

SPAR 

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Contact

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Ideally located at the crossroads of Munster





Ben Lenihan, Retail Director at Inver Energy

SPAR Inver Mallow Racecourse Junction, undergoes major revamp

SPAR Inver Mallow Racecourse Junction underwent a major refurbishment in 2022. Here, we speak with Ben Lenihan, Retail Director at Inver Energy, about the process and the revamped offering in what's known locally as the 'Crossroads of Munster', a key location in the centre of the region on the N20 Atlantic Corridor and bordered by Limerick and with excellent connectivity to gateway cities of Cork, Limerick and Dublin.



Ben Lenihan, Retail Director at Inver Energy, Tracey O'Callaghan, Forecourt and Store Supervisor at SPAR Inver Mallow Racecourse Junction, Peter Bolster, Forecourt and Store Manager at SPAR Inver Mallow Racecourse Junction, Tim Hogan, Forecourt and Store Supervisor at SPAR Inver Mallow Racecourse Junction

Can you tell me the history of the store?

The store underwent a significant transformation, evolving from an existing forecourt and store originally built in the 1960s into a modern, state-of-the-art facility. Recognising the strategic potential of the location in Mallow, Inver acquired the site and put in place a plan to completely redevelop the facilities to meet modern standards, with the forecourt and store reopening in September 2022.

How many years have you been in retailing?

With over thirty years of retail experience, I have been part of the Inver team since 2013. Previously, I served as the Managing Director at Lenihan Management Consulting for nine years, focusing on retail strategic consulting and business management.

Tell me a little about the operation?

The total area of the forecourt and store is 1,635 sqm, with the store covering 159 sqm. At the heart of the operation is



our dedicated team of 20 employees working on the deli and store, led by our manager, Peter Bolsters. Together, they do an exceptional job ensuring our customers receive the best customer service and an excellent overall experience.

On average, how many customers do you serve in a day?

On average, our store serves approximately 900 customers a day, catering primarily to commuters on the go from 6am to 10pm. Its location on the busy N72 secondary road ensures a steady flow of traffic throughout the day, especially during peak hours during the breakfast and lunch rush.

The forecourt business is becoming very competitive. How do you ensure that you stay ahead of the competition?

Staying ahead of the competition in the forecourt business requires a combination of strategic approaches and operational excellence. Our team focuses on providing exceptional customer service and creating a positive experience for our customers. We aim to continuously innovate our offerings and services to meet the evolving needs and preferences of our customers. This includes introducing new fuel types and partnering with food and beverage vendors for in-store offerings.

My team and I focus on enhancing the overall customer experience by investing in amenities such as clean and modern facilities, convenient parking, well-stocked convenience stores, and fast and friendly service. To stay ahead in a very competitive market, we will continue prioritising ongoing investment and development.

What is the customer demographic like for this store?

Our store serves a diverse demographic, including a significant portion of motorists seeking convenient and quick, accessible food options during their journeys. We have tailored our offerings to cater to their busy lifestyles, ensuring a range of freshly prepared food options for their convenience.

Food-to-go is a huge element of convenience retailing now. What food options do you have in the store?

The newly rebuilt store now operates as a multi-service site,

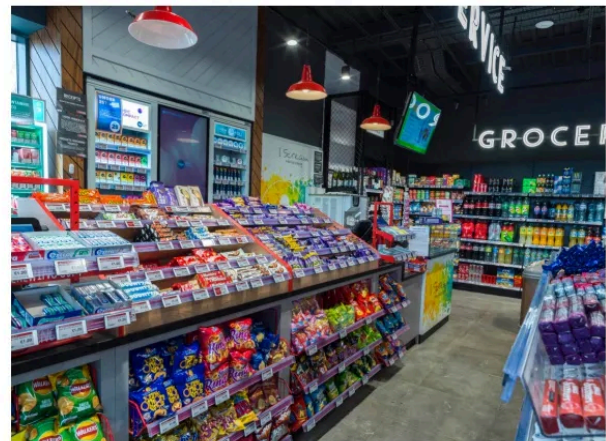
offering a wide range of convenient services and products. It includes a brand-new store with hot food offerings and a seating area catering to both on-the-go and sit-down dining preferences.

What percentage of your business is fresh food/ coffee?

Fresh food and coffee sales contribute significantly to the store's revenue, accounting for approximately one-third of its total revenue. This aligns with the performance of other stores across the Inver network of owned and operated sites, reflecting the growing demand for a range of quality food and beverage options in convenience retailing.

Do you think people are willing to spend a little extra on premium fresh food?

Yes, there is a growing trend of consumers willing to spend a little extra on premium fresh food, especially when it offers quality, convenience, and a unique experience. With the increased focus on health and wellness, and the desire for higher-quality ingredients and sustainable sourcing, many of our customers are willing to pay a little more for fresh, locally sourced, and artisan food options.



Is the consumer still very price conscious?

While our customers prioritise factors like quality and convenience, price consciousness remains prevalent, especially with the high cost of living. As such, we continuously strive to balance offering competitive pricing and delivering exceptional value to our customers.

How can you make customers come back again and again?

We prioritise providing customer experiences, value-added services, and building strong local connections in order to cultivate customer loyalty. We do this by consistently delivering high-quality goods and services and by fostering strong personalised relationships.

Furthermore, our customer retention is greatly aided by our tangible support to the communities in which we operate. Through Inver's Leading Lights initiative, each of our sites receives an annual grant of €1,000 to support local projects that improve the areas we serve.



You've recently completed a revamp, tell me about that?

The site's refurbishment was a substantial project that completely updated the amenities. It lasted over 26 weeks, required us to close the store for several weeks and involved a significant investment of €2.4 million.

The whole property, from the forecourt to the retail area, was refurbished. This entailed demolishing the existing installations and establishing brand-new infrastructure, including cutting-edge tanks and equipment.

Our team verified that the new site met all safety and quality criteria throughout the planning and implementation process. SPAR Inver Racecourse Junction, which was built from the ground up to accommodate the demands of the local population and vehicles, has now become a valuable asset in Mallow.

What additions/changes did you make to the store?

This major refurbishment involved a complete rebuilding of the store and forecourt to contemporary specifications. It currently offers a variety of convenient services and products, including a new store with hot food options and seating areas. The response from customers has been great and they have warmly welcomed the improvements, underscoring the store's importance to the community in Mallow.

Did you have strong support from the BWG team throughout the build?

Throughout the redevelopment process, BWG played a pivotal role as a partner, offering support and guidance from the initial planning and design stages to the final delivery of the site. This close partnership continues to be instrumental in the store's ongoing success, with both parties collaborating closely on a daily basis.

What is the most challenging element of your business?

Irish retail is driven by innovation and entrepreneurship, which allows it to adapt quickly to shifting customer

demands and industry trends. Meeting our customer expectations while staying ahead of these developments is an ongoing focus.

Our success also depends on hiring and keeping knowledgeable, committed employees who share our enthusiasm for quality work and devotion to providing excellent customer service. Inver commits significant resources to hiring new staff members and training existing staff members in order to keep our team prepared to provide the consistent experience that our customers have come to expect.

Have you plans for future growth of your overall business?

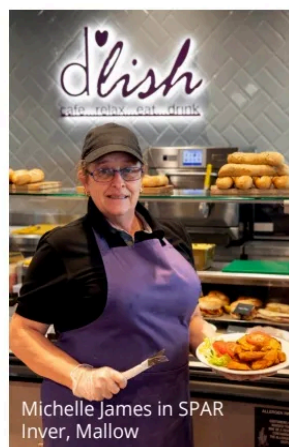
Our expansion goals for the future include bringing Inver forecourts to a wider audience throughout Ireland. To do this, we will continue to engage in research and development as well as invite independent dealers to become part of our network. Inver's strategy has a strong emphasis on retail innovation, and we are looking forward to working with SPAR and other partners to expand our services and provide our customers with outstanding value.

In addition to offering our customers a selection of high blend biofuels, we are dedicated to playing our part in lowering carbon emissions from our own activities. We successfully launched HVO for commercial clients in 2023, as well as at a number of forecourt locations. Looking ahead, we intend to expand the availability of renewable fuels throughout our network.

What is your favourite thing about retailing?

Overall, I believe that retailing offers a diverse and engaging environment that presents opportunities for businesses like ours to innovate, connect with customers, and make a positive impact on society.

Engaging with the community is a favourite aspect of retailing for us. SPAR Inver Mallow Racecourse Junction actively contributes to the local economy, creates jobs, generates economic activity, and supports local charities, embodying our commitment to community involvement. Since upgrading the forecourt in 2022, €3,000 has been donated to charities like the Irish Guide Dogs for the Disabled and the local Ballyclough GAA Club.



Michelle James in SPAR Inver, Mallow

