

SYSTEM CHANGE SPEEDS SPREADING



Self-levelling suspension front and rear ensures a smooth ride in the field and on the road with the big Bogballe spreader on the three-point linkage.

A change of approach to the supply and application of lime and fertiliser has led to greater output and simpler management to the spreading operations offered by a Staffordshire contractor.

A year ago, David Chandler, of Chandler's Lime & Fertiliser decided to rejig his lime and basic slag spreading operations, switching from two truck-mounted spreaders loaded direct from lorries to one tractor-trailed spreader loaded from a heap.

"Too much time was spent waiting for deliveries and the hauliers didn't like their trucks having to wait to load into the spreaders," explains Mr Chandler. "So we've changed to a heap in the field and a high capacity trailed spreader behind a new Fastrac."

Working out of Heybridge Farm at Lower Tean near Stoke-on-Trent, Mr Chandler specialises in contract spreading, applying bulk powders and fertiliser on arable land in the autumn and to grassland in the spring.

"I find it's best to stick to something you really know and deliver a good service than to branch out into other things and end up with clashes or having to take on extra labour," he says. "Demand for spreading is very

volatile and can go from 11,000 tonnes one year to double that the next and back again, mainly because when cash is tight, lime is usually first to go."

Having previously run two Unimog-mounted spreaders, the fleet now comprises a 235hp Fastrac 4220 bought in May 2015 to work with a Bredal K105 trailed spreader for powdered products, and for fertiliser, a linkage-mounted KRM-Bogballe spreader for the Fastrac plus a second-hand Multidrive 6185 with a Bredal K85 demount spreader.

"The Unimogs were excellent machines with very low running costs but at 7.5-9 tonnes they no longer had

enough capacity," Mr Chandler says. "Tyre size was another limiting factor and putting a grab on for self-loading from a heap would have reduced the payload even further."

The Fastrac and Bredal combination can operate as a self-contained unit clearing up to 360 tonnes of lime a day. The JCB is equipped with IF 600/70R30 tyres all round, while the spreader runs 30.5LR32 radials on 18-tonne commercial axles with air brakes.

"I've a business reputation to protect," he insists. "So running a tractor with the Fastrac's road-going credentials – all-round self-levelling suspension and high-spec disc braking with ABS and legally able to run at a higher speed than other tractors – was, I believed, the best choice."

"It's also a very agile machine with four-wheel steering and despite being a 2-3m longer outfit I can drive straight into places where I'd need to shunt with the Unimog," he adds. "Wherever



David Chandler: "For my application, there's nothing to beat the Fastrac 4220 as a contract spreading tractor."

Spreading basic slag – ride comfort and the roomy layout of the tractor's cab are big plus points for contractor David Chandler.

you can get the front wheels through, the spreader follows because the rear-wheel steering takes it in a different arc."

"Even with the 850kg ballast block on the front, you could imagine putting a finger under the front axle and just lifting it," says Mr Chandler. "But putting the transmission into drive 'wakes up' the suspension and sets the tractor level: You then have full wheel travel available despite the weight and on the road and that makes it drive really well with no hint of nodding as the suspension soaks up the bumps."

Steering guidance and precision application technology on the Bogballe spreader brings benefits to the small to medium-size dairy farms that use his services in the spring. Accurate bout matching in the absence of tramlines and section control that minimises double dosing ensure that best use is made of the fertiliser being applied.

"You make small gains at the headlands that add up over time," he says. "I find I'm easing off the speed later, riding over the end furrow and

getting up to speed again quicker, saving maybe five seconds on every turn. That doesn't sound a lot but it soon adds up to half an hour saved over the day.

"When using the Bredal spreader on 10-12m bouts, the four-wheel steering gets the tractor round in one go and the Rapid Steer feature, which halves the number of turns lock-to-lock, means there's minimal effort involved," he adds.

All good news so far but there must surely be some gripes or room for improvement?

"The wiper blade doesn't stay in contact with the curved windscreen hard enough at the top – although I believe JCB have a better blade for it now, it's a nuisance having to be almost stationary to shift between the

field and road ranges, especially when you've already pulled out of a field, and navigating the touch-screen terminal could be improved."

"Overall, the new Fastrac is better than I expected and I tend to be very particular about things. The cab, which really sold me on the tractor, is comfortable, had good visibility and well-positioned controls, and when you spend your working life in there, that's important.

"On a decent surface I can have a coffee in the cup holder and it won't spill a drop. You might want to get out and have a stretch after half a day's work but that's all," he adds. "For my application, travelling up to 30 or 40 miles, getting the job done and moving on to the next one, there's nothing to beat it." ■



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