

Charles Long & Paul Francis, R L Long (Farms) Ltd, Suffolk,
AXION 960 TT

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Suffolk, AXION 960 TT

When’s a tracked tractor not a tracked tractor? When it’s an AXION TT. This is certainly the case for R L Long (Farms) who since last August have been using a pre-series 445hp AXION 960 TERRA TRAC for both arable and vegetable cultivations. During this time it has revolutionised the role of a tracked tractor on the farm and turned conventional thinking toward tracks on its head.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

While the AXION TT’s half-track format still provides all the benefits of low compaction and high traction that come from a tracked tractor, they have found it still retains all the driving characteristics, manoeuvrability, comfort and fuel economy of a conventional tractor. It provides the best of both worlds.

Tracked tractors have been part of the Long’s tractor fleet for over 10 years. Of the 1,800 ha they farm at Fornham St Martin near Bury St Edmunds, 400ha is down to potatoes and onions. Often grown on rented ground, mainly along the A14 corridor from Newmarket towards Stowmarket, road transport is an important consideration.

Looking to replace one of their two Challengers last Autumn, Farm Director Paul Francis says that while he initially intended to replace like-for-like, looking at the latest version he felt it was much the same as the old version and had not progressed as much as he would have liked.

“As they are just down the road, out of interest I spoke to MANNS at Saxham about the AXION TT. Looking at it I thought it looked right and answered a lot of the problems we had with the Challenger, so agreed to try one of the pre-series machines.

“Once it landed on the farm and we put it to work, we knew it was right and were immediately impressed with it right from the ‘get-go’. It has certainly completely changed how we look at tracked tractors, with the result we have now got rid of the second Challenger and another conventional tractor, which has been replaced by a 415hp tractor that can be used with row crop wheels.”

RIDE COMFORT

“The biggest difference is the ride comfort, especially on the road – it’s not nearly such a bone-shaker. Richard who drives it loves it. The cab comfort is fantastic and having functions such as cruise control, the CSM sequence management and ISOBUS and steering on the S10 screen makes his life so easy. The difference in the cab environment is night and day – it’s worlds apart.

“In the field the AXION TT performs just as well as the Caterpillar, even though it is about two tonnes lighter, but it has all the characteristics of a conventional wheeled tractor,” adds Charles Long. “The overall footprint is very similar, but the AXION TT is better balanced, plus it’s easy to add or remove weight. The

710 front tyres are well matched to the 735mm tracks and in the wet they pack the ground down ahead of the tracks so they grip better.”

FUEL ECONOMY

“Fuel economy is also considerably better. Typically the AXION will use about 50-60 litres an hour, compared to the Challenger’s 70 to 80 litres. The CVT transmission is far more efficient and the 50kph road speed is a great improvement. At times we can be changing implements twice a day, but even if it is down at Newmarket that’s not now an issue.”

Taking on heavy cultivations from the Challenger, the AXION TT will typically

be paired with cultivation equipment such as a 6.0m Horsch Terrano or 9.0m Dalbo Rollomaximum, in addition to drilling using a 9.0m Pronto, pressing using a 6.0m Vaderstad Rexus or ridging up for potatoes.

“Basically it does everything from tickling the ground to ridging at 18 inches,” says Charles. “The excellent suspension is certainly noticeable when pressing with the Rexus, as you do need speed in order to do a good job. The AXION TT will comfortably pull it at 12kph, which you certainly wouldn’t want to do with a Challenger.

“Minimising ground compaction is very important and we need to work

deep and work at the right times to avoid damaging the soil. The AXION TT spreads its weight very well and being lighter is definitely a benefit. In a straight pull there’s very little difference between the two, but the AXION TT is considerably better on the headland when turning.

“Wheelslip is negligible and you get all the grip but without leaving any ‘dishing’. However, when turning it behaves like a conventional tractor and hardly leaves a mark. It certainly doesn’t leave any ridges of soil like the Challenger that then have to be levelled out again.”

MORE HOURS OUT OF ONE MACHINE

“As a versatile tractor for cultivations the AXION TT is fantastic, but due to its versatility that has now opened up a lot of other opportunities to get more hours out of one machine,” states Paul. “The conditions in the Autumn and Spring meant it was tied up with cultivations, but because it has ISOBUS with section control, we will certainly look at using it with our 10t Bredal spreader for base dressing in the Spring. There is no reason why it could not be used for haulage or grain carting if necessary, it’s been extremely successful.”

