

FARM FACTS

FARM	Foden and Abel near Lichfield, Staffs
FARMED AREA	243ha (600 acres)
CROP	Winter wheat 100ha (247acres), OSR 50ha (124acres), spring barley 30ha (74acres), potatoes 30ha (74acres) plus 30ha (74acres) rented out for carrots and parsnips
SOIL TYPE	Predominantly light sandy loams
STOCK	1,200-1,500 head of fattening cattle each year plus 800kW AD plant
STAFF	Chris Abel plus two other full-timers and casuals as required for potato grading

Longevity
is key

Chris Abel, Staffordshire, 2012 LEXION 630 with VARIO 660 header,
August 2020.



Elliot Richie, Foden and Abel.

Buying machinery that is built to last, looking after it and keeping it for a decent length of time is the key to keeping costs under control for Staffs farming business – Foden and Abel.

Longevity is central to the family firm which is this year celebrating 100 years at Shenstone Hall Farm, just north of Birmingham. The farmed area encompasses some 180ha (445 acres) of combinable crops plus another 30ha of potatoes.

When it comes to combine ownership the policy is pretty clear-cut – buy a decent machine, look after it well and expect it to put in at least eight to ten years’ active service.

Nine years ago the farm’s ten-year-old Laverda was beginning to show its age and it was decided it was time for a replacement. Changes in local dealers meant it was an open field in terms of colour choice and so some extensive research was done into finding the right machine for the job.

“We had demos of all sorts of makes of machine,” explains Chris Abel.

“They all had their strengths but the CLAAS won through on one simple thing – its build quality was way better than anything else on the market.

“I visited the CLAAS factory eight years ago and was impressed with the engineering that goes into the combines and the focus on build quality. Having been round other combine factories, CLAAS’ is the most impressive.

“With build quality comes reliability and having spoken to other CLAAS users locally they were reckoned to be rock-solid performers.”

“The other big factor was pricing – the LEXION certainly wasn’t the cheapest on paper, but when you compared it to the competition there was very little difference in it. The critical thing was that if we were planning to run it for at least ten years it needed to be built to last.”

WHY A LEXION 630?

“We settled upon a 630 with a 6.6m header because although it sounds a bit over the top for our acreage, it bought us the capacity to only cut crops at their driest.



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Chris Abel, Staffordshire, August 2020.

“We rarely go at anything over 17% moisture because we know we’ve got a machine capable of getting the grain in the shed without having to dry it – that can be the difference between making a profit and a loss.

“It also reliably produces a clean enough sample that we never have to worry about grain quality.

“The big sieve area is more than enough to get rid of the rubbish. Once I get the settings right for wind speed and openings, I can just drive the combine to the loss monitors without worrying about anything else.”

WHY A VARIO CUTTERBAR?

“Having the ability to vary the knife to auger distance is just brilliant in getting tricky crops like rape to feed properly.

“Even in cereals I’ll be tweaking it to get the material to flow in evenly, especially in laid or short crops. I wouldn’t want to be without it now.”



WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

“Although we’ve got yield monitoring on the LEXION we could now really do with mapping – our next combine will certainly have that facility.

CLAAS RESPONSE:
Working in combination with CLAAS GPS systems, the new QUANTIMETER offers unparalleled levels of accuracy, producing precise yield maps that can be used to build a true picture of crop performance.

“I’d like to see the engine bay redesigned to avoid the build-up of dust and chaff. We’re pretty meticulous about blowing it off between fields but a few less nooks and crannies would help.

CLAAS RESPONSE:
New machines have a revamped engine bay with CLAAS’ Dynamic Cooling package, all designed to keep as clean as possible, keeping maintenace downtime to a minimum.

“The only other feature that could do with a tweak is where crop drops off the walkers into the chopper – rape stems can bridge at this point causing material to back up.”

CLAAS RESPONSE:
Redesigned straw choppers introduced in 2016 have a larger diameter cylinder and a bigger chamber to accommodate bigger volumes of crop passing through the chopper.

HAS THE LEXION 630 BEEN RELIABLE?

“In the last nine harvests the 630 has had just one major repair – a knife-drive wobble-box. That’s a pretty good track record in my book.

“We get excellent back-up from our dealer MORRIS CORFIELD which, despite being over 50 miles away, look after us really well.

“While we do all the more straightforward maintenance work, we get CORFIELD’s technicians to do the major services. It’s not a cheap operation but if it keeps the combine going faultlessly through the season then it’s peace of mind that I’m happy to pay for.”

WOULD YOU HAVE ANOTHER?

“I’d like to think the 630 would do another couple of harvests, but when it comes to changing another CLAAS will certainly be in the running, especially if it retains its faultless track record.

“That dependability is the key – it gives me peace of mind when we’re up against it and the weather’s set to change. Although I’m always looking at potential replacements, I can’t really see any need to change when what we’ve got is so good.”

