Automatic hitch investment boosts work rates and safety

A Norfolk spreading contractor who purchased two sets of Siwi Combi Hitches for his tractors and spreaders two years ago, says the investment has dramatically increased work rates and improved safety. **David Williams** saw them in action.

Trading as AJ Shorten Ltd and based at Catfield, near Great Yarmouth, James and his son Ajay operate an agricultural contracting business which has been trading since it was set up by James' father Alan in the 1970s. General field work including ploughing and drilling are among the services offered, but for most of the year James and Ajay specialise in manure, lime, and fertiliser applications on farms in Norfolk and north Suffolk.

Self-loading

Lime is applied through a 10t capacity Bredall trailed twin-disc spreader. Manure is spread using a Bunning 150 HBD 15t machine, and most of the granular fertiliser is applied through a Kuhn Axis mounted spreader. Two identical John Deere 6215R tractors with front loaders are used for loading and spreading, and allow the father and son team to work simultaneously in different locations.

Norfolk-based family contracting business, AJ Shorten Ltd, specialises in lime, manure, and fertiliser applications.

Obvious solution

Two years ago, the Shortens invested in two Siwi Combi Hitch systems to improve their working efficiency, and now James says that he wouldn't want to go back to working without them.

Manufactured in Denmark, the Combi Hitch consists of a front section which is mounted to the tractor, and a rear section attached to the trailed implement. The hydraulic hoses, electric cables, the Isobus cable and the PTO shaft connect and disconnect automatically in just a few seconds without the operator leaving the tractor cab. The Combi Hitch can be fitted or removed completely in just 15 minutes, for the tractor to work with conventional trailers or three-

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point linkage mounted implements. The Siwi hitch is imported and sold by KRM Ltd, and available through all dealers holding the KRM franchise. One set of tractor and trailed implement sections with a PTO connector costs approximately £21,000.

System change needed

"We spread up to 40 loads of lime per day, and that used to mean climbing up and down the cab steps 80 times until we had the Siwi hitches," explained James. "With wet or muddy boots, that's the situation when we are most likely to slip or fall, and after loading lime we bring dust into the cab and if we are spreading manure then that is carried in on our boots.

"Attaching the PTO shaft is often fiddly, and connecting and disconnecting all the hoses and cables is hard work when it has to be done so many times each day – especially when everything is splashed with mud. When we looked at what we were doing, it was clear we needed something different."

Five seconds to connect

Hitching up to the KRM Bredall spreader using the Siwi hitch takes less than five seconds, and James has only to reverse the tractor up to the coupling then activate the in-cab control box and 11 hydraulic hoses and five electric cables as well as the PTO shaft all connect automatically. "It's a very clever piece of kit," he continued. "With just one operator using one tractor with the loader and spreader, we achieve similar daily work rates as if there were two operators plus an additional tractor for loading. Our whole operation has become far more efficient and without having to repeatedly climb in and out of the cab all day there is less operator fatigue which means mistakes are less likely. We estimate that on a good day the hitches increase our productivity by up to 20% and we feel less tired too."

Pricey but worth it

James said that during their first two years' use, the Siwi hitches have proved extremely reliable and always couple correctly. "We remain delighted with the system and wouldn't be without the hitches now. They aren't cheap, but for our type of work they make a huge difference, and there aren't many things that we could invest in which would provide such benefits to our working efficiency in return." **FG**

Increased work rates and improved safety have been achieved through investment in a pair of Siwi Combi Hitches for the family's two John Deere 6215R tractors plus a Bunning manure spreader and KRM Bredall lime spreader.

When the trailed spreader is unhitched during loading, the front section of the Combi Hitch remains on the tractor, and the rear section stays with the spreader. When loading is finished, the loader tractor is reconnected to the spreader including the hitch, PTO shaft, Isobus link, five electrical cables and 11 hydraulic hoses in less than five seconds, without the operator leaving the cab.

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