

“ If we’re to get all our jobs done in a day then we need fast cycle times and hydraulic output is the key to this – something CLAAS handlers have always been strong on. ”



When you’ve got serious numbers of mouths to feed in any farming operation, bulk handling becomes a big part of the job.

That’s certainly the case for Suffolk pig producer Simon Watchorn. With over 7000 animals on site at any one time, his Telehandlers are kept very busy getting feed and bedding to where it’s required. On top of that there’s a 450ha arable operation to take care of so there’s all the associated materials handling work that goes with that.

It’s no surprise then that the business’ loaders clock some serious hours, generally accruing 1200-1500 hours a year.

“Our whole system is based around having two handlers working flat-out,” explains Simon.

“But with such a workload on four different sites, the reality is that we actually run four – two fresh front-liners for the day-to-day grind and two older machines for lighter duties.”

Over the years Mr Watchorn has run a wide range of different coloured Telehandlers but a decade ago he settled

on CLAAS machines thanks to their work-rates, reliability, stability and visibility.

“If we’re to get all our jobs done in a day then we need fast cycle times and hydraulic output is the key to this – something CLAAS handlers have always been strong on.

“If we’ve got lorries to load and pigs to feed all in one day then trimming just a few seconds off each lifting and lowering cycle can make a huge difference.

“And, because the machines are out in the field a lot of the time we’re not always working on nice, flat concrete. We’ve always felt the SCORPION to be a better planted, more stable loader than a lot of the competition.

“All round visibility is also a real plus-point of these CLAAS machines – being able to see to each corner makes them easy and safe to manoeuvre in tight spots.”

These factors have cemented white, red and green Telehandlers as part of the furniture at Park Farm near Bungay and over the last ten years five CLAAS SCORPIONS have seen action with the business.

The latest is something a little bit special. To all intents and purposes it looks just the same as any latest generation, Stage V SCORPION 741. But under the hood it's a pre-production machine with a new transmission, new hydraulics package and a whole host of other new features.

As before, the Varipower driveline employs twin swash-plate motors but the key difference is that they're no longer immersed in oil. Being sump-free, these 'dry' units generate much lower levels of drag than before and as such are much more efficient. It's no coincidence that it's the same technology used in Jaguar forage-harvesters.

From an operator's point of view the machine drives in just the same way as before, just in a more responsive manner.

"Having run this pre-production machine for the last six months, we're really impressed.

"It's incredibly smooth and you've got a much better sense of feel. Critically, it delivers the grunt when you ask for it and feels much more powerful than our previous 741.

"But it's not all out-and-out muscle. It's brilliant for fine finesse work – you've got really precise control to the point where you can place loads like a crane."

“It has improved our work-rates – shaving precious seconds off cycle times has made a huge difference, particularly when you're doing bulk handling jobs like loading lorries or mucking out sheds.”

It's a similar story with the new hydraulics package. Changes to the main valve block, more sensors and improved software means there's now more feedback through the joystick, greater sensitivity to all boom functions and faster cycle times.

"The feel of the controls is a whole lot more precise. The extra feedback through the joystick means you can feel exactly where the tip of the bucket blade is. It's now like the boom is an extension of your arm – any slight movement from your hand is mirrored by the attachment."

There have been improvements to the brakes too. Not only is there more engine-braking generated through the transmission, a new valve block with sensors to detect how hard the pedal is pressed means stopping power is much more progressive.



FARM FACTS

FARM	SJ Watchorn near Bungay, Suffolk
FARMED AREA	400ha (1000 acres)
CROP	winter wheat, spring barley, spring beans, oilseed rape, sugar beet, winter barley and biogas maize
LIVESTOCK	600 breeding sows with offspring taken through to finishing (c. 15,000/year)
STAFF	Simon Watchorn plus nine others full-time

"Gently feathering the brakes now means you steadily slow down but jump on the anchors and the system detects your urgency, bringing the machine to an almost immediate standstill. It's just a whole lot more proportional."

Having had the experience of running this latest generation SCORPION, Mr Watchorn is convinced it's now one of the most capable machines on the market.

"The changes to the new 741 make it an absolute pleasure to drive. We're often using our machines in and around people and animals so having that extra level of precision is fantastic from a safety point of view.

"But it has also improved our work-rates – shaving precious seconds off cycle times has made a huge difference, particularly when you're doing bulk handling jobs like loading lorries or mucking out sheds. With this latest machine I think CLAAS has really got the handler job nailed."