

Steve and John Osborne
S&J Osborne, Ashington, West Sussex

JAGUAR/DISCO/LINER

Having been silaging for over 25 years, and contracting for much longer, the Osborne family, based at Ashington, West Sussex, have seen some significant changes in the sector. One thing that has stayed constant, though is their commitment to CLAAS – at first for their forage harvester needs, and latterly for other machines too.

John Osborne began contracting in 1967, when the contractor he had been working for since leaving school passed away suddenly. His employer's father invited John to take over the machinery and the customer workload, which was mainly muckspreading.

"When I joined the business at 25 years old, I wanted to look for ways we could diversify," explains his son Steve, who is still helped out by 87-year-old John, but whose own sons Sam and Daryl now take on much of the workload.

Recognising contractor needs

Contract silage-making requires high-capacity, ultra-reliable machinery. OLIVERS supplies and supports the CLAAS equipment on which S&J Osborne rely.



S&J Osbornes



With a workload including grass, wholecrop and maize, the Osbornes have a fleet of heads to match their forager.

“I decided to offer more services to the cattle farms we were already working with, reckoning there was a gap to get into silage so that farmers weren’t waiting too long for a contractor. With a self-propelled forager being a big investment, we split the cost with another contractor in a different area whose workload would fit with ours.

“That worked ok at first, but as we both took on more work, things got stretched and in 1998 we decided to buy our own machine, a secondhand CLAAS JAGUAR 840. We had 700 acres of grass and 400 acres of maize committed, aiming for a customer base of 1,000 acres of each crop to ensure the machine paid its way. But as we won more work, we needed to upgrade both in age and performance, so in 2003 bought a JAGUAR 850, our first new forager.

“Last year we chopped 5,500 acres of grass and 1,500 acres of maize, plus some wholecrop, all through one machine. Our forager tends to be replaced every four years, although our last one did an extra year. We’ve stayed with CLAAS, though, and last year bought a new 585hp JAGUAR 950. We have a couple of nice large organic farm jobs of around 1,000 acres each, and when added to our other work the 950 has just the

right capacity and specification to suit our workload.”

While dealers of other makes occasionally try to persuade the Osbornes to try something different, they have been happy to stick with OLIVERS and CLAAS for forage equipment.

“Other dealers do come knocking, but don’t always listen to what we want, simply pushing models with more output, while some don’t have a local branch. We’ve had a good relationship with the team nearby at Petworth since the premises was a Southern Harvesters CLAAS Retail branch, and that’s continued since it was taken on by OLIVERS. They’ve retained good staff who know foragers, and while they’ve grown in size, they seem to understand how family businesses work, which isn’t true of every dealer.

“We also operate a LEXION 570 combine, so we’re committed to CLAAS because of product quality as well as service support.”

A forager dealership tends to recognise that a silage contractor is busy with harvest not just from July to September, like a combinable crop contractor, but from April on early grass to November on late maize.

Back in 2005 our forager caught fire one morning late on during first cut, but by 4pm we were working again with a back-up machine for the rest of the season, and were found a new machine for the autumn. That’s the sort of support we value.

“CLAAS JAGUAR foragers are the obvious choice given their popularity. The 950’s size and specification suits us well, and the 900 series spec gives us additional features over the 800 models, such as automatic variable chop length according to crop drymatter. Service back-up is just as important as specification, though, and while we’ve had no more than a couple of small metal detector issues on our current machine, they were sorted quickly by OLIVERS. All machines have the occasional problems or breakdowns – it’s the way they’re dealt with that’s important.”

GRASS, WHOLECROP & MAIZE

With a workload including grass, wholecrop and maize, the Osbornes have a fleet of heads to match their forager.

“Our current ORBIS 750 maize head was carried over from our previous forager, and is

now four years old. We’ve decided to upgrade for this autumn to a wider 12-row ORBIS 900, which will make it easier to open up fields with the tractor and trailer alongside. We also have a CLAAS Direct Disc wholecrop header, so we can offer the full forage package.”

Other key silage implements are also from CLAAS, including a LINER four-rotor rake, while the business is now on its fourth CLAAS DISCO triple mower, a 9200C.

“We settled on CLAAS for our main butterfly mowers some time ago, and are now on our fourth set. The current DISCO 9200C has a grouper, which has proved useful in lighter crops, where we’ve sometimes grouped the three mower swaths and then put two rows together with our LINER rake. The DISCO does a good job even on flat grass, and leaves a decent finish and good swath.

“We also do a lot of square bale silage, running three big square balers, including CLAAS QUADRANT 3300 and 3200 models, and outside of forage work we also operate a LEXION 570 combine, so we’re committed to CLAAS because of product quality as well as service support,” says Steve.

A key benefit of such high capacity kit is its efficiency and how it helps to ease the workload, reckons Steve.

“We try not to do silly hours, usually stopping by 9pm when silaging unless bad weather is forecast. Family is important, and my dad is still working with us at 87 – until recently he did all the mowing. It’s good to work with a dealer that’s a family business like ours.

To keep our workload manageable we need good kit with good back-up that means we can get the job done when the weather comes right. That’s what we get from CLAAS and OLIVERS”

