

THE KING OF FORECOURT RETAILING



Since opening five years ago, King's Gala in Ashbourne Co Meath has enjoyed award-winning success. Its manager, Robert Cunningham, speaks to IF&CR about why it has been so well received.

Robert Cunningham has held the reins of King's Gala M50 Oil Ltd in Ashbourne since its opening five-and-a-half years ago.

The Baltrasna service station has won some four Gold Star B.E.S.T awards in that time from the 200 strong Gala Convenience Group.

The station is owned by Brian King, who since opening the Ashbourne filling station and shop in 2010, has gone on to open three others – each of award-winning quality. Along with a premises in Kiltale, Co Meath - a 1,400 sq ft Gala store and forecourt – Brian's other stores include his King's Gala/Naas Oil in Prosperous in Co Kildare, and his most recent opening King's Gala in Gorey, Co Wexford.

Trying to pin down what has made the King's Gala offering so successful, manager Robert said their promotional offerings and service are what sets them apart and is instrumental in driving trade.

"Customers find there are always new offers available every month, and it keeps them coming back," he said. "There has also been a great response to our Baker's

Corner, and the great value that this range provides.

"I think customers know that we try to help them by offering good value.

"It's important to show commitment to your customers. We know many of our regulars by name, and that's the personal touch you don't get everywhere."

As well as benefiting from the support of their customers, Robert said the store benefited greatly from the support of the Gala group: "We have a very strong relationship with the Gala team, including Gala's Retail Operations Executive, Ray Conboy, and its Retail Operations Manager, Jerry McDonnell. The guys are always on hand when you need them.

"Our wholesaler, Better Deal Navan, has also been brilliant, and that has helped us maintain a really high-standard of offering within the store."

The high standards are something Robert is keen to talk about, and tells us how the store's awards have allowed the Ashbourne services to become a flagship outlet for the Gala brand.

"Presentation, offering and cleanliness are all really important, and we go to



great lengths to get that right. It's about connecting with your customers; you have to have customers to keep your store open – they are the lifeblood. The customer is at the centre of what we do, and we constantly take on their comments and requests to improve of offering."

Along with working hard to ensure the shop and forecourt is at its best, the staff are also involved in a range of charities, while the Gala brand has recently agreed to provide six-figures of support to help Irish athletes travel to and compete at the Special Olympic World Summer Games, taking place this July in Los Angeles.

Another aspect of Kings Gala is its food-to-go and in-store offering, which includes a bakery, seated area, and expanded coffee range.

"We have an excellent deli counter and it does very well," Robert said. "The key to our offering is having a good choice to select from. We've seen a resurgence in customers from the construction industry, which is experiencing a real boom at the minute.

"We offer a range of ready-made dinners for €4.99, with a different choice every day.

"Our coffee has really taken off, and our sales are huge. We have a good offering with link deals on scones and other products, and importantly, they're competitively priced. We've even had to add an extra machine due to the popularity of our coffee options.

"One of the most popular fresh offerings is Baker's Corner, and this was introduced into our store with the help of Ben McGinn, Fresh Food Manager at Gala. Once people see 'home baked' they snap them up, and we sell a lot of fresh scones, buns, cakes, and breads."

Looking to the future, Robert explained that King's Gala would be looking to continue its pattern of growth, opening new stores in the near future.

Also speaking to IF&CR about the store, Gary Desmond, CEO of Gala,

praised King's Gala, saying it had won many Gala B.E.S.T awards.

"Gala's strapline is 'Your Local Market' and it's very fitting, as for every community in which a Gala store operates, the store has been tailored and it really is that community's 'local market'. King's Gala in Ashbourne is an excellent example of this.

"Brian King is a progressive retailer and the King's Gala stores are some of the best across the country in terms of convenience retailing in Ireland today," he said.

Mr Desmond continues: "We're proud to have King's Gala, Ashbourne, and the other King's stores in the Gala Group and look forward to working with Brian and his team for many years to come."

Meanwhile, Brian King, proprietor of King's Gala, spoke fondly of his first Gala outlet.

"King's Gala in Ashbourne was my first store with the Gala Group, and we opened the shop just over five years ago.

"It's been a phenomenal success and this is in no small part down to the team here and the support of the local community since we first opened our doors."

Mr King said it was Gala's personal approach and professional systems and procedures that appealed to him

"Although we're part of a national group, we can still add a local stamp to our stores and ensure that they meet the needs of our customers," he said. "No two Gala stores are the same, and this is part of the Group's appeal.

"Like all businesses, we're focused on continually delivering a quality service to our customers. Therefore as each of the four sites progresses, we'll be reviewing our offering, and we're always on the lookout for new facilities and services that would be of benefit to our customers."

King's Gala is situated at Baltrasna, Ashbourne, Co. Meath. For further information on the Gala Group, please see www.Gala.ie or www.facebook.com/GalaRetail

