

Custom Operators Nominate Best, Worst Combines

Are you generally satisfied with the performance of your combines? What could the manufacturer do to improve them in terms of performance, capacity, cleaning ability, maintenance, etc.? Have you modified your combines in any way?

These are some of the questions we asked custom combine operators from across the U.S. who are members of U.S. Custom Harvesters Inc., a trade organization for professional harvesters headquartered in Tulia, Texas (ph 806 995-3087). Many of these custom harvesters own three or four of the same make of combine. Most trade for new machines every one to three years. Because of the close relationship these "best in the country" operators have with manufacturers and with their customers, we promised to make this report anonymous so the operators we surveyed would feel free to "tell it like it is" about problems they've had with their machines and modifications they've made. That's why no names appear in the following report.

Deere: "Something every owner of a Deere 9600 agrees on is that these combines have major problems with their strawwalkers," says a Kansas custom operator who runs two 9600's - a 1995 model and a 1993.

"I feel the problem is in improper balancing of the strawwalkers. Using six smaller strawwalkers instead of five bigger ones would solve the problem, I believe. The company also needs to improve how they fasten the beater curtain and should make it easier to get in the back of the combine to work on it. I'd also like to know why Deere won't honor final drive warranties on machines with hopper extensions. They should build them heavy enough to handle the extra load. The machines should also be built to run in weedy conditions for more than a few hours without plugging up concaves and conveyor augers."

Among the modifications he makes to his combines is hard-surfacing chopper hammers, clean grain return auger flighting and clean grain dump flighting. He also installed "Mud Hog" rear-wheel assist with 18.9 by 30-in. flotation tires, which not only helps with flotation but smooths out bumps over pivot tracks as well. (Fluid Drive Inc., P.O. Box 600, Brookston, Ind. 47923, ph 800 348-2474).

Case-IH: A Kansas custom cutter is generally pleased with his 1995 Case-IH 2188's equipped with 30-ft. headers.

"The Case people have done a good job with the cab. It's a pleasure to sit in for long periods at a time.

"But they need to do something about how the combine spreads and distributes wheat straw. It leaves windrows. Gleaner had the same problem with their N series. Then they listened to their customers and now Gleaners do a fine job spreading straw. Except for the straw-spreading problem, everything else works fine."

AGCO: A Nebraska cutter has this to say about his 1995 R 62: "Performance is good, it has lots of capacity, requires little maintenance, is well-constructed, and does a good job cleaning grain. It has good corn and grain heads, too."

New Holland: "We've had many compliments that ours is the cleanest grain sample at the elevator," says an Oklahoma custom cutter about his 1995 New Holland TR-97. "We're very satisfied with its performance, high capacity, low maintenance, and grain cleaning capability. More horsepower would be welcome, though."

He installed a Peterson air foil chaffer offered by New Holland as an option and a Vittoe chaff spreader. (Vittoe Inc., 2112 Keokuk/Washington Rd., Keota, Iowa 522488, ph 800 848-8386).

Deere: "I've owned Case-IH's and I've run Gleaners, but the most reliable combines I've ever been around are the two 1995 Deere CTS's I own now," says a Louisiana custom harvester. "For reliability and parts availability, Deere's hard to beat.

"However, I wish they would put a 2-speed gearbox on the rotors to help in pulling slugs through. An electric motor on the crank would be helpful to roll rotors out. I also wish they'd put the rotors into a 9600 frame.

"The only problem we've ever had with the combines is in tall, wet soybeans. We had problems with the beater feeding into the rotor. We had to run cylinders as much as 400 rpm's faster than normal to keep stalks from plugging up the

concave or recirculating around the beater."

Deere: A North Dakota cutter reports he's had "little downtime" with his four 1997 Deere 9600's equipped with 30-ft. headers.

"They perform exceptionally well and are the best machines on the market, in my opinion. I can't think of any changes I'd like to see made to them, although I wish they'd come out with one head for both wheat and soybeans."

Case-IH: "Our 1996 Case-IH 2188 performs extremely well, requiring much less daily service and maintenance than my old Deere 9600,"

"We had to run cylinders as much as 400 rpm's faster than normal to keep stalks from plugging the concave."

says a Kansan. "They could boost power by 25 hp, add an additional slip clutch to the clean grain return elevator, and put hinged windows on the grain tank to make cleaning easier."

Case-IH: "It needs more responsive hydraulics, more aggressive feeding in the impeller section, and a larger grain tank. I'd also prefer a lightweight straight cut header," says a Texan about his 1994 1688. "Otherwise, it does a good job threshing when properly set, has very few mechanical problems, and is economical on repairs and service."

He's equipped his combine with several performance-boosting add-ons. One is chrome alloy impeller wear plates for the front of the rotor to extend life and feeding ability (Hilco, 107 1st. Ave, Nezperce, Idaho 83543, ph 800 937-2461). Another is poly feeder house liners for quieter operation and better feeding (May-Wes Mfg., Cty. Rd. 2, P.O. Box 5, Gibbon, Minn. 55335, ph 800 788-6483). Also, feeder chain rollers and split steel sprockets for easier replacement (Terog Mfg., 387 Atlantic Ave., Stephen, Minn. 56757, ph 800 423-3918). He also likes his Distel grain tank extensions "because you can see the grain at all times." (Distel Grain Systems Inc., 624 Southside Drive, P.O. Box 108, LeSueur, Minn. 56058, ph 800 426-1848).

Deere: A custom operator from Colorado says his 1995 Deere 9600 has great capacity, cleans well, saves grain, and offers the operator comfort and ease.

"However, it's very difficult to get into the grain tank to inspect and test grain. I understand the safety considerations. But please provide me with an easy way to enter the grain tank on my \$120,000 combine."

AGCO: "It out-performs other brands I've used," says a Kansas custom harvester about his 1995 Gleaner R-72. "It has adequate power, good cleaning and separating capacity, and we get excellent dealer service. One thing that needs improvement, however, is the quality of the cylinder bars.

"We've also been mostly pleased with the heads we've used. Both the flex head and the rigid head run smoothly and feed evenly. We used a draper head for a while but it was unreliable."

Case-IH: A Nebraska custom harvester says his customers are "sold" on his 1995 2188, but he'd like to see a few improvements.

"A monitor system to check the amount of material in the tailings elevator would be helpful. The sieve adjusting system could be improved to make settings more precise. Grease zerks on the rear axle pivot should be located where they're easier to get at.

"Likewise, the flex header needs to be improved to handle soft, terraced ground."

Deere: A Kansas cutter says he's well-satisfied with his 1996 Deere 9600's performance and dependability.

"However, since they changed the strawwalker bearings from wood to an alloy, they just don't last. The company has since hardened their crankshafts and improved their bearings, but I feel a split roller bearing would have been a better bet."

AGCO: Reliability is what one Kansan likes most about his three 1995 Gleaner R-72's. "You can quickly service the machine yourself and be confident it will run dependably. However, the clean grain elevator chains must be tightened from the top, meaning you either have to stand on your head or carry a very tall ladder. The batteries are also in an awkward place to service them. We run Deere and AGCO heads and the AGCO are more aggressive, bringing in less foliage and leaves."

To keep weeds flowing through the header more uniformly, he cut each reel arm down 3 in., reducing the reel dia. 6 in. This positions the reel right over the sickle. "The 1997 models come with this design modification from the factory, so it must have been a common problem on earlier models," he says.

Deere: "I've been generally satisfied with my 1996 9600," says a Texas cutter. "But it could use an additional 50 hp, and the guards and sickle sections fail about 80 percent faster than other combines I've used. Also, flighting on the cross auger is weak and bends too easily. Overall, I'm finding the 9600 isn't as good as the 1994 Case-IH 1668 I had before."

Case-IH: "If you have a power problem with a 1996 2188, you need to check 'no load' engine speed first. It should be about 2150 rpm's for the governor to work properly," says a Kansas cutter. "It usually needs readjusting after the first 50 hours or so. You also need to check the throttle control linkage. The spring-loaded knuckle that hooks to the injection pump control arm needs to be properly set."

He uses Farris Chaff Spreaders, which consist of a pair of offset aluminum disks that install on existing cones. (Farris Manufacturing, Box

125, Edson, Kan. 67733, ph 913 899-6234).

AGCO, Case-IH: A Texas cutter says he's fairly well satisfied with his 1996 Gleaner R-62, his two 1997 R-62's, and his three 1997 Case-IH 2188's.

"The grain table on the Gleaners vibrates on the left side of the header, a problem we haven't been able to solve," he says. "We like running both the Gleaners and Case-IH's because it gives us the opportunity to find out which machines work best under various harvest conditions."

Deere: "Fuel consumption is higher than some other combines I've operated," says a North Dakotan who's generally well-pleased with his 1994 9600. "They need to improve the strawwalkers and add a poly floor to the feederhouse to cut down on the noise the feeder chains make in light crop.

"I'll probably stick with Deere when I trade for a new machine. But, whether it's Deere or another manufacturer, the price of new machines is getting out of hand."

Deere: "They're not the most productive machines, but they're good steady runners and are the most efficient for their size," says a Kansas custom harvester about his 1995 9500's. "I wish they'd eliminate all the electronic gimmicks and gadgets, including GPS systems, that last about a year and then cause trouble."

Case-IH: "Great machines" is how an Illinois custom harvester describes his 1993 1666's. "We operate four of them in Southern Ukraine - formerly part of the Soviet Union - harvesting wheat, barley, canola, sunflowers, soybeans and corn," he says. "We harvested 3,750 acres in 10 days last July without a break-down."

Deere: An Iowa cutter says his 1997 9500 has plenty of capacity and is comfortable and convenient to operate.

"There are several things Deere could do to improve the machine, however. For example, it needs better lighting. Better performance in high moisture corn would also help. The biggest thing the company could do is to do something about the amount of dust created as the crop enters the feederhouse.

"The corn head has been reliable and trouble-free. The flex head is also reliable but needs a better cutting system.

"To boost capacity, we run Maurer grain tank extensions and a Turbo Tube vacuum add-on to cut down on dust." (Maurer Manufacturing, 1300 38th Ave. W., Spencer, Iowa 51301, ph 712 262-2992; Elkhorn Equipment Co. Inc., Rt. 5, Box 341A, Ft. Dodge, Iowa 50501, ph 515 972-4500).

Case-IH: "Overall, it's a good reliable combine that doesn't grind or crack grain when it's

Handy "Slide-Out" Combine Toolbox

"It gives me a safe, handy place to carry tools on my combine," says Rick Mabeus, Winfield, Iowa, about the ground-level "slide-out" toolbox he made for his Deere 9500 combine.

He made it out of a 60-in. length of 6 by 3-in. rectangular steel tubing with 3/16-in. thick sidewalls. The toolbox slides in and out of a piece of square tubing that's part of the combine frame at a point near the ground just behind the header. Mabeus simply releases a lock pin and pulls on a handle on the end plate. The tray just clears the combine's left front tire.

The toolbox has three 15-in. long compartments. To make the trays Mabeus cut notches out of the top of the tubing and welded in 3/16-in. thick steel plates to serve as tray dividers.

"It's much handier and safer to use than having to climb up into the cab to get tools," says Winfield. "Also, unlike the tool boxes on most combines, it's big enough to hold large wrenches. Newer



combines require both metric and standard tools which normal toolboxes can't hold. The trays make it easy to grab any wrench that I need. When I'm done I just push the toolbox back into the frame and insert the lock pin.

"I think the idea could be used on any combine brand. It could also be adapted to planters, cultivators, etc. - anything that has a toolbar-style frame."

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