

“ I don't think there's a single feature that the Rexor doesn't have that I'd want. ”

Sixth time's a charm

Machinery Masterclass

With a more positive outlook for sugar beet, a Norfolk-based contracting business has invested in a sixth beet harvester to provide greater efficiencies to customers. CPM finds out more.

By Charlotte Cunningham

The flat Fenland landscape gives an unspoilt view of the Wissington British Sugar factory, miles before the satnav tells you you've reached your destination.

A fleet of beet harvesters travel in convoy down the winding roads that lead up to it, with the blue skies above and the mild November temperatures making it a seemingly perfect day for harvesting sugar beet.

In a field adjacent to the Wissington factory, a Grimme Rexor 6300 Platinum beet harvester fires up with a loud powerful rumble as it prepares to take

flight on the last few runs of the field.

Behind the driving seat is Matthew Russell. “Sugar beet has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I think the earliest picture I've got of me driving a harvester is from when I was about 12,” he laughs, as the machine starts munching its way through the crop.

Beet specialists

Matthew is the youngest generation of Russell Agricultural Contractors, who have been specialists in sugar beet since his grandfather founded the business. “It all started with my grandfather and a single-row harvester. Then my dad and uncle came along and grew the business from a small beet round, up to what it is now.”

Now run by Matthew, alongside his father and uncle, the team cover land right the way across the east from Peterborough all the way over to Hunstanton — equating to around 4856ha of sugar beet a year.

As the Rexor turns on the headland, Matthew explains how the machine has been the latest investment for the business, taking its total fleet up to six beet harvesters.

“Historically, we've always run six harvesters, but in light of the challenges over the past few years with sugar beet we had to drop this back to five.

“But things are looking more positive, particularly after this year, so when we were approached by Grimme in the spring ▶



Matthew Russell reckons there will always be a British-grown sugar industry so it's important to keep investing in it.

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NOTHING RUNS LIKE A DEERE



Following an improved outlook for sugar beet, the Norfolk-based business decided to invest in a sixth beet harvester.

▶ to trial a Rexor from the new Platinum range, it felt like a sensible time to think about investing again.”

This was backed by an increasing area from customers and even more work planned for next season, he explains. “We were really impressed with it from the minute it arrived on farm, so we did a deal and our own machine arrived at the beginning of this season. I’ve done about 607ha with it so far, and it’s running really well.”

The Rexor 6300 Platinum is a six-row, six-wheel beet harvester, with a 30t bunker.

It’s also fitted with a variable topper to enable side discharge of beet tops, explains Grimme’s beet product specialist,

Confidence to invest

With both Matthew and David attributing a growing interest in investing in kit to improved contract outlooks, here’s a reminder of the latest offerings from British Sugar:

- For 2022, a new one-year beet contract paying a fixed price of £27/adjusted tonne
- Current multi-year growers have the option to upgrade to a fixed £25/adjusted tonne by contracting for an additional year
- New premium for all growers up to 28 miles contract distance from their nearest factory
- Continuation of the futures-linked variable price contract.
- Continuation of the virus yellows assurance scheme.

David Wadsley, who worked with Matthew through the purchase of the machine. “Grimme is constantly looking to bring the latest innovations through in its equipment, a large number of these have filtered through into the Rexor.”

Gentle handling

From the defoliation system to the digging unit, and even the tyres fitted to the self-propelled harvester, everything about the Rexor is designed to focus on handling the crop gently and soil health and protection, he adds. “The hydraulically-driven Oppel wheels for digging are designed around gentle handling to ensure no fractures to root tips.

“There’s also a walking share option — both offering maximum tap root from the start of the digging process.”

In terms of the cleaning system, this is a dual approach, says David. “The first unit consists of six spiral rollers and a 900mm crop conveyor. Effective soil cleaning is also enabled thanks to a secondary cleaning unit which consists of three cleaning turbines. The first of these turbines is slightly larger than the second two, at 1700mm diameter and 1500mm, respectively.”

But this gentle approach doesn’t come at a cost to production, with the ring elevator claimed to increase throughput by up to 25%.

“In terms of the bunker, the shape has been redesigned to enable a better view of the unloading web. There’s also a rubber drop height reducer, again adding to the gentle approach of the Grimme machines.”

In the guts of the harvester is a Mercedes-Benz 653hp Stage V engine,



Russell Agricultural Contractors started with Matthew’s grandfather and a single-row harvester, and is now the biggest operation in the area.

and inside the cab Grimme claims the Rexor to be one of the quietest on the market — as well as showcasing other driver-comfort features like heated, premium seats, adds David. “Something also popular on the Rexor is the ErgoDrive operating concept, whereby the whole machine is operated from the joystick.

“There’s also the option of the ProCam system for monitoring the side space of the machine. This comprises two wide-angle cameras and an additional monitor.”

While Matthew feels a lot of the nuts and bolts is similar across the board in beet harvesters, he says a particular standout with the Rexor is the backup and aftercare service provided by Grimme. “This has probably been the best part of the purchase for us. Anytime we’ve needed support or assistance, someone from the Grimme team has been on hand to assist. This is crucial with any purchase, but particularly for us as contractors — we operate seven days a week and need to ensure our machines are running at all times.”

Other favourite features include the ▶



Harvesting sugar beet next to the Wissington British Sugar factory.



“A good all-round tractor.”

“From a power point of view, it has plenty of grunt for the majority of our tasks that we need it to do, and will tackle most of our implements with relative ease.

As tractors evolve, you get to a point where you think there's nothing that could be improved, then CLAAS will come out with something else that is designed to help even more.”

Anson MacAuslan, Estate Manager, Welbeck Estates, Calthress, ARION 420 Stage V, September 2021



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Machinery Masterclass



Matthew Russell runs a Rexor 6300 Platinum, six-row, six-wheel beet harvester, with a 30t bunker.

► drive style and the yield-monitoring abilities. “I must admit, I wasn’t sure on the idea of driving with a stick when we first trialled the machine as I’d been so used to harvesters where you sit with your foot on the throttle the whole time. But this is much more comfortable — particularly when you’re working long hours.

“I can do about 12ha a day with this machine (depending on the conditions and location). Throughput wise, we’re targeting 1ha an hour — again, that’s in an hour.”

Machinery Masterclass

Technology is advancing fast, and the capabilities of equipment found on farm far outstrips what was available just five years ago.

For growers who embrace the change, the potential to cut cost, refine production systems and boost output is immense. But how can you make an informed choice about whether an innovation will deliver the refinements you seek if you’ve not operated it before?

This is where Machinery Masterclass comes in. In this article, sponsored by Grimme, CPM has worked with the manufacturer to get a true user experience and an insight into the technology advances it has introduced.

We hope this will bring you a ‘try before you buy’ feel for specific features found on this item of machinery and help you remain at the forefront of progression in crop production.

This is also the businesses’ only machine that has a yield meter on board, adds Matthew. “It’s interesting for us as contractors to know what kind of tonnage we’re achieving across the field, but it also adds value to our services for our customers,” he explains. “I don’t think there’s a single feature that the Rexor doesn’t have that I’d want.”

Positive view

Though it’s been a challenging time of late for the sugar beet industry, Matthew is positive about the future. “Though we don’t have a strict machinery replacement policy, we haven’t invested in kit over the past few years due to the challenges faced by the sugar beet industry. Lots of people in the area were either cutting back production significantly, or just coming out of the crop all together.

“But we’ve already picked up more work for next year, so we’re feeling hopeful that changes to contracts and less pressure from virus yellows will make the outlook more positive for both growers and contractors. Based on this, we’ll be looking to buy another machine next year, and it’s likely to be another Grimme harvester.

“I think there will always be a British-grown sugar industry, and it’s important to keep investing in that. As contractors, our investments are based on there being a requirement for the service, but things are certainly moving in the right direction.”

David agrees: “We’re committed to the long-term future of the British sugar industry, and there’s lots happening behind the scenes to ensure we can bring the best solutions and technology to market for our customers. Locally, we understand that there’s a lack of confidence in the crop, but I think some of the new contract offerings from British Sugar are helping, and we’re certainly seeing a bit more interest from



Everything about the Rexor is designed to optimise gentle handling and soil protection, says David Wadsley.

growers wanting to reinvest in kit on the basis of a more positive outlook.”

As for Matthew, what does the future hold for him? “I’m only 22 so it’s hard to know exactly what’s in store. We’ve also got a 405ha farm of our own growing combinable crops, potatoes and sugar beet, as well as a baling contracting business, so plenty to keep us busy.

“My overall aim would be to take over the business, so it’s important to really consider what we’re doing now to ensure our operations are sustainable and allow me to do that one day.

“That’s another plus of working alongside the team at Grimme. They’re invested in hearing our suggestions and feedback on what we’d like to see from a machine, meaning we’re able to optimise the best possible technology — which is great for both us and our customers.” ■



The Rexor is fitted with a variable topper that enables side discharge of beet tops.

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