

Extra capacity

David Kempster, Shropshire, 2014 LEXION 650, August 2020.

FARM FACTS

FARM	GF Kempster & Son near Oswestry, Shropshire
FARMED AREA	607ha (1,500 acres)
CROP	Winter wheat 271ha (670 acres) OSR 52ha (130 acres), winter barley 20ha (50 acres), spring barley 20ha (50 acres), forage maize 202ha (500 acres) remainder down to grass leys and permanent pasture
SOIL TYPE	Medium clay loams through to light sandy soils across a 10 mile area
STAFF	David and James Kempster plus one other full-time and one casual at harvest

Inevitably as a business grows, so too does the kit required to run it. Never is that more true than at GF Kempster and Son in Shropshire.

20 years ago the family firm’s arable acreage stretched to just 80ha (200 acres). Today that figure stands at 344ha (850 acres).

Two decades ago the modest cropped area was accompanied by a much larger grass area to support the farm’s 150-head dairy herd. A CLAAS MEGA 106 with 4.5m (15ft) header comfortably handled the workload at the time, but with the demise of the milk production enterprise, cereals replaced much of the grassland, taking the combinable total to over 283ha (700 acres).

“Our old MEGA was a rock-solid machine that would just work away at it without complaining, but the increased area really began to stretch its capabilities,” explains David Kempster.

“So in 2008 we took the plunge and splashed out on a four-year-old LEXION 520 with a 6m (20ft) cutterbar. In terms of output it was in a totally different league and when you climbed up into the cab it was huge step forward.

“Six years later our contract farming business had grown again and we needed even more harvesting capacity, so once more we started looking for a decent second-hand replacement.

“But what quickly became apparent was how well CLAAS combines hold their value – it was actually more cost effective to buy new. We decided we needed to future-proof ourselves for further expansion so opted for the biggest straw-walker on offer at the time – a LEXION 650 with 7.5m (25ft) VARIO header.

“It’s now in its seventh season and hasn’t skipped a beat.”

WHAT SORT OF OUTPUT DO YOU EXPECT?

“In a decent crop of standing wheat the 650 will comfortably cover 1.8-2ha/hour (4.5-5acres/hour), so by the end of a 10-hour day we’ll usually have a 200 tonne heap in the shed.

“We’re probably a little bit over capacity but it means we know we can clear the acres when we need to. It means we don’t have to cut anything above 18% which keeps our drying costs down.

“Importantly that extra capacity also gives us the capability to take on more ground should the opportunity come up, without having to immediately shell out on a new combine.”

HAS THE LEXION 650 BEEN RELIABLE?

“In seven harvests we haven’t once had a single issue that has stopped us. In fact, the only repairs we’ve ever done have been a handful of belts and bearings during the winter service. I’d say that’s a pretty good track record.”

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

“The VARIO header is absolutely brilliant for maintaining an even flow of crop, even in cereals, but for switching over to rape it is a bit of a pain having to fit filler-plates.

“I’m hoping my next machine will come with the new generation cutterbar that does away with that issue.”

CLAAS RESPONSE:
In 2016 CLAAS introduced a completely new design of VARIO headers that enabled the operator to switch from cutting cereals to rape in a matter of seconds without the need to add or remove filler plates. This is now a standard feature.





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WHY CLAAS?

“The build quality and reliability is unbeatable in my opinion and the back-up we get is superb.

“Our nearest MORRIS CORFIELD depot is 35 miles away but that’s never been an issue. If we’ve ever needed anything for any of the combines it’s been on the shelf or we’ve been able to borrow a part off a machine in the yard – that’s true service and is something we simply wouldn’t get if we went to another manufacturer.”

WHY A STRAW-WALKER MACHINE?

“Primarily it’s about output and up until now we haven’t needed the capacity of a rotary or Hybrid combine.

We run our own CLAAS 3200 QUADRANT to bale up some straw for our neighbours and protect against blackgrass coming in on contractors’ balers. To be honest I haven’t seen any issues with the swaths behind bigger LEXION, so I certainly wouldn’t rule out the Hybrid option should we need to increase capacity at any point.”

WILL YOU BE CHANGING IT ANY TIME SOON?

“Obviously as contract farmers we’re very mindful of having a reliable machine that will cut crops at their best for our customers. But the 650 has proved so dependable I’m reluctant to replace it unnecessarily.

“Each time we’ve changed a combine it’s because our acreage has grown and that’s likely to be the case next time we’re looking at a replacement. The build quality of CLAAS kit means that I’d be more than happy running the 650 beyond the ten-year point.”



David Kempster (right) with Field Sales Manager Martin Wood from MORRIS CORFIELD