

MACHINE
STRAUTMANN GIGA-VITESSE CFS 3601

Two of a kind

Andrew Whitelaw has been running two Strautmann Giga-Vitesse CFS 3601 forage wagons since 2018. *FMJ* went to find out how they have performed

WORDS AND IMAGES **KEN TOPHAM**



Above: Additive tanks are made from utility van water tanks and look like they were made for the job

Right: Despite normally working in different fields, Andrew and Glynn set this picture up with both wagons side by side



In the Derbyshire Peak District grass silage is king. There are patches of maize and whole crop cereals but grass grows well on the higher grounds and in the colder climate that the area offers. Andrew Whitelaw has now been running forage wagons for six seasons, the last three of which have been with Strautmann machines. The Giga-Vitesse 3601 has been a success for Andrew and his customers, who range from high output multi-cut dairy farms to two-cut beef and suckler herds. Andrew runs three John Deere 7530s that, with full disclosure, have had the usual 30-Series treatment: EGR deleted, straight turbo and 230hp map. As a result, they handle the 3601 wagons quite comfortably.

Andrew's other main activity is spreading sewage sludge, for which Bunning Lowlander 120 spreaders are used. The 7530s are ideal here too, as Andrew is firmly in the camp of spending on implements rather than having the most modern tractor. The Strautmann machine differs from most of its competition, in part due to its continuous flow system (CFS), which employs a flighted roller between the pick-up and rotor to accelerate and spread the crop out across the width of the knife bank. With an extra component to drive, logic would suggest that it would take more power but the crop isn't forced through the central part of the knife bank.

Right inset: Unloading takes about 75 seconds from the bed moving to the tailgate closing



Above: The CFS roller has a flight that spreads the crop out wider and accelerates the grass from the pick-up to the rotor

Below right: Owner and operator Andrew Whitelaw runs two Strautmann Giga-Vitesse wagons in Derbyshire

"We've had one of the wagons on a 130hp four-pot Valtra and it handled it surprisingly well," explains Andrew. "They're quite easy to drive, you just can't pull them on banks as easily with a smaller tractor," he continues.

Before the CFS you need to get the grass off the floor and Andrew has been very pleased with the pick-up, which incorporates six rows of tines on a cam-less system with nylon

bands. The Strautmanns are equipped with extra guide wheels behind the pick-up to stop the tines digging in in soft or uneven conditions. "The pick-up is very good," Andrew says. "We've only had to replace one tine between both wagons and the bands don't get damaged from impact. There is no metal-on-metal wear with the tines either."

Andrew currently uses a Krone Swadro TC 760 rake pulled by his uncle's 2002 JCB Fastrac, but for farms like the one we see him working he has been mulling the idea of a four-rotor machine. "For customers like here it would be ideal," he explains. "They do four or five cuts per year but our beef and suckler customers would still need a two-rotor machine as we'd struggle to get 40 to 50ft of heavy crop into the wagons." With 30ft rows and average crops the team can clear 100 acres per day.

Profile

Whitelaw Agriculture

Machine Strautmann Giga-Vitesse CFS 3601

Year purchased 2018

Used for Three years

Operators Andrew Whitelaw, Glynn Glomas

Location Buxton, Derbyshire





“We’ve had one of the wagons on a 130hp Valtra and it handled it surprisingly well”



Left: Ball and spoon hitches were adopted after the first season with wagons after excessive wear to hooks and rings

Above right inset: The chop length is theoretical as with any machine; the 3601 achieves very consistent 35mm results

the inside, the rotor sitting below a coffin box. Where other manufacturers rely on lowering the front and the rotor sitting below the floor level, the Giga-Vitesse has a very defined trench that the grass has to be pushed up through. Without a direct comparison it's hard to say whether this compresses the load more, but Andrew says he's weighed a load off

at 16t and in lush, wilted grass the 34m³ wagon claims a 64.6m³ load of compressed crop.

The knife bank on the Giga-Vitesse is fairly convenient, although there aren't external buttons to take it out so it has to be done from the cab. Parts of the Peak District can be quite stony but Andrew doesn't report a high incident of knife damage, ▶



Left: The Field Operator 120 control interface works well and is said to be user friendly by Andrew

Right: The Giga-Vitesse has a steering axle and the 710 tyres look to be very gentle on the headlands



The full squad in view. The team cleared 240 acres in 24 hours for one customer



Tech specs

Strautmann Giga-Vitesse CFS 3601

- Capacity** 32m³; 64.6m³ (compressed)
- Weight** 9000kg (empty)
- Power requirement** 145hp
- Tyres** 710/50R26.5
- Knives** 45
- Chop length** 35mm
- Height** 4.0m
- Width** 2.81m
- Length** 9.42m

► instead praising the protection: “the knives trip out individually if an object goes through and stay out until you reset the bank, but we’ve never broken a knife yet,” he says.

Wagon knife sharpening is a contentious subject that seems to have a wide variety of opinion. For this, Andrew is in the ‘fresh edge for each day’ camp, having invested in the Claas wet sharpener after mixed results with other systems. The Aqua Comfort non-stop will sharpen a set of knives in about 40 minutes. With six sets in stock there are a few days in hand before a sharpening session is needed. “The Claas sharpener was expensive, but definitely worth it,” Andrew says.

“You load a full set on to it and can leave it to work. On a wet day you can have all of the knives sharpened and get some other jobs done too.” At £13,000, Claas might not sell many, but for a set-up with a couple of wagons, and possibly a baler with knives, it might be worth the money, particularly if you can sub in some sharpening for locals, as the machine can sharpen most types of wagon or baler knives.

The chop quality is relayed from the clamp man and on a long day regular buckrake man Ben Wager can tell when the knives have lost their edge, letting the wagon operators know the loads are getting fluffy.

The 3601 has 45 double-sided knives, which give a theoretical chop of 35mm. Andrew has had good feedback from customers, reporting consistent chop and good scratch factor in the fodder.

At the clamp the loads from the wagons look more challenging to deal with than from a precision chop forager. There’s no pushing through a

load and tackling the ramp - the loads are dense and Andrew says you need an experienced hand on the clamp to get a good finish. “You have to lift and carry most of the load, you can’t bulldoze it up,” he explains. “We work to the clamp and try and keep him happy. The farmers see the clamp filling up and they need to see it’s going in right.”



Right: Operators Glynn Glomas and Andrew Whitelaw load manually but it still takes a bit before the grass appears above the sides

Below: The Strautmann coffin, through which the grass has to push after the rotor



Left: The guide wheels are extra but give a bit more leeway if the ground is soft or uneven

Right: Plastic tine bands on the 2m header have been very resilient and six rows of cam-less tines have been very economical on replacements





Easy access

Accessing the body of the 3601 is easy and the ladder attached to the side allows the door to open. The bed chains are automatically tensioned so only require regular inspection and greasing of the shafts. There are no roof strings on the Strautmann and Andrew says that they can drop a bit of crop. "We load them on manual, so you have to keep an eye on the

load coming over the top if you're on a bank side, otherwise we don't miss them," he says.

The Field Operator 120 control boxes provide the interface if you're not working with ISOBus, and although there is a higher spec 130 model with more functionality, Andrew likes the system. "They're easy to use and quick to get proficient with," he says. "You could sit someone on that's never used a Strautmann and they'd pick it up in minutes."

The chassis of the Giga-Vitesse runs on sprung axles with 10-stud wheels rated at 40kph and with passive rear steering. The 710/50R26.5 boots are slowed by air-over-hydraulic brakes. "We do have some hills to travel on and the brakes aren't as powerful as we'd like, but there wasn't a higher spec axle available at the time."

The drawbar is

Left: Like most wagons, access is very good. The door latches open and the ladder is firm

Far left inset: Tailgate sensor raises the alarm when the wagon is full. It's a simple solution that doesn't involve any door sensors

Below inset: The only time top strings or nets are missed on the Strautmann is when loading on banks

hydraulic to lower the wagon for work and it also provides suspension for road travel. Andrew uses ball and spoon hitches, making the switch after his first couple of seasons with wagons. "They were expensive to change to (the tractor end alone is £500) but we wore a hook and ring hitch out in no time when we first started. They will save money in the long run and are smoother than a ring hitch for travelling. We use them on the Bunnings too," he says.

After two seasons and 2000 loads through each machine a good evaluation has been done and Andrew feels like he will look to continue with Strautmann machines when the time comes to upgrade, if a deal can be done to part-exchange his current machines. "I have been looking at the Strautmann Magnon CFS 430, largely because of the uprated axles, unless they change to a heavy-duty axle on the Giga Vitesse going forward," he concludes. **EMJ**



The two wagons rarely work in the same field at this farm and with some clover leys the customer likes the loads mixed

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