

A pleasure on the road

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James Green

A move away from conventional crop establishment techniques towards a strip-tillage regime has seen a massive reduction in the horsepower required and diesel used at Conant Farming in Rutland.

Central to this has been the arrival of a 445hp CLAAS AXION 960 TERRA TRAC. Where previously heavily intensive cultivation practices necessitated well in excess of 540hp and tractors with a track at each corner, the lower draft requirements of the new regime allowed the contract farming business to look at other options.

While a number of tractors were considered, the company settled on an AXION 960 TT for its ability to put power to the ground in an efficient way.

“We felt the combination of wheels up front and tracks at the rear offered the best of all worlds, particularly when it came to running costs,” explains farms director James Green.

“We aim to keep our kit a decent amount of time to extract maximum financial value out of it but to do that we have to closely examine running costs – four-track machines have proved costly of late although we are still running one for the really heavy work.

WHY TRACKS?

“We have a fair bit of steeply rolling ground and plenty of heavy clay so traction is king. And of course moving to strip-till drilling means we have to be ever more aware of surface and sub-soil compaction.

“The CLAAS TERRA TRAC system is about the most reliable on the market – we’ve run with them on our combines for a long time and they’re pretty much bomb-proof – that gave us all the confidence we needed.”

WHY CLAAS?

“We’ve never run CLAAS tractors before but the back-up we get from MANNNS at Market Harborough on the combines was enough to convince us. We have total confidence that we’ll be properly looked after by the Parts, Service and Sales departments.

“We took a six-year warranty and, having clocked 1700 hours in 18 months, the 960 hasn’t had a spanner on it.”



James Green and Michael Gardner



HOW DOES IT PERFORM?

“Despite being 100hp less than my last tractor, the AXION pulls like a train. Even on our banks it doesn’t struggle with a 12m cultivator,” says operator Michael Gardner.

“And when it comes to traction it feels unstoppable – one of the first times I went out with it I forgot to put it in four-wheel-drive and it was a couple of hours before I realised. It just cruised on up our banks without scrabbling.

“Most of the time it’s hitched up to our 6m strip-till drill which barely ever makes it murmur. Having the stepless transmission makes it so much more adaptable – all the time I’m working in the field I run it in ‘Eco’ mode so the engine’s burbling along at 1600-1700rpm. I can switch to ‘Power’ and run at higher revs but I’ve never found it necessary.

“The transmission works out the revs required to keep going at the speed I set – even in tough spots I just let it get on and do its own thing.”

FUEL USE

“While the intelligence of the gearbox undoubtedly adds to the AXION’s efficiency, it’s the weight saving that I believe is making the biggest difference,” says James.

“It is over 10 tonnes lighter than our four-track tractors. Not hauling all that extra weight about has had a massive impact on fuel use – we’re using between 15-20% less diesel than before.”

STAYING ON TRACK

“I’ve got CLAAS’ S10 screen and RTK-corrected GPS steering which is so much easier to set-up and use than the system I had before,” says Michael. “Connected via iPad, it integrates seamlessly with SOYL’s system for variable rate drilling.”

ON THE ROAD

“With our land shared between five estates spread across Rutland, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire we’re sometimes having to travel up to 18 miles.

“The AXION is an absolute pleasure on the road - the cab is so much quieter and more comfortable than our articulated machines. Having suspension on the front axle, under the cab and in the tracks, it doesn’t rock about and rides so much better.”

WOULD YOU HAVE ANOTHER?

“The AXION 960’s performance has given us a lot of confidence in CLAAS tractors which we probably wouldn’t have considered before,” says James.

“We want machines that will do a decent stint with us without giving trouble. If the AXION continues with its current reliability we’ll certainly be looking at CLAAS seriously when it comes to changing our other tractors in the future.”



Farm Facts

The Conant Farming Company, Lyndon near Oakham, Rutland

Farmed area

2,836 ha

Cropping

Winter wheat 1,234 ha, winter barley 396 ha, oilseed rape 416 ha, spring barley 39 ha, spring wheat 332 ha, spring beans 419 ha

Staff

Six full-timers plus one other part-time

Machinery

LEXION 8800 TT and 8900 TT
AXION 960 TT
SCORPION 7044