

## BUSINESS FACTS

B Dawe Contracting Ltd,  
near Southampton, Hampshire

**WORK UNDERTAKEN**  
Silage: grass 1010ha (2500acres/year),  
maize 607ha (1500acres/year)  
Baling: 10,000 4-stringers/year,  
5000 6-stringers/year

**FARMED AREA**  
80ha (200acres) grass

**LIVESTOCK**  
35 suckler cows plus 80 store cattle

**STAFF**  
Brian Dawe plus two others full-time

1986  
JAGUAR 690

1996  
JAGUAR 820

1998  
JAGUAR 820

2001  
JAGUAR 830

2006  
JAGUAR 830

2011  
JAGUAR 830  
SPEEDSTAR

2015  
JAGUAR 840  
SPEEDSTAR

2019  
JAGUAR 840

2023  
JAGUAR 840

# B DAWE CONTRACTING

“We’ve tried other makes over the years  
but nothing matches a CLAAS.”

It was 28 years ago that Hampshire farmer’s son Brian Dawe took the plunge into silage making.

Starting out with a nine-year-old JAGUAR 690SL, in his first season he chopped over 200ha (500acres) of grass and a further 200ha (500acres) of maize. While it might sound like a modest amount by today’s standards, at the time it was considered quite an achievement with a second-hand 300hp machine.

“The workload grew steadily but the old forager seemed to take it in its stride. However with three seasons under our belt I felt we had proved that the business was sound and we could justify a change of machine,” explains Mr Dawe.

“I looked around at other colours but it was pretty clear the JAGUAR was still the machine to have so I put my name down for a brand-spanking 820. Happily that coincided with another local contractor retiring and suddenly we were looking at chopping 690ha (1700acres) of maize.

It felt like a long season but we proved it was possible – it just meant some long nights in the seat.”

## Why a JAGUAR 820?

“At the time, being a young business I didn’t want to over-commit with huge debts and so it seemed sensible to go with a basic-spec version of the smallest machine in the range.

It’s a principle that we’ve stuck with. By opting for models at the lower end of the power range we’re putting less strain on the various drivelines – we just plod on steadily without pushing it too hard. I’m convinced that’s why **we’ve had such a decent run of reliability with our nine foragers.**”

## What changed?

“The biggest difference with the switch from the 690 to the 820 was the move from a longitudinally mounted V8 to a transverse V6. This change did away with the 90 degree gearbox which had a huge impact on efficiency. We immediately saw a 20% increase in output even though the engine had only an extra 20hp – the simpler driveline was just sucking less power.

Of course from an operator’s point of view it was the cab that really made the difference. It was so much quieter. Your ears weren’t constantly taking a pounding so by the end of the day you came off the machine feeling less tired. Simple things like the positioning and action of the hydrostat lever meant you weren’t leant over all day. Having all the functions grouped on the joystick rather than a series of levers and pedals meant you were able to respond that much quicker.”

With four years’ work under its belt that first 820 was replaced by another of the same which did a similar stint. It was at this point that an opportunity arose that would see the forager’s working window stretched by some margin.

“In the early 2000s I was approached by United Oilseeds to see if I would have the capacity to pick up their morphine poppies. With poppy harvest generally taking place through August - typically a quieter time for grass harvesting in Hampshire – I could see an opportunity to extend our acreage without piling up more work at busy times. While initially it was all very manageable, the demand for the crop grew massively and pretty quickly we were looking at clearing 1010-1215ha (2500-3000acres) – all within a couple of weeks.

Having a bigger machine was never really an option as invariably we’d need to be in two places at once and so we went all out and bought a second 830.”







### Why a JAGUAR 830?

“Being dry and brittle the poppies took very little power so we didn’t need anything any bigger. It could easily take over half an hour to load a 12-tonne trailer so we resorted to hitching them on behind the forager.

Some of our steeply rolling ground would see the Jags scrabbling and so our next machines were ordered with 4wd. **We’d never go back now. With increasingly challenging weather throughout the season becoming the norm – whether in grass or maize – it’s cheap insurance knowing we won’t get stuck.** It also means we’re not wearing out tyres unnecessarily on some of the flinty ground that Hampshire is famous for. The extra expense of ticking the 4wd box on the options list has always been recovered when we’ve come to trade the machine in four years down the line.”

One of the most significant changes to the transmission came with Mr Dawe’s first SPEEDSTAR. **“Going to 40kph was a complete revelation to us.** Because the poppies were spread out over such a huge area we could waste hours on the road travelling at 20kph – it was a fantastic extra that transformed the efficiency of our operation overnight.”

### Why a JAGUAR 840?

A move in poppy growing and processing to other parts of the world saw the United Oilseeds workload diminish to the point that by 2016 only a single forager was required. “By then an 840 was the smallest model in the range. Being just over 400hp it was capable of comfortably managing our grass and maize single-handedly. It was one of the first with curvy, fold-out panels which massively speeded up dealing with the corn-cracker. We were then able to slip it in and out with our mini-digger – just half an hour and it’s in.

It also had a trick hidden up its sleeve. If the metal detector kicked

in it would stop the transmission dead. It’s a brilliant feature but that first season striking out in maize, one of our trailer drivers got a bit close to the back of the new machine. The forager stopped all of a sudden and he carried on... It cost us the rear corner panel but has repeatedly saved us swallowing anything nasty – I wouldn’t be without it now.

That first 840 was followed by a second four years later. With its new joystick, armrest controls and touchscreen **the 2019 machine was another step on again. It was so much more driver-friendly with electronically-selected gears and the ability to sharpen up and adjust the shear-bar from the cab.**”

The latest machine to join the line-up is a 2023-plate 840. It’s equipped with GPS auto-steering and QUANTIMETER yield recording.

“Going to GPS steering has made life that little bit easier, especially when we’re chopping maize that has been sown with a cereal drill. **I don’t have to concentrate so hard so I’m less tired coming off the forager particularly when we’re doing 20 hour days.**”

It also links well with yield mapping. I can email customers maps to show them how their crops have performed and which areas could do with a bit of help. It’s easy to access from the farm computer. There’s no complicated set-up process, you just start work and it starts recording.

I can see it becoming a really useful tool in moving to a charging system that’s fairer on both the farmer and contractor. By recording exactly what tonnage of crop had gone through the machine **we can give growers a precise picture of what’s in the clamp and bill accordingly.** That way they only pay for what they’re getting and if they choose to prioritise high quality multi-cut grass they’re not getting penalised. Likewise we are getting paid fairly for every tonne we’ve processed.”



Which forager has been your favourite?

“To be honest each time we’ve had a new machine it’s been my favourite – they’ve just got better and better with each generation.”

### Why CLAAS?

**We’ve always been well looked after by our local dealer** should anything go wrong. They’ve generally got the parts on the shelf and a back-up machine in the yard if the problem can’t be sorted straightaway.

They’re happy to let us do our own servicing – having owned CLAAS foragers for nearly 30 years we know our way around them pretty well and they’re easy to work on. As a driver I know every little rattle and shake and can generally tell when something’s up before it becomes a problem.

We’ve tried other makes over the years but nothing matches a CLAAS. We typically change the forager every four years – around the 2500-hour point – and we know we’ll always get a good trade-in price. It seems even the smallest JAGUARs hold their money well – ours are generally tidy, well-maintained machines and that seems to pay dividends in keeping depreciation to a minimum.

“Even though the very first JAGUAR I bought was nine years old, it was a solid, reliable machine. And every one we’ve had since then – nine in total – has proved to be the same.”