

Business

Scotsman makes sure there's plenty of life at Mars

Grant Reid isn't letting the pandemic knock his strategy for the sweet giant off course, James Dean writes

The headquarters of Mars in McLean, Virginia, are deserted for five days a week. For the other two, Grant Reid, chief executive, and a receptionist are the only ones clocking in. Sometimes the Scot paces the floors alone. "Perhaps that's just giving myself normalcy," he says. "I know where everybody sits; I just imagine everybody coming back."

The age of coronavirus has thrown the world economy into disorder. For those lucky enough to have held on to their jobs, working life is anything but normal. And when your job is running one of America's largest private companies, and one that does business in 80 countries, it presents additional challenges.

For five days a week Mr Reid works from home. "Do I need to be in the office? Probably not, other than from a stability and sanity point of view," he says in a rare interview, via video link. He says he "may just be in denial" but does not feel stressed by the pandemic.

"Part of what I have to do is import stress and export serenity. And I exercise a lot, so that's probably where I can de-stress."

Judo, boxing and mixed martial arts are his sports of choice but for now he is limited to strength and conditioning training in his basement gym, taking online classes with a coach. He runs, cycles with his daughter Charlotte and tends to the garden. At the end of the working day he walks his dogs, Mattie and Ollie, with his daughter and his wife, Jennifer. He is reading a biography of Ian Fleming and taking online chess classes. "You need time to rejuvenate. The isolation can get quite difficult."

Mr Reid, 61, was born in Falkirk and went to Dunfermline High School. He studied management economics at the University of Stirling and then went to the Chartered Institute of Marketing. He has been at Mars for more than 30

years. In 1988, while working as a management trainee at another company, he saw an advertisement in *The Sunday Times* for a job at Mars. He joined Mars Electronics, which developed vending machine technology for the group, and which in 2012 was sold to Crane.

Mr Reid moved to America 28 years ago and has worked in sales, procurement and media licensing and sponsorships, and ran one of Mars's factories. In 1995 he took control of its chocolate business and in 2014 he was made chief executive, which made him "excited and frightened".

Mr Reid need not be wary of shareholders in the typical sense, given that Mars is privately held. His challenge instead is to keep the Mars family happy. The American business dynasty is worth an estimated \$127 billion, second only to the \$191 billion fortune of the Walton family, who own Walmart.

"I don't think I'd have been here this long if I didn't like interacting with the family," Mr Reid says. "I do tell them, I don't like them all the time, but most of the time, it's like any real relationship."

His task, as agreed with the family, is to transform bigger company while taking note of the changing preferences of millennial customers, such as their desire for social responsibility and transparency.

Mars dates back to 1911 when Frank Mars began selling butter cream candy made at home. He launched the Milky Way in 1923 and the Snickers bar, known for many years in Britain as Marathon, in 1930. Forrest, Frank's son, moved to Britain in 1932 and three years later bought Chappel Brothers, which made Chappie pet food.

To most Brits, Mars remains the company that makes their favourite childhood treats: Mars bars, Maltesers, Skittles and Galaxy chocolate (Mr Reid's favourite). However, today it has interests in food, drinks, pet care and life sciences. The company makes Dolmio pasta sauce and Uncle Ben's rice. Its pet food business, which makes Pedigree Chum and Whiskas, is the largest in the world and bigger than its confectionery division. It also owns the world's largest veterinary health business. The confectionery division is still growing despite



Grant Reid is working from home and walking the dogs as he steers Mars, still

cherished for its childhood treats, through the pandemic

CV

Age 61
Education Dunfermline High School, 1972-78; University of Stirling, 1978-82; Chartered Institute of Marketing, 1985-87
Career 1982-88: marketing, ICL; 1988-95: marketing, Mars; 1995-99: procurement manager and director for media, sponsorship and commodities, Mars; 2000-01: plant manager, Mars; 2001-02: chief procurement officer, Mars; 2002-04: general manager, snack food development, Mars; 2004-07: VP of sales and customer service, Mars; 2007-09: global president, Mars Drinks; 2009-14: global president, Mars chocolate; 2014-present: chief executive, Mars

normal" after the pandemic. "We have 125,000 associates around the world," Mr Reid says. "How do you bring them back safely into a work environment, keep the social distancing and allow them to be successful and safe? That's a big element of what we're working on."

"Your associates are looking for stability, some hope, some compassion, some trust. For now, we must make sure our associates are still safe. But at the same time, all the challenges that were there before this will be there when we're out. You can't be 100 per cent focused on the crisis and you can't be 100 per cent focused on the future."

Brexit has fallen off the radar somewhat but remains a challenge, especially given that Mars has long had a big manufacturing base in Britain. "One of the family philosophies is to manufacture in the countries in which you operate. That's critical through Brexit that we keep those factories up and running." Mars, which favoured Remain, has worked on various scenarios for Brexit and is ready "whatever direction it takes", Mr Reid says, unlike with Covid-19: "Frankly, if you try and forecast this thing, you're probably going to be wrong."



Q&A

Who is your mentor?
 I have been fortunate to have many. I have also learnt a lot from those I have mentored. One can watch, listen and learn from many people.

Does money motivate you?
 Money is not my primary motivator. I am driven more by a sense of purpose, being part

of something larger than one's self.

What does leadership mean to you?
 Great leaders develop themselves. Outstanding leaders develop others as well.

What is your favourite TV programme?
 A few jump to mind: The First World War, Band of Brothers; during the lockdown I have enjoyed watching The Crown, right, with my wife and daughter.



How do you relax?
 I have a wide range of interests – from reading to historic car racing, bike rides with my daughter, weight training to mixed martial arts. I have a black belt in judo and enjoy boxing as well. Being on the receiving end of a good left hook teaches you humility – particularly if you have to address your team with a black eye the next day.

changing tastes, especially rising demand for healthier products, Mr Reid says.

"There's definitely a change in consumer behaviour. I grew up with Galaxy, Mars bars, Maltesers in the UK. They [consumers] are using them as a treat, which is what we want. People are now supplementing that with a better-for-you snack." Mars has a minority stake in Kind, which makes nut and cereal bars.

Being privately held, Mars does not publish financial results or talk about profits. However, Mr Reid says that the company aims to double annual revenue in the ten years to 2029, to about \$70 billion. It had a "very strong year" in 2019 with revenue "in the \$40 billion range", he says.

Then the coronavirus struck. "There is no playbook for this," he says. The company's supply chain

"has held up well so far and our factories have been running, by and large. There's a lot going on, a lot of challenges, but nothing that's debilitating so far, relative to the airline industry or the hospitality industry."

Mr Reid leads the Mars crisis management team, which is made up of senior executives and medical experts. They formulate policy for getting the company through the pandemic, such as providing personal protective equipment for staff, or associates as they are called. They are also discussing how best to get staff back to work once infections subside and are looking at the "new