northern Ireland he has strong views on Brexit and the lack of clarity over the borders between the north and south of the island of Ireland and the rest of the UK.

“We as a manufacturer didn’t want Brexit but we will deal with whatever the outcome is,” he declares. “All we want from the government is to just tell us what the situation will look like



after March 2019. If it is the case that there will be elongated procurement cycles and trade tariffs as we leave the Single Market, just tell us. The problem right now is that no one knows what is happening, but we will deal with whatever happens.”

Whatever the future brings he remains confident that SDC Trailers will continue to thrive for another 40 years. “It is an exciting position to be in,” he says. “I am head of a highly motivated team of people who are doing their very best for the customers we serve.”

Retlan owned MDF Engineering, which was also founded 40 years ago by John Donnelly, and is a steel fabrication business that supplies much of SDC's chassis components, so it was a shrewd move by John and his son Darren to integrate MDF with one of its biggest customers.

The change in ownership enabled the next phase in SDC's growth to take off and in 2002 SDC Truck and Trailer Parts opened its first branch in Toomebridge. The SDC Truck and Trailers Parts business was developed to meet the needs of customers for truck and trailer parts in a timely manner.

Currently SDC Truck and Trailer Parts has eight branches

covering the island of Ireland, with over 16,000 parts stock lines and 28 delivery vehicles.

The demand for SDC trailers and the creation of Truck and Trailer Parts resulted in a new plant being built at Toomebridge in 2002. This facility, known as Plant 2, is just across Deerpark Road from Plant 1 and is home to the parts branch, repairs and graphics workshops.

Plants 1 and 2 now total over 300,000sq ft of manufacturing space, and group wide the company has a huge 500,000sq ft of factories. "These facilities are the best in class in the UK market," says Cushnahan. "All our production plants are certified to ISO 9001 standards."

In 2012 SDC led the development of longer semi-trailers (LSTs) when the UK government started a 10-year trial of 1,800 14.6m and 15.65m trailers, and it was the first company to manufacture the longer length trailers that allowed operators to carry greater volumes resulting in lower fuel costs and lower emissions. SDC has manufactured 40% of the chassis taking part in the LST trial, which has now run out of allocations so no more can be built until the UK government gives the go ahead.

"The 15.65m are far and away the most popular LSTs," says Cushnahan. "Less than 5% have been the 14.6m versions and every LST was made with a steering rear axle to meet turning circle requirements."

"Quite a lot of the 15.65m trailers are doubledecks as these are very popular with operators who always cube out before the weigh out. I don't see them ever replacing 13.6m as the standard semi-trailer as a lot of local infrastructure isn't geared up for them. However, they do have a place in the overall UK transport network, and if bogie weights increase so could their popularity in time. There are no LSTs operating in Northern Ireland as we have been excluded from the trial."

In June 2016, CIMC Vehicles,

the Chinese number one global trailer manufacturer, acquired Retlan Manufacturing Group. "There was a willing seller and a willing buyer so it was a perfect deal," says Cushnahan. "CIMC wanted to grow its international operation – they say they want to be a global company with local knowledge. We provide the local knowledge for the UK and Irish markets and they leave us to manage the business as we see fit."

Commenting on the deal, David Li, general manager and a director of the board of CIMC Vehicles said at the time: "We are delighted to have acquired the Retlan Group. The acquisition will mark an exciting new chapter in its history. We look forward to continuing its fine tradition of high quality UK-based manufacturing and to the opportunity for further investment to help grow the business. The Retlan Group will represent a valuable complement to CIMC Vehicles' portfolio and progress our policy of global operations, local knowledge."

CIMC Vehicles, founded in 2002, is a leading trailer manufacturer with global presence in Continental Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, Australia and Africa. The company is a subsidiary of CIMC Group based in Shenzhen which has turnover in excess of \$10bn (£7.7bn) and almost 70,000 employees.

The deal also ushered in plans to turn SDC into a global brand and increase its export sales by 10% over the next five years, with the focus being on chassis, platforms and extenders where the major continental manufacturers do not have equivalent products to offer.

"Within our board of directors we have representatives from the US, Belgium, Germany and China and that international mix is very useful as is the backing of the world's largest trailer manufacturer," says Cushnahan. "The initial targets for our export drive will be the



▶ Customers can specify every aspect of an SDC trailer including flooring, tyres, axles, curtains, roof and doors to exactly suit the application



◀ SDC has manufactured 40% of the chassis taking part in the longer semi-trailer trial, and every LST was made with a steering rear axle

Scandinavian markets.”

Since the acquisition, SDC has continued to invest heavily in its factories to increase production capacity and product quality.

One of SDC’s largest projects in recent years was to implement inhouse Training Academies focused on continuous learning and development to further enhance all employees’ skills. SDC worked in conjunction with the Department of Education to facilitate a programme to train apprentices and to date 100 apprentices have graduated from its Academies.

Jane Millar, SDC human resources manager, says: “The Welding and Piping & Wiring Academies have been a great success, with people of all ages in Toomebridge and surrounding areas now enjoying careers at SDC.

“The Academies have also provided current employees the opportunity to receive training in a new field, the benefit of this is that it further enhances job satisfaction, one of SDC’s most important values.”

Ironically, despite its £250,000 investment in training facilities, being based in Northern Ireland means SDC has to pay the unpopular Apprenticeship Levy but is not able to claim funding from the UK pot.

“We pay the levy but as a Northern Irish manufacturer we cannot access the voucher system, which is just ridiculous,” says Cushnahan. “It is just a stealth tax and comes on top of the 2% of wages we now have to pay for employee auto-enrolment into a pension scheme. Those two have increased our operating costs significantly.”

In August 2018 SDC completed a £7m expansion to Plant 1, creating 50 new skilled jobs, improving production capability and boosting output to meet increasing demand for its innovative products.

The project has created employment opportunities for both trainee and experienced painters, welders, engineers and material handlers and will bring

the team at SDC to almost 900 people making it one of Northern Ireland’s largest private sector employers.

Cushnahan says: “The opening of the new facility at Plant 1 in Toomebridge is an example of SDC’s proactive strategy to meet the growing demand for innovative trailers as required by customers in markets at home and abroad. The expansion will revolutionise

“Our main objective was to create the best manufacturing working environment in Northern Ireland”

our manufacturing process and gives us the ability to increase output of trailers by 50% on a weekly basis.”

The investment was not just to grow manufacturing capacity however as it also improved working conditions significantly.

Cal Carmichael, SDC’s operations officer, says: “Our main objective was to create the best manufacturing working environment in Northern Ireland, enhancing job satisfaction and increasing output of trailers by improving ergonomics. The new working environment now utilises 50% natural light in large open spaces and introducing technology in a new semi-automatic paint line. There is also spacious changing rooms and a subsidised canteen.

“We went through a lengthy planning process, including visiting manufacturing plants in Ireland, the UK and Europe, to ensure that SDC is now one of the best manufacturing environments to work in Northern Ireland. The 60,000 sq ft expansion also means that Toomebridge is now one of the largest manufacturing production sites in Northern Ireland.”

The new semi-automated paint facility has been equipped

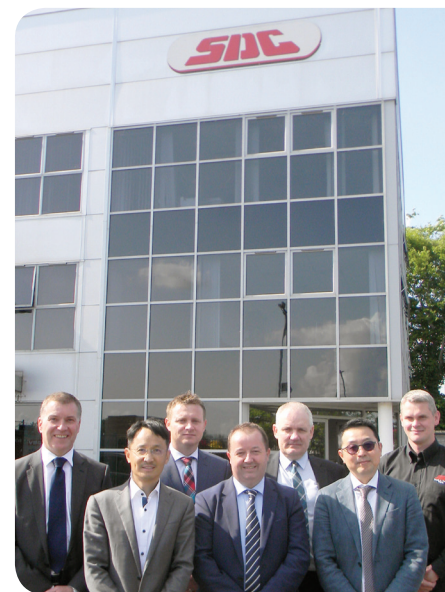
with top of the range equipment, including a robust conveyor system, two bespoke paint bays for priming and top coat fitted with six ‘Wall Man’ units and high spec curing ovens. SDC is confident that the new paint process is the most sophisticated in the industry, and the two-pack epoxy paint will achieve a high gloss, high quality and durable finish that will enhance the residual value of the trailer.

At a time when UK plc is looking to grow exports and compete on the world stage, SDC Trailers under its Chinese owners is leading the way.

“SDC trailers are now demanded in international markets, where they previously had a limited presence. The demand in those markets is for tailored transport solutions which have been the cornerstone of the SDC success story. The new facility has the systems installed to meet the additional demand of trailers in the new markets, whilst shortening delivery times,” says Cushnahan.

“In an era where there is uncertainty, this news was very much welcomed by the surrounding community, cementing the firm as market leader in the UK and Ireland and positions it to challenge in markets overseas.”

► In June 2016, CIMC Vehicles, the Chinese number one global trailer manufacturer, acquired SDC. “There was a willing seller and a willing buyer so it was a perfect deal,” says Enda Cushnahan.



Product innovation and customer service at the heart of SDC Trailers' success

With new trailer sales in excess of 8,000 units and turnover of over £200m last year, SDC Trailers is by far the UK and Ireland's largest trailer maker.



When asked what sets SDC apart from other trailer manufacturers, CEO Enda Cushnahan reflects for a moment.

“People deal with people,” he says. “We have the backbone of support from a great team of people here at SDC who can interface with customers and offer them the right solutions to their problems, deal with any aftersales matters and have a cradle to grave approach to every aspect to trailer manufacturing.

“We manufacture the chassis at MDF in Antrim, assemble the trailers here at Toomebridge and can body them at Mansfield. We also have used trailers, parts and repairs capabilities so we deal

with all aspects of trailers. That enables us to build a relationship with our customers and develop the product they need.”

Around 40% of SDC's output leaves the factory with a body fitted, and its impressive trailer range features 500 different variants spanning curtainsiders, boxvans, skeletals, platforms and urban trailers, all of which are bespoke manufactured to meet operator requirements.

The manufacturer has a policy of not competing with trailer rental companies and so enjoys a solid working relationship with the leading UK and Irish trailer rental companies. In fact around a quarter of SDC's new trailer business is with rental

firms, making this an important customer base.

One of SDC's most innovative products was launched at the CV Show in 2016 – the Kinetic Energy Recovery System (KERS) semi-trailer. A world-first, SDC's patented KERS trailer can deliver a reduction in fuel consumption of up to 25% by capturing electrical energy during vehicle deceleration in a bank of graphene ultra-capacitors. When the driver accelerates, control units on the tractor and trailer communicate with each other to create a hybrid electric vehicle, which is powered through an electrically-driven axle on the trailer.

Regenerative braking systems have been adopted in automotive applications for many years, but the market has lacked a similar solution for articulated vehicles until now. SDC's engineering manager Jimmy Dorrian believes that the innovative KERS trailer is set to revolutionise the future of road freight transportation with



▲ Kinetic Energy Recovery System (KERS) semi-trailer that was unveiled at The CV Show in 2016

“considerable benefits for the operator, the customer and the environment” when it becomes more widely available in 2019.

Another recent innovation was a multi-functional skeletal trailer, which has been designed to allow containers to be moved to the rear of the trailer for ease of loading and off-loading. The skeletal trailer is adaptable to all

standard sizes including 20ft heavy containers and complies with European height restrictions for the international operator. “Feedback has been positive so we are looking to push more of those into the market now,” says Dorrian. “The sliding skeletal is the way to go because of its versatility.”

In 2015, SDC along with a long-standing customer, Scotland-based Malcolm Logistics, won the Motor Transport Innovation Award for its extendable 15.65m skeletal trailer designed to accommodate a 50ft rail container for use either

“We manufacture the chassis at MDF in Antrim, assemble the trailers here at Toomebridge and can body them at Mansfield”

side of its rail operation.

“We are working with Malcolm Logistics at the moment on a new design that is capable of assisting with payloads,” says Cushnahan. “They do a lot of transport from their railhead up in Scotland.”

SDC introduced its lifting-deck doubledeck trailer at the CV Show in 2018 which like its fixed decker can carry 52 full-height pallets. SDC has stuck with wire ropes powered by a single hydraulic ram to raise and lower its moving deck, as Dorrian says there are still “issues” with multi-ram systems. “If they lift out of sync due to flow divider issues, the deck can jam. Due to the small diameter rams used they run at very high pressures which can lead to heat build-up. This causes oil and motor issues accelerating wear and causes a huge electrical draw on the system,” he says. “Wires and pulleys may be more traditional but they are the most reliable.”

Looking ahead to 2019, rising fuel costs mean ▶



▲ SDC Trailers and Moffett have collaborated to produce an innovative 10.6m Urban Trailer which will allow the customer to fit any Moffett style forklift. SDC CEO Enda Cushnahan (second right) handed over the first example to Michael O’Reilly, product manager at Moffett’s parent HIAB.

SDC INNOVATION ROLL OF HONOUR

2010

Launches 3-axle skeletal trailer than splits in two, to form a single axle trailer for transporting 2x20ft containers

Launches ‘Aeroliner’ aerodynamic trailer with 12% fuel savings

Introduces roll stability systems (RSS) for brake type approval two years ahead of mandatory legalisation

2011

Manufactures and tests the UK’s first 14.6m and 15.65m longer length semi- trailers

Develop a new lightweight walking floor trailer with an increased capacity of 90.2 cu m

2012

Builds 3-truck transporters based on a longer length chassis - a first for the UK market

2013

Launches ‘Autoliner’ car transporter with increased flexibility for vehicle transport operators

2015

Named Motor Transport National Innovation Award winner with Malcolm Logistics for 15.65m extendable skeletal trailer



2016

Launches the world’s first application for a Kinetic Energy Recovery System (KERS) on a semi-trailer

2018

Launches hydraulic lifting deck curtainsider featuring lightweight deck design suitable for 52 pallet operation, exhibited at the CV Show and received third place in the Trailer Innovation Award body category.



as the arrival of better battery technology to power telemetry when the trailer is disconnected from the tractor means it is now possible to locate and monitor the condition of the trailer at all times.

“There are lots of systems on the market now that enable operators to see how well the trailer is performing and manage the maintenance in a proactive way,” says Cushnahan. “Everyone wants the maximum return on their investment and that means maximising uptime. We do not promote any one system but will fit what the customer wants to integrate with their systems, underlining SDC’s bespoke approach”

One trend that SDC has also taken advantage of is the move towards short trailers for urban applications to replace rigid trucks and increase utilisation of tractor units. “We have a wide portfolio of urban trailers, curtainsiders, boxvans, platforms, extendable platforms and brick platforms,” says Cushnahan. “They generally have the steering axles to improve manoeuvrability still further.”

While building new trailers represents the lion’s share of SDC’s revenue, it has many other strings to its bow.

“Our revenue streams are from new trailers, parts, repairs and used trailers,” says Cushnahan. “SDC really does provide customers with a complete one-stop-shop from cradle to grave for all their trailer needs.”

a key focus for new product development will be fuel saving through better aerodynamics. While sloping roofs have been around for many years, Cushnahan says reducing drag under the trailer will be where the big gains will be made.

“The drag that comes from the axles is as significant as the roof of the trailer,” he argues. “Obviously a sloping roof at the front of a doubledeck assists in deflecting the air over the trailer but the significant drag is from below.”

Dorrian goes on: “If you can fill in the sides, even a sideskirt down as far as the centre line of the axle, that provides the most benefit. Removing the large rear full width mudflap that some operators fit under the crashbar also helps as that is the least fuel efficient thing operators add.

“A boat tail improves the air flow round the back but they come with a lot of issues with damage. Tapering the rear as we have done with the Aeroliner seems the most efficient solution.”

The SDC Aeroliner, with its sideskirts and tapered sides at the back of the trailer, claims to reduce fuel consumption by up to 8% without reducing capacity by sloping the roof.

One of the biggest aerodynamic gains can come from close coupling the tractor and trailer but Dorrian points out this would

▲ One of SDC’s innovative Brick Platform Trailers

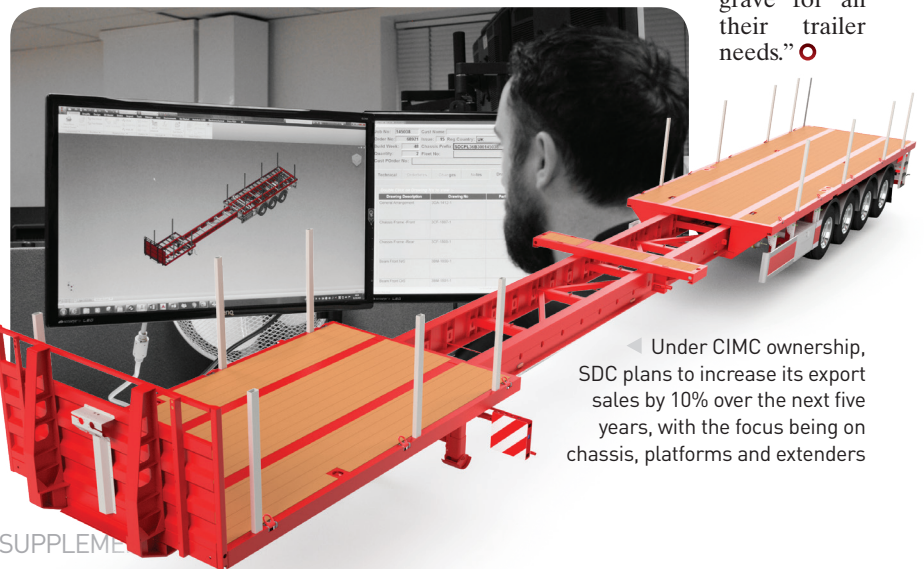
mean the pair effectively become a single unit, reducing flexibility for the operator.

SDC is also working hard to take weight out of its trailers without affecting their well-deserved reputation for durability and reliability.

“When the Euro-6 emissions standard came in, tractor units were up to 500kgs heavier,” says Dorrian. “So there is a big drive to make our trailers lighter by using higher tensile steels and Finite Element Analysis [FEA] to optimise the design. The last thing we want to do is to take strength out of the chassis to reduce the weight as we would encounter issues further down the line.”

Trailer telematics is another area SDC is watching closely,

▼ SDC is on a drive to make its trailers lighter by using higher tensile steels and FEA analysis to optimise the design



◀ Under CIMC ownership, SDC plans to increase its export sales by 10% over the next five years, with the focus being on chassis, platforms and extenders



Head office and manufacturing
SDC Trailers
116 Deerpark Road
Toomebridge
County Antrim
BT41 3SS
Tel: 028 7965 0765

SDC Parts branches
Toomebridge
Branch manager:
Sean Convery
121 Deerpark Road
Toomebridge
County Antrim
BT41 3SS
Tel: 028 7965 0765

SDC Used trailers
121 Deerpark Road
Toomebridge
County Antrim
BT41 3SS
Tel: 028 7965 0765

121 Graphics
121 Deerpark Road
Toomebridge
County Antrim
BT41 3SS
Tel: 028 7965 0765

SDC Repairs
121 Deerpark Road
Toomebridge
County Antrim
BT41 3SS
Tel: 028 7965 0765

Belfast
Branch manager:
Shane Convery
5B Duncrue
Crescent
Belfast
BT3 9BW
Tel: 028 9077 2070

Omagh
Branch manager:
Anthony McCann
Unit 10 Gortrush
Industrial Estate
Omagh
County Tyrone
BT78 5EJ
Tel: 028 8225 0515

Lurgan
Branch manager:
William McKnight
Unit 9 Annesborough
Industrial Estate
Lurgan
County Armagh
BT67 9JD
Tel: 028 3834 3100

Cork
Branch manager:
Kevin McMahon
Unit 32
Doughcloyne
Industrial Estate
Wilton
Cork
T12 X365
Tel: 00353 21433 6925

Newry
Branch manager:
Jarlath Ward
3B Lisduff
Business Park
Newry
County Down
BT35 6QH
Tel: 028 3025 1977

New Ross
Branch manager:
Jamie O'Neill
Unit 34 Woodbine
Business Park
New Ross
County Wexford
Y34 H720
Tel: 00353 5144 8544

Dublin
Branch manager:
Stuart Clarke
B2 Centrepont
Rosemount
Business Park
Ballycoolin
Dublin 15
Tel: 00353 1899 1690

SDC Used trailers
Contact: *Vince Croot*
Fulwood Industrial
Estate
Fulwood Road South
Sutton in Ashfield
Nottinghamshire
NG17 2JZ
Tel: 01623 552 220

Trailer manufacturing branch
SDC Trailers
Mansfield
Bradder Way
Mansfield
NG18 5DQ
Tel: 01623 625 354



116 Deerpark Rd, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, BT41 3SS.
T. +44 (0)28 796 50765 E. info@sdctrailers.com

Bradder Way, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, England, NG18 5DQ.
T. +44 (0)1623 625354 E. info@sdctrailers.com