

Jon Gowing of Manns has reached LTA4 status in record time and talks to Landwards editor Chris Biddle

Onwards and upwards for Jon

GROWING up on the family farm at Bungay in Suffolk, Jon Gowing rarely thought beyond trying to find a job working with agricultural machinery.

As soon as he left school, he applied for a job with a leading dealership in the region - but was turned down because his academic grades were not good enough.

Undeterred, he joined a local contract farming company, David Baker Farms Ltd where he gained all round experience operating and looking after a wide variety of tractors and machinery.

One day, when a Swather went into the local branch of Manns for repair, he was sent in to help out with the work in order to save on labour charges.

That was in 2001 - and Jon has not left!

He asked Manns whether he could come and work for them, was taken on and is now the workshop foreman of the Halesworth branch - and has become one of the first people to have gained the prestigious LTA 4 qualification, following the introduction of the formal Landbased Technician Accreditation scheme just under two years ago.

Jon was largely through his 4-year Apprenticeship with Manns when the LTA scheme was introduced but he is in no doubt that an industry-wide scheme will enhance the standing of technicians throughout the whole industry.

It's a view supported by John Palmer, Training Manager at CLAAS UK.

"As things have turned out, the launch of the LTA initiative has worked out fine," he says. "If you look back two years, we were struggling to find enough skilled technicians, but then came the credit crunch which hit the automotive and construction industries very hard, so we are finding some migration from those sectors.

"By having an industry-wide scheme in place which identifies very clearly a career path for new entrants, it is easier to ensure that we retain them".

That said, the CLAAS experience is that almost 25% of apprentices drop out of the course for various reasons.

John Palmer says, "They leave for a variety of reasons, usually because they feel they are not suited to the rigours and unsocial hours that can go with the job".

It's a view supported by Jon Gowing who is now looking after the new entrants at Manns. "You soon know whether or not they are going to make it," he says.

"The thing is, this is a job which demands so much of your time and commitment.

"Working rules mean that you now do get agreed free-time, even in harvest, but when I started I sometimes worked a near 23-hour day on occasions.

"You have to be adaptable and flexible, and that often means working all hours in all conditions. But if this is a life you enjoy - as I do - then there is no better career".

And there considerable perks attached to some of the apprenticeship schemes on offer.

As with all apprentices on the CLAAS four-year programme, Jon had a spell working in Germany, then several months at Landpower Pty, the CLAAS distributor in New Zealand.

"That was a terrific experience," he says. "Apart from the obvious boost it gave someone like me who had hardly left home before, it also taught me that UK students were regarded very highly for their work-ethic and desire to get on and finish the job in hand".

Jon has the distinction of being the fastest to reach the coveted LTA4 qualification. Barely 8 years after coming through the door with that Swather in need of repair, he has completed the CLAAS four-year apprenticeship and has risen to workshop foreman.

He is still a valuable member of the service team, dividing his time roughly 70% to chargeable service work and 30% on admin in the service office.

"Although it often feels like 70/70!" he says.

He has reached this stage at the age of 25, and there is little doubt that Jon will progress onwards and upwards over the coming years.



“ I think my workload as foreman is probably 70/70! ” Jon Gowing

CLIMBING THE LTA LADDER

LTA 1 Self registration on-line. Entries on this register would be categorised as either Apprentices (on recognised programmes) or more skilled/mature entrants not yet otherwise assessed and categorised. There is currently no charge to register.

LTA 2 Newly qualified apprentices or assessed skilled technician meeting the required criteria.

LTA 3 A skilled & experienced technician who has successfully attended a series of assessed course programmes - may be a product specialist.

LTA 4 - A professional technician having a proven and assessed track record. Additional assessment criteria are included to demonstrate exceptional diagnostic and technical ability together with customer and technical mentoring skills.

www.iagre.org/LTA