FARM FACTS

FARM	BK Hinwood and Son, near Ludlow, Shropshire
FARMED AREA	445ha (1,100 acres)
CROP	Forage maize 101ha (250 acres), wholecrop rye 101ha (250 acres) spring barley 60ha (150 acres), winter wheat 81ha (200 acres), fodder beet 20ha (50 acres), ryegrass seed 40ha (100 acres), remainder down to permanent pasture
SOIL TYPE	Predominantly clay loams
STOCK	1,200-1,500 head of fattening cattle each year plus 800kW AD plant
STAFF	Paul, Kim and Jack Hinwood plus two full-timers and another two casuals at harvest

Keeping everyone fed

Jack Hinwood, Shropshire, 2011 LEXION 630 MONTANA, August 2020.

CUSTOMER WITH LONG-TERM STRAW WALKER

With 400-500 hungry beef cattle to feed at any one time as well as an anaerobic digester the Hinwood family know the importance of making the most of all they've got.

Based close to Ludlow in Shropshire the BK Hinwood & Son business is a truly mixed enterprise with mainstream arable cropping and herbage seed, beef and renewable energy.

Such a varied mix means the machinery fleet needs to be as versatile as possible to meet the workload which can alter significantly season-to season.

"Before we had the biogas plant we pretty much knew that our combinable cropping would sit at around 400acres year-in, year-out," explains Jack Hinwood.

"But the addition of the AD unit made things a whole lot more variable. It reduced our dry-cut grain area with much more land put over to maize and cereals for crimping.

"But depending on the season we may also switch some of that to wholecrop, so our combine workload can be unpredictable."

"The one thing the reduced workload does mean is that we no longer clock the hours on the machine, so we can keep it longer, potentially making it more cost effective."

Currently a nine-year old LEXION 630 is the weapon of choice. Equipped with MONTANA hill-side levelling and a 6m (20ft) VARIO header it cuts an average of 160ha/year (400acres/year). But the workload isn't an easy one – a good chunk of it comes in the form of green-strawed barley for crimping and chewy ryegrass seed, gathered with a stripper header.

"While the total combinable acreage has pretty much halved since we built the digester, it's a much harsher workload.

"We're asking a lot of the combine and so we need to know we've got a robust, well put together machine that will stand the test of time."

Having just completed its ninth season, in 2011 the 630 replaced a five year-old 530, again equipped with MONTANA slope-compensation.

"Although our old machine had done only five seasons it had clocked over 1000 engine hours – about the same as our current combine.

"Despite that it had proved a rock-steady, reliable workhorse and that's really what's given us the confidence to keep our 630 as long as we have."

HAS THE LEXION 630 MONTANA BEEN RELIABLE?

"In nine harvests, we haven't had any major stoppages which is pretty impressive for a machine with over 1000 hours on the clock.

"In fact the biggest issue we've had was the fan speed variator which had seized over winter – that was simple enough to free off without any parts required."

WHAT'S IT LIKE FOR MAINTENANCE?

"We tend to do the lion's share of the servicing ourselves and that's when you really begin to appreciate how well engineered these CLAAS combines are.

"Everything is easy-access. Simple things like the indicators on the belt tensioner springs mean you're never in any doubt that things are running as they should be."

Jack Hinwood with his parents.

WHY A MONTANA?

“In my opinion there is no substitute for full body levelling. Our ground can get pretty steep in places and without a hill-sider things can get a bit dicey.

“The other big factor is output. We had a contractor in to help out with a level-land machine a few years back, when we were up against it with the weather, and he was reduced to a crawl to keep losses to an acceptable level.

“The MONTANA system means we can keep going at a reasonable pace whether we’re on the flat or on a serious bank.

“By distributing the weight of the machine evenly it also works in tandem with the diff-lock and Michelin Ultraflex tyres, to help with hill-climbing and avoid crabbing when working across side-slopes.

“And, when you come to trade the combine in, there’s definitely a better second-hand value to it. We nearly always seem to recover the money we shelled out for body-levelling in the first place.”

WHAT SORT OF OUTPUT DO YOU EXPECT?

“In 10t/ha crops of wheat we’ll comfortably average 25-35 tonnes an hour which puts us well over capacity. But that’s great because we can go out and cut it at its driest.

“With the crimping barley we are asking a lot of the combine – it’s harder to thresh. We run a high fan speed and set the drum in to 10mm which takes quite a bit of extra power.

“However the 630 doesn’t grumble and in our experience outperforms the competition by a long stretch in these harsh crops.

“Before we had the stripper header we found that in grass seed the mountains of green chewy material going through the guts of the machine slowed things right up. But to be fair the build quality of the LEXION meant it could cope with such a harsh diet.”

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

“I like to use cruise control where I can because I think it helps load the combine up evenly and ultimately does a better job. But I think it could do with being a bit more proportional.”

CLAAS RESPONSE:
All LEXION now have the option of CRUISE PILOT that controls forward speed depending on crop volume and engine loading. The system also monitors losses, using all this data to adjust the forward speed of the combine before peak loads occur. Within this there are five response levels, providing different levels of proportionality.

> “In my opinion there is no substitute for full body levelling. Our ground can get pretty steep in places and without a hill-sider things can get a bit dicey.
>
> “And, when you come to trade the combine in, there’s definitely a better second-hand value to it. We nearly always seem to recover the money we shelled out for body-levelling in the first place.”
>
> Jack Hinwood, Shropshire, August 2020.

“We used to find grass seed could bridge in the tank which meant it could take up to 15 minutes to drop a load. When you’re unloading on the headland to avoid wind losses that’s an awful lot of downtime.

“Initially we tried a tank vibrator of the type used in quarry machinery. It helped but it wasn’t really the answer so two years ago we fitted CLAAS’ own tank agitator system which works an absolute treat. Now we’re down to four minutes to unload which is a huge saving over the season.”

WHY CLAAS?

“Fifteen years ago we had a hill-sider that was a different shade of green and, although it wasn’t a bad machine, when we demo-ed a CLAAS we realised what we’d been missing out on.

“There were significantly fewer losses behind the MONTANA, it produced a noticeably better sample and it was just so much easier to set up and use.

“Much of that was down to the CEBIS computer – it is just so straightforward to operate. Hotkeys take you directly to the relevant settings pages.”

“The other major factor for going with a CLAAS machine is dealer back-up. MORRIS CORFIELD nearly always have the parts we need on the shelf and if you’ve got a query or need advice there’s always a knowledgeable person on the end of the phone.”