

“We really value being part of the CLAAS family”



Rhodri Thomas

Based close to the harbour town of Fishguard in Pembrokeshire, the Thomas family have a long history with CLAAS tractors, having taken delivery of the very first lime green and white liveried tractor to arrive in Wales back in 2004.

Since then, there's always been at least one CLAAS machine on the small contracting fleet running alongside prime movers of a range of different shades. But two years ago all that changed.

“For the last 15 years or so we've chosen to run tractors with stepless CVT gearboxes because of the extra flexibility and efficiency we feel they bring to our type of work,” explains Geoff Thomas.

“Because of our history with CLAAS and the backup we get from RIVERLEA we would have chosen to stick with white and green machines but CVTs weren't an option on the smaller ARION until a couple of years ago.

“When stepless boxes became available we were keen to make the switch back to CLAAS, having been disappointed in the manufacturer back-up and reliability of other coloured tractors.”

“Here in our corner of South Western Wales the climate is a big factor, the Atlantic often battering us for months on end. For that reason we need machines we know are on top of the job so we can make the most of the weather windows.”

The family now run an ARION 660, 550 and 530 plus a SCORPION 635 telehandler.

WHY ARION?

“We really like the combination of the ARION's light weight, manoeuvrability and power. On top of that, they're packed with the latest technology so that we can really make the most of every pound we've got invested in them,” says Rhodri.

“They're not the cheapest machines on the market but the undoubtedly the best value for money.”

STEPLESS VERSUS POWERSHIFT?

“We've tended to go with CVTs for our frontline tractors since 2004 because we feel they suit our baling, wrapping and cultivations work really well.

“The ability to set forward speeds independently of engine rpm makes for a much more efficient machine – they use less fuel and the smoother uptake of drive is kinder on the tractor itself.

“CLAAS' CMATIC box is as good as anything else on the market. You just set the speed and let the tractor sort itself out. Every time I try to challenge it I'm proved wrong. Leave the transmission to work things out for itself and you end up burning less fuel while covering more acres in a day.

“And they're a more relaxed machine to drive which is important when you're sitting in the seat for 1400-1500 hours a year. Although the HEXASHIFT powershift box in our older 530 is good, when you get back in either of the CMATICS you quickly remember why we chose that option for the front-liners.”



“I’d go as far to say that the current CLAAS cockpit is a better cab than anything we’ve had or tried before.”

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CEBIS

“The new CEBIS touchscreen is a huge step on. Even for someone less technologically minded like myself, it’s dead easy to set up and doesn’t overload you with stuff you don’t need to know,” says Geoff.

“What I really like is having the option to have camera views as part of the main screen, right there in front of you all the time. I’ve got one camera in the drill hopper and one on the wrapper table – it makes life so much easier.

“Because it’s so straightforward to change settings and uncomplicated to set-up the headland management it means you do so more frequently. As a result we’re undoubtedly getting more out of the tractors.”

GPS

Both the ARION 550 and 660 are both equipped with GPS auto-steering – the Thomas’ first foray down this route.

“In the smaller tractor we’ve got an S7 screen running SATCOR 15 which is plenty accurate enough for drilling,” explains Rhodri.

“In the 660 we’ve got the bigger S10 screen which gives me the ability to do variable rate spreading and section control. I like the fact we use the CEBIS solely to handle the tractor functions and have a separate dedicated screen for GPS and ISOBUS implement control.

“It keeps everything simple and means it’s really clear and easy to set up. It’s got to the point where I now use steering for virtually every job I do.”

COMFORT

“The four-point cab suspension is fantastic – it’s the next best thing to fully suspended axles,” says Geoff.

“It’s quiet, even with the mowers running flat-out. I’d go as far to say that the current CLAAS cockpit is a better cab than anything we’ve had or tried before.”





Carwyn Evans, RIVERLEA Field Sales Manager, Geoff and Rhodri Thomas

FUEL USE AND SERVICING

“We rigorously record fuel use so that we know what it’s costing us to do various jobs. Where the CLAAS scores highly is on transport – our current tractors are using less fuel on haulage work than anything we’ve had previously,” says Rhodri.

“But it’s also a real driver’s tractor. It’s been designed by people who clearly have experience of working on these types of machines. Service access is better than any other colour tractor we’ve tried.”

WHY CLAAS?

“Put simply it’s all down to the back-up. As contractors we’ve got to keep going and with CLAAS you feel as if everyone’s working towards ensuring that’s the case,” says Geoff.

“We’re lucky that all the dealers in our area are pretty good but what makes the difference with Riverlea is that they’ve got the back-up from CLAAS UK.

“Night or day there’s always someone on the end of the phone and if ever we have an issue, we know someone will be out to us within half an hour.

“Although we’ve had at least one CLAAS tractor on the fleet since 2004, it wasn’t until two years ago that smaller ARIONS became available with stepless CVT gearboxes.

“The minute we learnt that was on the options list we made the decision to go full-line CLAAS – we haven’t looked back since.

“We really value being part of the CLAAS family. The combination of dependable, capable machines and unbeatable dealer back-up make CLAAS tractors the clear choice for us.”

Farm Facts

FARM	GR, RK and RD Thomas near Fishguard, Pembrokeshire
FARMED AREA	146ha (360 acres)
LIVESTOCK	40 Blonde X suckler cows plus followers 320 Texel cross breeding ewes
CONTRACTING WORK	Baling, wrapping, muck-spreading, ploughing, drilling and spraying plus full stubble-to-stubble contracting
STAFF	Geoff, Yvonne and Rhodri Thomas plus two others part-time