

Ontario Drive & Gear Ltd.

Designer and manufacturer of “the world’s most capable off-road vehicle,” Ontario Drive and Gear (ODG) is the world’s leader in amphibious, all-terrain vehicles and also produces noise-reduced transmission systems.

Headquarters	66 Hincks Street, New Hamburg, ON N3A 2J5
Year Established	1962
NAICS	336990 - Other transportation equipment manufacturing
Employees	240
Major Expansions	N/A
Exports	US, Mexico, EU., Asia-Pacific, Central America, South America, Africa, Australia
Parent Company	N/A
Other Locations	Manufacturing Facility - 3551 Bleams Rd, New Hamburg, ON N3A 2J1, Manufacturing Facility - 220 Bergey Ct, New Hamburg, ON N3A 2J5

A thousand kilometres north into Hudson Bay, the entire world is blinding white, with tints of blue and grey. Suddenly, a flash of colour appears on the horizon. Steadily making its way across the ice is an ARGO, a special kind of all-terrain vehicle (ATV) manufactured by Ontario Drive and Gear (ODG) of New Hamburg, Ontario.

ODG is the industry leader for amphibious, all-terrain six- and eight-wheel vehicles; in fact, some would say that the company is the industry. Dozens of different models cater to various applications, but all boast superior traction and low ground pressure (pressure so low that an ARGO could drive safely over a person lying on the ground). ODG also manufactures the CENTAUR, ARGO’s “big brother” product, for commercial and military applications, as well as gear and transmission equipment.

From search and rescue missions in the great Canadian wilderness to hunting expeditions on the Serengeti plains to avalanche control in the Himalayas, the ARGO has seen it all. Engineered for extreme environments such as swamps, deep mud, frozen rivers, and rocky slopes, the versatile ARGO is built for places where no other ATV dares to venture. Other applications include oil and gas mining and exploration, insect and weed control in hard-to-access areas, and remote firefighting.

The South African Special Forces Brigade commissioned over 100 vehicles to resupply frontline troops and evacuate personnel. In China and Israel, unmanned ODG vehicles are deployed for security, surveillance, and perimeter patrol. After terrorist attacks, the Mumbai police force rode ARGOS on patrol. Back home in

Canada, the company's unmanned ground vehicles are used in military practice.

ODG can confidently say that its products are used on every continent: the company designed the Venturi, which produces zero emissions, for Antarctic research.

Yet ODG plans to expand even further, and is currently building a vehicle that, with any luck, will one day go to the moon.

In 2008, the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) invited several parties to design concepts for lunar rovers. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) tested the prototypes in Hawaiian volcanoes. Several iterations later, Artemis Junior, developed by ODG and its partners, was the only product left standing. Thanks to the success of the rover platform, the CSA may participate with a rover in a NASA mission, planned for 2020, to find water on the Moon.

ODG's sales are evenly divided between Canada, the United States, and overseas, with exports to over 70 countries and all continents.

Dreaming big is part of the company culture at ODG. The firm has grown steadily over the last 50 years and now employs 240 staff members. The surrounding rural population is a good source of talent: "People who have lived on farms know how to work hard," says ODG board chairman Joerg Stieber.

Recently semi-retired, Stieber is the son of ODG's founder, Ortwin Stieber, and headed ODG for over three decades before becoming chairman of the board. In 1962, as a recent immigrant from Germany, Ortwin Stieber established ODG as a small gear manufacturing company in Kitchener. When an order for ATV transmissions systems was cancelled at the last minute, ODG turned to manufacturing the ATVs itself, and the ARGO was born. Over the years, the company has continuously developed new models using state-of-the-art technology.

"Canada is moving away from the traditional model of manufacturing simple, low-tech products relying on the low Canadian dollar," explains Stieber. "The future lies in advanced manufacturing—sophisticated processes, high quality, and educated people." According to Stieber, labour that was outsourced to Asia will come back to Canada as the region industrializes and costs of labour equalize. At that point, the future of Canadian manufacturing will be determined by the availability of skilled labour.

"There's a current disconnect between the growing number of unemployed young people and our region's need for skilled workers," says Stieber. "As a society, we can't afford to leave flipping burgers as the only option for kids who aren't cut out for academia.

For this reason, Stieber wants to raise the profile of manufacturing amongst students, as he emphasizes: "I

want kids to realize that the modern face of manufacturing is no longer the dirty and dangerous work of old. You're working with cutting-edge equipment, the environment is so clean you could almost eat off the floors, and jobs are safe, stable, and well paying. It's actually fun!" Accordingly, ODG works closely with Conestoga College, the University of Waterloo, and local high schools to provide apprenticeships, co-ops, and practical work terms.

The importance of manufacturing is currently underestimated, explains Stieber, as people focus on the service industry, "but the truth is that to create wealth, your only three options are to dig it up, grow it, or make it." While the service sector moves wealth around, manufacturing—or "making things"—actually increases the size of the economic pie. As a cornerstone of the wealth creation process, manufacturing is crucial in moving the economy and the entire country forward.

In the next 10 years, Stieber predicts that there will be a manufacturing renaissance. Assuredly, part of that renaissance will be on the Moon: a cutting-edge rover with Ontario Drive and Gear emblazoned on its side, proudly flying the Canadian flag.