Custom Operators Nominate Best, Worst Combines

"very satisfied" with his 1997 R-72's. "I've been in the custom harvesting business for more than 40 years and have operated mostly Gleaners. These machines perform better, and cut more acres per hour - with little or no downtime and almost no loss of grain - than any other machine I've seen. They're easy to operate and do an excellent job in the field. They're not as heavy as other makes so they're able to keep going on soft fields where other brands get stuck. I've had very few problems with my R-72's and none that I couldn't solve. Gleaner's newer header, which has a big auger, works really well under most conditions."

Deere: "We own six 9650 walkers, ten 9750 STS's, and twelve 9650 STS's. All are 2001 models," says a North Dakota harvester. "We're generally satisfied with the performance of the STS machines. However, the straw chopper doesn't spread evenly enough or far enough. And when it comes to maintenance and construction, this machine

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doesn't hold up. For example, chains, augers, and choppers wear out at about 500 rotor hours. On the plus side, capacity, controls, cleaning ability, comfort and power are satisfactory.

"The walker machines work well in edible beans and wheat.

"We own 20 flex heads, eight draper heads, 10 corn heads, and 12 pickup heads. The flex heads don't have enough capacity for the STS machines. Our other heads seem to work well.

"Using all Deere parts, we equipped our 9650 STS's with heavy duty final drives, feederhouse cylinders, feederhouse drives, and hopper extensions.

"We had a difficult time with the tines in the 9750's. We had to replace four sets of tines after only about 12 hours. The dealer couldn't solve the problem.

"All of our STS combines are equipped with yield monitors, and twelve of them also have mapping systems. We have had some difficulties.

"We will continue to purchase Deere products because no other OEM can offer us a machine for the same price and with similar service programs."

Deere: "They need better batteries and some type of enclosed hopper cover for the grain tank," says a North Dakota cutter. "Otherwise for the most part I'm satisfied with my four 1998 9610's. This model could use a smoother design on the frame so chaff doesn't hang up, especially on the right rear side ladder compartment going to the engine. Some things could be welded better and not just spot welded And the conveyor auger bearings should be bigger or made better. "Next time I'd go with Deere 9650 walker machines. From past experience, they shine in tough conditions - wet grain, weedy fields. They're cheaper and lighter weight than the rotary models."

Case-IH: Capacity and reliability are what a Kansas cutter likes most about his 1999 2388's. "We're satisfied with the grain quality, and these machines are fairly simple to work on. We've used Deere headers on Case-IH machines in the past, but we like Case-IH headers better."

Deere: "These are user friendly combines because of their simplicity. A mechanically-minded person can rebuild or repair them," says a South Dakota harvester about his 1997 9600's. "The cabs are roomy and the controls are easy to reach. I installed 9650 series concaves in my 9600's to greatly increase threshing capacity.

"Deere straight heads work great. However, their corn heads could do a better job of chopping up stalks.

"We had a problem with a fuel injection pump last year. Deere's mechanics said they were stumped. They wanted to sell me a new pump at a cost of $3,200. After several weeks of struggle, I finally discovered that the fuel shut-off solenoid was faulty."

Deere: "Overall, we're pleased with our 9650 STS's," says a Kansas harvester. "However, in wheat they could do a better job of cleaning the crop. They work good in corn, and they have tremendous capacity in irrigated soybeans - they feed the crop smoothly into the machine without bunching them up like other models do. I wish this machine had a faster road gear for higher transport speed. Also, the bin unloading system could be faster. We've had a lot of problems with fingers bending. My next combine will probably be a Deere 9750 STS. It has more capacity in corn so we could get by with fewer machines and therefore reduce our labor requirements."

Gleaner: A Kansas cutter says his 2000 R-72's deliver "good field performance. I use rigid, flex, and corn heads and they all perform well."

Deere: "Generally satisfied" is how a Kansas cutter describes his 2001 9650 walker combines. "Deere could offer a 2-year warranty like Gleaner does, instead of only one year. One of our previous Deere combines, a 1998 9510, had numerous bearing failures. We found there were Chinese-made bearings on the machine."

Gleaner: "I'm well satisfied with my 2001 R-72's," says a Kansas cutter. "However, the accelerator rolls lasted only one year. They need to improve the material so that they will last longer."

Deere: A custom operator from Kansas says his Deere 9750 STS's have outstanding capacity, handy controls, and generally outstanding performance. "Our elevator complimented us on how clean the grain sample is, with no kernel damage. That's the first time that ever happened. These combines are very comfortable to operate. I'm 70 years

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old but I could still spend 12 to 14 hours a day in this combine and not be exhausted. We use it with a 36-ft. draper header and have cut 8,000 to 9,000 acres so far with great results."

Case-IH: A Minnesota cutter reports he's "very satisfied" with his 2000 2388's. "It's an excellent corn and bean combine that's easy to service and work on, with minimal downtime. However, the feederhouse can't handle heavy, down wheat straw. This year our wheat was so flat to the ground we had to use our flex heads to pick it up, and we had problems with heavy straw. The feederhouse isn't big enough to handle a 30-ft. header under those conditions.

"The Case-IH flex head is a joke on soft, wet ground. It pushes dirt and the crop dividers don't work well, either. They haven't improved it since it came out in 1986.

"We used to have trouble separating wheat from straw when conditions got real tough at night. So we took out the small grates in the rotor cage and put keystock grates in, and that made a big difference."

Deere: "They have a lot of power and capacity and deliver a clean sample," says a North Dakota cutter about his 9650 walker machines. "We use full finger augers and they do a good job of feeding the crop in. We also use a Deere yield monitor which works good. However, the company's moisture monitor is slow to register."

Gleaner: An Oklahoma cutter says he's satisfied overall with his two 1999 R-72's. "We use them in wheat, canola, corn, soybeans, and milo. They work well in all of these crops except for canola.

"A number of improvements could be made to these combines. They should have a wider feeder house to eliminate plugging. The engine air intake could be improved, as we have to clean them every day. The straw spreader needs bigger bearings - we have to change them every 200 hours. And there should be an oil and temperature warning on the cylinder gearbox. We've had too many gearbox failures.

"After using Gleaner headers for 20 years, with their high maintenance needs and cost, we purchased McDon and Honeybee draper headers in 1999. We're well satisfied with them.

"We've rented Deere 9750 and Case-IH 2188 combines in the past, but we prefer Gleaners. These combines are very simple and basic, which I like."

Deere: "I'm generally satisfied with my

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To make the 16-row head, Jensen cut a 4-row Deer e head in half. Then he cut both ends off his 12-row head and added two rows from the 4-row head to each side..

He Built His Own 16-Row Corn Head

When John Jensen, Ankeny, Iowa, heads out to combine corn, the grain really flies.

Jensen bought a Deere 9750 STS combine and, after using it for one harvest, decided he could put a bigger header on it without overworking the machine's high-capacity cylinder.

He was already running a 12-row head he'd made several years ago by putting two 6-row units together. "When I built that header, there weren't any that big on the market," he says, noting that the home-built head worked like it came off the assembly line.

"Those old Deere corn heads are well-built and if you maintain them, they'll run forever," he says. "I ran the 12-row head for 19 years and it still worked fine."

When he looked around for something bigger than 12 rows for his new 9750, he found nothing. Since he'd had such success building his own before, he figured he could do it again. A Deere dealer in Perry, Iowa, offered him an old 4-row head just to see if he could do it.

Jensen cut the 4-row head in half using a 14-in. chop saw. Then he cut both ends off his 12-row head and added two rows from the 4-row head to each side. Before welding everything back together, he removed the old metal snouts from the four added rows and replaced them with poly snouts that match the ones he'd put on the 12-row head.

He had to lengthen the feeder augers on each side, which was probably the trickiest part of the conversion. "Lining up the flighting and the tube took some doing, particularly since the flighting toward the center of the head gets worn more than out at the ends. When you get it lined up, you have to carefully tack it together and then weld a little on side, then the other, going back and forth from side to side, to keep it from warping from the heat of the welder," he says.

He also had to add sheet metal to cover the opening where the throat of the old 4-row header had been. He replaced the drive chains on the head with heavy-duty #60 roller chain and had to add 4 ft. 7 in. to the hex shaft that drives the head. "I happened to have some of that shaft around from another shop project, so I made a coupler and added what was needed," he says.

When he mounted the big head on the combine, everything seemed to work fine so he headed for the field.

Running about 4 1/2 mph with the 16-row head, the 9750 was able to shell between 3,500 and 3,700 bu. an hour. "It kept two 1,100-bu. grain carts going all the time to haul corn away from it," he says.

Extending the head by two rows on each side meant getting close with a tractor and grain cart was going to be tough, so Jensen added 6 ft. to the 9750's unload auger. "We might have gotten by with the auger as it was, but we unload on the go and I didn't want to take any chances," he says.

He also had to lengthen his header cart to handle the wider head.

He says keeping the head level might have been a bit tricky, except for the fact that his combine is equipped with a Contour Master system, which uses sensors to automatically level the head.

This winter, Jensen's considering making a bigger planter. "I've been planting with a 24 row planter. The 16-row head worked okay on those rows, but it would line up better with a 32-row planter," he says.

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