

Champion of champions

“It’s fantastic to see a plant breeder offer a diversity of genetics and to know the agronomics will hold up.”

Insiders View

Taking the gold medal for wheat yields is a new variety from DSV that promises to deliver both in the field against disease and in filling the barn. CPM takes an in depth look at just what gave Champion its name.

Melanie Jenkins

DSV must have known it had an absolute behemoth of a variety on its hands when it decided to call it Champion. And that’s just what the new hard Group 4 is proving itself to be, coming in at the very top of AHDB’s Recommended List for yield, at 107%.

It’s garnered so much interest that Sarah Hawthorne of DSV believes there isn’t a merchant in the country who isn’t supporting it. “No other variety has performed across all sectors so confidently. We’re well known as a breeder for disease resistance, which growers will have seen in Theodore.

“We breed in the West, so historically have had better septoria scores for our wheats as that area sees it before anyone in the East.”

DSV breeds its varieties by first

selecting for cleanliness at an early stage, to ensure a good disease resistance profile, explains Matt Kerton, breeder at DSV. “Things can still change but generally disease resistance has been dealt with, allowing us to shift our focus to selecting high yielding lines.”

No trade-offs

Champion stood out right away, coming top in its first year of DSV trials in 2016, says Matt. “It’s a variety that’s overcome the yield/resistance trade off. Usually varieties with a high genetic resistance to disease take a hit in yield, but Champion maintains resistance and achieves a high yield.”

It’s proving to be unbeatable at the moment, says Sarah. “It topped the candidate list for yield and has topped the RL — head and shoulders above anything else in the East. And it’s consistently improved its yield, year-on-year, since 2019.”

On a national scale, the variety has looked massive throughout Wynnstay trials, says the company’s Toby Reich. Working across much of the country, Wynnstay has seen Champion in North Yorkshire all the way down to Cornwall, he says.

“It’s had equally fantastic yields in both directions, whether it’s following on from oilseed rape, potatoes or maize. For it to be yielding everywhere, it’s definitely a barn busting wheat,” says Toby.

Duncan Durno of Openfield has also

seen Champion in trials. “It’s a big yielding wheat with an excellent disease package, any feed wheat grower should be having a look at an area of Champion within their variety selection.”

And it’s not just yielding in typical high yielding situations, adds Matt. “It seems to be fitting a whole range of farm management styles, as a first and second wheat, all regions, heavy and light soils and a range of sowing dates.”

Toby is excited to see this coming from DSV. “We haven’t seen much new wheat from DSV for some time. We had Theodore come through, which sits at the best agronomically but isn’t the best yield-wise. So it’s fantastic to see a plant breeder ▶



DSV initially selects varieties from its breeding lines for disease resistance, before then selecting on yield, says Matt Kerton.

Clean, green, high yielding machine

Tim Lamyman is no stranger to DSV wheat varieties, having been impressed by Marston in the 2013/14 season. From 2016 until this year, it accounted for half of his wheat area.

"It was reliable in a first, second or third wheat situation and was always the highest yielding variety on the farm."

After so much success with Marston, and having grown Theodore and finding it equally reliable, when his son Robert presented him with a marketing sheet on Champion before drilling in 2020, he was sold.

Based at Worlaby Farms and Tumby Farm in the Lincolnshire Wolds, Tim is farming around 780ha. He has 280ha in wheat, 130ha in winter barley, 90ha in OSR, 50ha in spring wheat, 40ha in beans, 30ha in spring barley, and the rest is either game cover, grass or woodland.

"The past three years we've had over 260ha in wheat," he says. "We used to grow more spring crops but now it's shifted to winter because of the stability of prices."

He's grown wheat for milling, feed and for seed, with around 80% of his Champion and 5% of his Theodore going for seed this season.

When Tim first grew Champion in the 2020/21 season, he only had enough to plant 9ha at a rate of 70kg/ha. "We only got 81 plants/m², but the crop tillered exceptionally well and had 15cm long ears. Its ability to tiller and produce a big ear resulted in the field finishing second in the 2021 YEN contest, achieving 15.1t/ha," exclaims Tim.

"Champion's yield came in below the field next to it, which was drilled at three times the rate and

averaged 15.6t/ha. It just shows that its tillering capacity is incredible."

For the 2021/22 season, Tim planted 70ha of Champion, starting 23 September through to the third week of November, as a first wheat. "Every single field looks fantastic. I'm really happy with the establishment, vigour and its ability to tiller seems second to no other variety I know of."

Using a 6m Vädertad Rapid in an intensive min-till system, he started drilling at around 100kg/ha, which went up to a max of 200kg/ha. "As a rule of thumb, I would usually reduce Champion's seed rates by 25-50 seeds/m² because of its ability to tiller. In comparison, our 130ha of Theodore was drilled at 350kg/ha."

He uses a homemade flat lift press with Spaldings tines, discs and Andrew Guest roller or a Lemken Terradisc to prepare the ground and if the seedbed is good, he'll roll it. But crops drilled beyond mid-October won't get rolled, he says.

Tim pays a lot of attention to plant nutrition, so Champion had several applications of Delta K in the autumn to encourage cytokinin production and plant growth. "This helps root structure, encourages shorter, stronger stems and more tillers," explains Tim. He will follow this up with several more applications in the spring.

But with N prices where they are at present, it means he's decided to put some of his Theodore into trial this year. "We're looking at lower rates of N compared with our normal rates, so we have 120kgN/ha, 160kgN/ha, 200kgN/ha and 240kgN/ha in the same field.

"Theodore has the ability to convert N to protein as well as any milling wheat, so I am wondering if it still has the ability to yield at 10-11% protein with low N inputs," explains Tim.

He's equally impressed with Theodore as he has been with Champion. "Theodore is the most underrated variety on the RL and is the cleanest variety we've ever grown on farm. But its weakness is its tillering ability. However, if managed right, it's a great back up for Champion on the farm. And Champion was incredibly clean last year as well."

Another important aspect for Tim is that he feels there's more flexibility in his spray programme with both varieties. "I don't have to worry if I miss T0 or if I'm slightly behind in my spray programme because these varieties give me the flexibility to catch up.

"With other varieties, if you miss T0 it's time for the fire engine treatment. But with Champion and Theodore I don't have to walk them every week to see if yellow rust has broken out and, with their septoria resistance, I don't have to worry until the flag leaf stage as they're easy to manage without losing yield or green leaf area."



The flexibility that Champion allows him in his spray programme is important, says Tim Lamyman.

Brown rust is the biggest disease issue Tim has on his farm, but he finds it easy enough to manage so long as crops have a T3 and T4 application. "I save my strobilurin application for T3 with a prothioconazole product and always go back on at T4 with a half rate of prothioconazole," he explains.

As well as growing Champion on a full input programme, Tim is also trialling the variety with scaled back nutrition in one field, and reduced fungicides on another, as well as in a second wheat situation. "On paper, a second wheat looks phenomenally good and we could do with Champion to take over from Marston in this position.

"I have been looking to replace Marston for a while because I can't get the seed, so Champion is very exciting," says Tim. "It's a clean, green, high yielding wheat machine from DSV breeding lines."



Having had success with DSV varieties such as Marston and Theodore, Tim was very interested when his son showed him marketing material on Champion.



Tim Lamyman's 9ha of Champion yielded 15.1t/ha in 2021, the second highest on his farm.

► offer a diversity of genetics and to know the agronomics will hold up as it's come from a different genetic background."

Champion has demonstrated big

Champion at a glance

Yield (% treated controls)	
UK treated	105.9
UK untreated	90
East region treated	106.7
West region treated	105.1
Disease	
Mildew	6.5
Yellow rust	7.6
Brown rust	5.3
Septoria	7.7
OWBM	R
Agronomy	
Lodging (% + PGR)	6.5
Height (cm)	88
Ripening days (+/- Skyfall)	0
Specific weight (kg/hl)	74.8
Protein content (%)	11.4
Hagberg falling number	239
Source: AHDB Recommended List, winter wheat 2022/23	

tillering ability and large biomass, explains Toby. "It got up and away quickly and continued to develop fast in Wynnstay's trials. DSV advises not to drill the variety in the early window, but we've had it in both early and late sown trials and it looks equally good."

But Duncan suggests that for growers to get the best out of Champion, it really has to go in the main and later drilling windows. "It has a very forward growth habit and is very quick to get away in the autumn. It's the perfect variety for those looking to delay drilling for blackgrass," he says.

Champion's parentage includes Reflection and DSV 20122, and it has French genetics from one of its grandparents, explains Matt. "This is probably what gives Champion its speed of development."

One potential weakness could be its specific weight, says Toby. "It's 74.8kg/hl, which is not ideal but is okay. KWS Santiago and Evolution had similar specific weights and they had 7-10% market shares, so it's not the be all and end all. Champion consistently yields well despite this characteristic."

Duncan points out that the variety's



Toby Reich points out that there's going to be a limited supply of Champion available for autumn 2022.

early maturity will help maintain specific weight in catchy harvests. "Growing Champion on medium to better bodied soils will also help with specific weight," he adds.

"The early signs are that it performs well as a second wheat too, its growth habit is certainly well suited to this slot, but this will become more apparent when there's more acreage on farm."

Champion is a variety for growers who'll ►

ONE POTATO, TWO POTATO, THREE POTATO, FOUR.

Keeping yields high with our product range for tackling weeds, pests and diseases.

CLAYTON
PLANT PROTECTION

Clayton Mizuna®

Clayton Comply®

Azofin® Plus

Find out more at claytonpp.com or scan this QR code.



f in t i





Merchants across the country have been showing interest in Champion, says Sarah Hawthorne.

► put on the inputs to get the best results, believes Toby. "But it's agronomically sound as well," he says.

Its untreated yield has garnered attention, likely because of the variety's high septoria resistance. As well as scores nearing 8 on the RL for both septoria and yellow rust, it has a 7 for mildew, a 5 for brown rust and it's resistant to orange wheat blossom midge, adds Sarah.

Champion's disease package is strong,

concur Duncan. "This gives growers some flexibility and risk management around fungicide use and timings."

Seed supply

Toby anticipates Champion to max out by taking 5% of the market share. "There's an extraordinarily limited amount of seed this year, but it's a sensible move from the breeder. Smaller amounts allow us to appreciate where it sits and allows the variety to move into the market in a progressive way."

Sarah confirms that seed supply will be short this year. "If you want it, put your name down. The day Champion came out on the candidate list, I sold out within 24 hours, so the seed will sell out before harvest this year."

And the variety has certainly turned a few heads so far, says Toby. "From our perspective, there's been massive interest from customers, and I think it will be sold out by June or July."

He anticipates it could take market share from Graham, Gleam and maybe even Skyscraper. But he suggests growers watch to see if Champion will prove itself in terms of reliability. "It has yet to do this because it's new."



Champion is best suited to the main and later drilling windows, according to Duncan Durno.

So what's next? "We're delving deeper into Champion," says Matt. "It's in its second year of sowing rate trials and variable rate nitrogen trials to see how it performs at different levels. Because of the fertiliser prices, there could be potential to reduce applications — so we'll see how it responds to lower inputs."

"We hope to present the results to growers and to keep offering them management advice." ■

Now you've seen
the imposter,
you'll appreciate
the real deal.


TWOXO
better
by nature.

