

Foraging flexibility



Billy Howat

Rather than rely on a contractor, the Howats make their own silage which gives them the flexibility they need, living in an area with up to 55 inches of rain a year.

"We feed an all grass silage diet with bought-in concentrates. So having control over silage quality and being able to maximise the use of home grown forage is important, because that's where profit is made," explains Billy Howat, who with his brothers Mungo, Alastair and David runs two dairy herds totalling 350 cows on their farm near Cumnock in Ayrshire. In addition, they breed their own replacements and keep the youngstock on until selling them as stores at 15 to 20 months, meaning there is over 900 cattle on the farm.

"The weather windows can be very tight," he says. "Last year was easy but that was the exception. Even though we have some very good contractors in the area, we have made our own silage for over 40 years because it gives us the ability in a difficult year to just go out and harvest for an afternoon if necessary."

The Howats have relied on CLAAS JAGUAR foragers for virtually all the years they have been making their own silage. Starting with an engine-on trailed JAGUAR 60, more recently a JAGUAR 850 bought in 2003 was responsible for silage harvesting for 17 years, prior to being replaced by a new JAGUAR 850 two years ago.

JAGUAR WAS THE ONLY REAL OPTION

"Although we did look at the other foragers on the market, even though they are good machines the only real option was the JAGUAR. That's partly because of the reliability and it's what we are comfortable with, but also because we are looked after by GORDONS, who are a very good, family owned dealership. There would have to be a very good reason to change away from the JAGUAR.

"For the 360 ha of silage we make a year, the JAGUAR 850 is probably a bit big for our needs, but we originally chose it over the 830 because of its heavier build and over the 17 years we ran it the

old JAGUAR 850 was never any trouble. Also further down the line, even though we were looking at it as a long-term investment, when we came to replace it the 850 would be a more appealing machine."

Comparing the two JAGUAR 850s, even though the basic mechanics and flow through the two machines is very similar, the biggest difference is in the engine bay. Both are powered by Mercedes engines, but while the old 2003 JAGUAR 850 developed 389hp at 1,800rpm, on the latest 850 the Stage V litre engine with turbo-compound technology now generates 462hp at 1,700 rpm.

"With the increased engine power, we could have gone for the smaller 840, but the extra power is definitely useful and when we had it on demo you could instantly see the difference that made to output. There was certainly no need to go up in model size. Even though we don't monitor fuel use, it certainly seems to be very fuel efficient and our output per litre of fuel will definitely be higher.

TOUCHSCREEN CEBIS

"The other big difference is the touchscreen CEBIS terminal and the amount of information I can easily get out of it on engine performance and load to ensure that the JAGUAR is running at optimum efficiency.

"Because of the difference it makes to fuel consumption and output, I am also a stickler for keeping the blades sharp and the shearbar gap tight. I like to sharpen the blades little and often and adjust the shearbar. So having the counter in CEBIS and being able to just press a button when waiting on the headland or moving between fields to quickly touch up the blades or to adjust the shearbar, instead of having to set it manually, is a great improvement.

"Along with things like 4-wheel drive, wider tyres to reduce compaction and the auto-lube which makes servicing easy, the new pivoting system on the pick-up follows contours better and reduces contamination. We now have a machine that will comfortably enable us to clear 40ha a day, but with the capacity to clear far more if we need to push it, which all helps in ensuring we can gain the optimum quality silage."