

A 'film on film' machine

Taking control of his own baling operation, livestock farmer Phil Dickinson bought his first combi-baler in 2021 in the form of a CLAAS 455 UNIWRAP. And already the investment is paying dividends, not least financially, but also in the quality of the bales being produced, he says.

Complimenting his long-standing recycling business and successful egg production enterprise, which produces 6,000 eggs per day, Phil farms 52 ha on the outskirts of Manchester, rearing 150-head of cattle and 100 sheep.

WHY BUY A CLAAS BALER?

"When I bought the baler, there was no question that it was going to be anything other than a CLAAS machine, simply based on the great service that I get from my dealer, RICKERBY, now with a depot at Burscough," explains Phil.

"Producing about 1,200 bales per season, I'll be the first to admit that buying my own combi-baler is a bit of a luxury for this size of business. But it does mean we can go baling exactly when we want to. And when you cost it out compared to the price of using a contractor over a period of time, the numbers do stack up."

Phil's baler is specified as a 'film on film' machine, which applies film wrap in the bale chamber rather than net. "This means we can keep film use down – only applying two and a half layers in the chamber and another four layers on the wrapping table. But crucially, the bales keep really well with excellent bale quality and no spoilage. It also means we have only one type of plastic waste to deal with."

HOW HAS THE BALER PERFORMED?

Bales produced are like bricks, says Phil. "In our first year using the baler, the bales were actually too hard for our diet feeder to handle. As such, we lowered the chamber pressure in the second year, from 180bar to 120bar, which makes an ideal bale for the diet feeder, while maintaining their shape throughout winter with good square shoulders."

Operator Rhys Woodward adds: "After two seasons of use, the baler has been reliable. In good conditions, it can produce about 40 bales per hour.

"The wrapping table easily keeps up with the throughput of the baler and is not upset by any of the hills that we have to work on. To prevent bales from rolling away, the baler is also fitted with a 'kicker' that puts the bales on their ends."

For the last two seasons, the baler had been paired with a CLAAS ARION 650, which handled it comfortably, says Rhys. "This year (2023), it will be used with an ARION 660 CMATIC, which should be good for achieving the ideal baling speed."

“It does a great job, produces dense bales with no waste, keeps wrap costs down and has lots of capacity.”

Rhys Woodward

WHAT ARE THE STAND-OUT FEATURES OF THE 455 UNIWRAP?

One of the baler's stand-out features is its Maximum Pressure System, which sees three of the chamber's rollers swing into the chamber, says Rhys. "This helps get the bale formed initially, then keeps pressure applied to the bale to get good bale density.

"Everything we bale for ourselves is chopped - mainly using all of the baler's 25 knives. This produces a very dense bale, but is easy to feed out. If conditions get too dry, we will then switch to using 12 or 13 knives - simply selected via the control box.

"To prevent the bale from 'bursting' when feeding out, the baler also has a good feature whereby the knives automatically retract when the bale is nearly complete, leaving the outer part of the bale unchopped."

Phil concludes: "Overall, I'm very pleased with the baler - it does a great job, produces dense bales with no waste, keeps wrap costs down and has lots of capacity."



Farm Facts

Middleton, Manchester

Farmed area

52 ha

Livestock

150 beef cattle
100 sheep

Staff

20 across all businesses

CLAAS History

ARION 660 CMATIC tractor
ARION 630 tractor with loader
DISCO 3200FC PROFIL front mower
DISCO 3200C CONTOUR rear mower
VOLTO 52 tedder



Operator Rhys Woodward