



Pictured left to right: Trevor 'Cleet' Thompson with father and son, James and Roy Townley.

Mean green mowing machine

The first signs that silage season has started in County Down comes when J D Townley's XERION 3300VC comes out of winter hibernation, and after a service, polish and a bit of TLC, the distinctive bark of its Cat C9 engine can be heard as it sets to work mowing.

This year sees the XERION celebrating its 20th season of mowing, during which time it has worked its way through four sets of triple mowers and is currently paired with a 9.10m wide DISCO 9400 C DUO working with a DISCO 3200 F PROFIL.

Working ahead of a JAGUAR 970, over the course of the season the XERION will work its way through 800ha of first cut silage and then anything up to three further cuts of varying amounts depending on the season.

"The first triples I had were on a reverse drive tractor before changing that in 2000 for a JAGUAR 860 with front mowers that I ran for six years. That worked very well, but was slow on the road," says Roy Townley. "Frank Ward took me over to the factory and having returned on the Friday, I put in an order for the XERION, a set of DISCO 8550 triple mowers, an AXION and a LEXION on the Monday. At the time, we were running a 20,000th Anniversary JAGUAR that had silver wheel rims, so we arranged that the XERION could also be supplied with silver rims to match.

LOW COST OF OWNERSHIP

"The XERION cost £125,000 and the mowers £50,000 and everyone thought I was mad, but I think I have had the last laugh as the cost of ownership has been brilliant over the years. At the time it was the same price as a self-propelled mower, but the benefit of the XERION is that I only need to replace the mowers every four years and not the whole machine. Also it's very recognisable so has been an extremely good advert for the business."

The XERION is driven and looked after by Trevor 'Cleet' Thompson who says that one of the reasons that the XERION, which still shines and certainly not looking its age, has stood the test of time and been so reliable is due to the fact it is only used for mowing.

"We did initially think about doing arable work with it, but the fact we didn't use it for cultivations or one-pass drilling has certainly benefited it, with the result that it only has 6,500 hours on it so has plenty of life left in it yet," he says. "Other than treating it to a new set of injectors last year, the only other things needing doing have been a new driveshaft and fuel delivery pump. The front tyres are original but we did replace the rears due to the weight of the mowers.

"With the cab turned around the XERION is ideal for mowing. You are sat right above the mowers and can see everything around you. Also having the engine behind you, I can easily hear any stones or branches going through the mower, so can stop and move them out of the swath."

STILL GOT ALL ITS HORSES

Even when working in heavy crops, Cleet says it does not miss a beat and has the power to just push on, comfortably averaging 8.0ha an hour at 14-16 kph, with a best of 12.8ha in just 55 minutes. Field size can be anything from 0.4ha up to 12ha, but with its four-wheel steering, which Cleet has set to come in above 15kph, it is more than manoeuvrable enough.

"Due to our conditions, you are usually faced with a wall of grass, especially with the beef boys who only take one cut, but the XERION is more than up to it. Overall fuel consumption is only about 2.0 to 4.0 litres a hectare and as it has got older and loosened up, the better the engine has become. It just sits there quite happily and the temperature gauge doesn't move."

Just how well the engine now performs was highlighted last Christmas when Cleet put it forward for a charity dyno test. This showed that instead of its nominal 335hp, at 1,000 rpm the C9 engine was generating 345hp rising to a max power of 351.9hp, with max torque at 2128 lb ft/hr. "It's still got all its horses and they are alive and well," comments Roy.

The XERION is also a regular at various charity tractor pulling events that can see up to 60 tractors competing, "which I often win," says Cleet, grinning. "It will certainly outpull a 400hp tractor and has even been up against tractors tweaked to over 600hp, but due to its even sized wheels and weight distribution it leaves them standing! The last event we organised here was for Macmillan Cancer Support which raised over £25,000 and we are currently planning another for this Christmas."

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