



Smooth operator

CLAAS tractors have been a feature on J&D Foster's farm outside Tonbridge in Kent for around 20 years. In this time David Foster reckons they have had nearly 20; the latest being an ARION 660 NIGHT EDITION delivered in May, that is fitted with an FL140.

Farming around 400ha, around 120ha of this is down to rotational leys cut for hay for the equestrian market, all delivered within a 20 mile radius. This was one of the main reasons why David opted for the new NIGHT EDITION specification.

"One of the main jobs for the ARION is delivering hay, so for the driver to be able to display satnav through the Apple CarPlay screen, rather than having to look at his phone is a great advantage," he explains. "Also the enhanced lighting package on the tractor is far better when handling or wrapping bales into the evening. It ticked all the boxes."

In addition to the new ARION 660, the Foster's run four other CLAAS tractors – a gun metal grey ARION 650, another '72 plate ARION 660, plus an AXION 870 and 920, all of which, bar the 650, have CMATIC CVT transmissions. In addition they also run a LEXION 740 plus all their green harvest machinery is also sourced through MANNS Kent.

FANTASTIC TO DRIVE

"The CMATIC transmission in the new 660 is so smooth and that combined with the loader, front axle, cab and seat suspension make it a fantastic tractor to drive," states David.

"The smoothness, along with operator comfort, has to be the biggest change that we have seen over all the tractors we have had. Overall reliability, bar an 820 about 15 years ago, has also been excellent, but the dealership has always been extremely good and looked after us well.

"Over the years, the dealership name may have changed, but the core people are all still there and that's what's important. Whether its Gary (Jackson) on sales, to James (Whitbread) their demo specialist or the workshop team, it's the whole package and they are all there to help and will do all they can to keep you going and back you up. Farmers have long memories, and if someone goes out of their way to help get you out of a hole that's not something you forget!"

As the main 'run-around' general purpose tractors clocking up the most hours during the year, David aims to change the ARIONs once they are at the end of warranty and before they need new tyres. Main jobs for these tractors range from spraying and rowing up for the smaller 650, to hedgecutting, bale carting and general haulage for the larger 660s.

For the two AXION, there is no set replacement policy, with the oldest, the AXION 920, now about 10 years old. Of these, the AXION 870 is mainly responsible for baling, while the larger 920 becomes a virtual self-propelled mower during the spring and summer fitted with a set of DISCO triple mowers, before becoming the main cultivations tractor in the Autumn.

"All the tractors are on the MAXICARE service contract, mainly for the peace of mind should we have a problem, but this is also probably reflected in the trade in value. ISOBUS also makes operating the tractors easier and avoids having extra control boxes in the cab, and now with CLAAS connect its early days but it's certainly useful for planning being able to see where tractors are and how they are getting on," concludes David.

