What the papers say.

JCB Fastrac
JCB Fastrac – fast, ‘resourceful’, great field performance

The versatility and fast operation of the JCB 8310 Fastrac has earned the tractor an important role in the machinery fleet operated across the substantial acreage of arable land farmed by Rand Brothers.

With large blocks located several miles north and south of the home farm near Royston, Herts, the arrival of the farming company’s first Fastrac is already simplifying the logistics of getting men, machines and equipment in the right place at the right time. That much was expected: more surprising, says operations manager James Bairstow and the tractor’s main driver Richard Hellyer, is its field performance.

“I was sceptical about how the tractor would perform with draft equipment but I was amazed how well it pulled our seven-furrow mounted plough through heavy clay,” says Richard. “We’ve one notoriously difficult field of nasty heavy clay with quite steep banks; my previous tractor got stuck when it was wet, it just couldn’t cope.

“But the Fastrac sailed through and was not keeping scrabbling for grip. “It comes out during a turn on the Fastrac and is its field performance.”

Richard’s previous tractor used the same transmission hardware so he is familiar with the benefits of the big Fastrac’s V-TRONIC stepless drive. Providing seamless acceleration and speed adjustment, it has six manual and auto operating modes for driving ease and to get the optimum combination of engine revs and transmission ratio for different situations.

“The new Activ Traction feature works well,” Richard notes. “On my previous tractor, you had to switch out of cruise mode and adjust the transmission manually if it started to lose traction but on the Fastrac it’s all done automatically so it doesn’t keep scrabbling for grip.”

Adjustable settings for automatic disconnect of the diff locks and four-wheel drive also come in for praise: “I didn’t like the clunk you’d hear when the diff lock came out during a turn on the other tractor,” he explains. “On the Fastrac, you can make separate adjustments, so for ploughing I have the diff locks disengage at 5% steering lock and then four-wheel drive at 25% when the tractor’s got into the turn. It means the system can be set up for performance and long-term durability according to what you’re doing.”

In addition to pulling the plough and a seven-leg subsoiler through heavy clay soils, the Fastrac is deployed in the summer with one of six big square balers that sweep up straw on farms in the area.

Bales destined for the Ely power station in Cambridgeshire, incorporating into animal feed and numerous other outlets, are stacked and loaded using a pair of JCB 535-95 Loadall high-reach telescopic handlers.

The Fastrac also hauls an 8 tonne capacity trailed fertiliser spreader, which is now run at up to 20 kph thanks to the tractor’s all-around suspension providing an improved ride for both operator and machine.

Ferrying liquid fertiliser supplies to a pair of self-propelled sprayers and quickly moving equipment on a flat-bed trailer to the outlying land for both tillage and straw operations are also part of the tractor’s year-round workload.

“The versatility of the big Fastrac is unmatched and that was pivotal in the decision to bring one into the fleet,” says James Bairstow. “Travelling at up to 70 kph cuts journey times to and from our outlying land, so moving loaders and implements is quick and cheaper than using standard tractors.”

The tractor is noticeably quiet in the large, spacious cab, which is a result of the noise damping effect of the engine’s SCR emissions after-treatment system, as well as numerous measures to improve isolation from engine noise and vibration.

“The new Sisu engine pulls well and is quite happy purring along at around 1700rpm,” adds James. “Fuel consumption is coming in at a reasonable 35-litres/hr on road work and up to 55-litres/hr in heavy draft conditions.”

Richard is still working his way through the control menus on the impressive colour touch-screen terminal. He will no doubt discover new features as the tractor supplied and serviced by Oliver Landpower moves on from the 400 hours and 4000 miles it had clocked up by mid-April from its arrival late February.

In all respects, the tractor is proving a popular choice: ”It’s quiet and comfortable but also fast and powerful, with field performance that’s been better than we expected,” says James Bairstow.
Speed, suspension and CVT

That fact wasn’t lost on Cambs farmer and contractor Nigel Bates, when he purchased a new 248hp Fastrac 8250 two years ago to join an original mid-cabbed five-year-old 8250. Initially it took some convincing for him to invest in his original 8250 — the first of the unequal-wheeled Fastrac models, he confesses.

But having made the purchase and found the machine to be very reliable over the following five seasons, he decided to replace his remaining mainline conventional tractor with another 8000 series machine — this time the new rear-cabbed version of the 8250.

The key reason is the higher workrates, he says. There’s faster travel both between fields and within them when at work, along with a much-improved cab. The newer 8250 proved itself well for Nigel Bates, to the point where it was joined this spring by JCB’s new flagship, the 306hp 8310, with the original 8250 making way.

The business, J Bates and Sons, farms 300ha around Coates, near Whittlesey in Cambs, growing combinable crops and potatoes, as well as carrying out tasks for others, including cultivations and drilling. With that contract work requiring round trips of up to 50 miles, the idea of a crawler was quickly dismissed when Nigel Bates decided last year to upgrade to a 6m drill to increase workrates across his home ground and 2000ha of contract drilling.

“We tried crawlers from both Challenger and John Deere on demonstration, but I wasn’t convinced this was the way to go. Not only are they less comfortable on the road, but they are also less versatile in that they can’t be used to tow a trailer, for example. “Our other tractors are New Hollands — a T7050 and TS135A — which have been good machines, and we did consider a conventional-type tractor. But having
He had originally intended to part-exchange the John Deere 7920 when purchasing his first big Fastrac 8250. But the Deere eventually stayed on until the new 8250 arrived in spring 2010, and spent most of the autumn and following spring coupled to the 6m Vaderstad Rapid System Disc drill. The older Fastrac took on subsoiling, ploughing and cultivating duties. The drilling now falls to the 8310.

The usual methods of crop establishment are direct drilling for oilseed rape, although the top 5cm of soil will occasionally be cultivated first if necessary. Once created, the stale seedbed is sprayed off, pressed and drilled to wheat. The plough comes into play where there is potato or maize ground to be established or pulled up.

“The 8310 was delivered only this spring, so it actually hasn’t done any autumn drilling yet,” says Nigel Bates. “But we do a lot of contract sowing, both early in the autumn when customers are sometimes still busy combining, and in spring, which is mostly pea and bean work. As soon as the tractor arrived it was put to work drilling 240ha of peas, beans and linseed.”

The format of the tractor’s design creates a machine that looks physically imposing, partly due to its full-width cab. But the Fastrac actually makes an ideal drilling tractor, he reckons.

Nigel Bates was sufficiently convinced by the performance of his 8250 Fastracs to invest in a new 8310.

moved to a CVT transmission in the 8250, as well as the 7920, I wasn’t keen to switch to a powershift, which is the transmission New Holland currently offers in the 250-300hp bracket I was looking in.”

The Cummins-powered 8250 had proven a reliable tractor, and Nigel Bates liked the CVT transmission for its simplicity and ease of use. So he was persuaded to try an 8310, by local JCB dealer Pecks, and try one of two new models introduced to take the Fastrac concept beyond the 300hp mark.

“With the 8250, the only time it let us down in its first five years with us was for a small issue with an oil pipe, and the CVT transmission proved very simple to set up and operate, unlike some on the market. That good experience over what we had had with the 2135 meant that I was much more confident in considering another Fastrac. With sufficient power and the benefit of full suspension, I felt that a bigger model would be ideal for handling the drill at high working speeds.”
the Fastrac’s road speed capabilities are welcome — having run JCB tractors for some time, Nigel Bates is familiar with their ability to travel safely and legally at over 50km/h. But recent winters have left local roads in a particularly bad state, he says, so the ability of a fully suspended tractor to smooth out road bumps has been particularly welcome.

“With conventional tractors capable of 50km/h, the steering is lighter and the ride and handling aren’t the same at full road speed. But the Fastrac feels much safer, and as our minor roads are pretty bad here on the fens, I wouldn’t now want to do without full suspension. Our Easterby 14t trailers are also used behind the Fastracs, and are on commercial axles.

“With only two full-time staff and me, we have limited labour, so being able to complete jobs and travel between them faster also helps.”

More important to Nigel Bates, though, is the value of a suspended ride when seeking the best results from equipment in the field.

“While the 8250 works on slow-speed, high-draft field jobs with a five-leg Cousins V-Form subsoiler and 6f Rabe plough, the 8310 spends a lot of time hitched to a 4m Kockerling PC tine cultivator and a 4m set of Simba discs plus press. Those need high forward speeds for the best results, and that’s where the Fastrac comes into its own, as the tractor can be worked at a fairly high speed without shaking the operator around. I like to work with the Kockerling at 14-16km/h where possible, and the same with the drill.”

It’s the combination of a Stage 3B AGCO SisuDiesel engine with the Fendt-sourced CVT that really makes the 8310 a different beast from the 8250, he reckons.

“The CVT transmissions really make these tractors, but with the 8310 in particular, the engine is a big step forward from the Cummins in the 8250. It’s evident that there’s a lot more power on tap, even though the engine is actually much quieter. We ran Valmet tractors in the past, so are familiar with the Sisu engines.”

What really helps in getting a tractor’s power to the ground, though, is proper set-up advice from those who know the machines, he suggests.

“Neil Sharman from Trelleborg has been particularly helpful in getting the 8310’s tyres and weight distribution set up correctly, given that we have decided to use wider tyres on this tractor than on our existing 8250. We were able to put it onto weigh cells to show that we were achieving the correct 60:40 distribution to create the ideal 50:50 in work.”

**Farm Facts**

- **J Bates & Sons, Coates, Whittlesey, Cambs**
- Cropped area: 300ha
- Soils: Fen, silt
- Staff: Two
- Tractors: JCB Fastrac 8310 and 8250, New Hollands T7050 and TS135A
- Combine: Claas Lexion 760TT
- Sprayer: Househam 24m self-propelled and 24m trailed
- Cultivation equipment: 4m Kockerling PC tine cultivator, 4m Simba discs and press, 6f Rabe plough, five-leg Cousins V-Form subsoiler
- Drill: 6m Vaderstad Rapid System Disc
ON-FARM OPINION

This is the first tractor, though, that Nigel Bates has had with a diesel exhaust fluid (AdBlue) system to meet Stage 3B emissions legislation. Although this requires regular AdBlue refills and purchases of the fluid in bulk, he considers it a better system than the alternative.

“I far prefer the idea of paying for AdBlue and using only clean, cool air for combustion, rather than including a proportion of recirculated exhaust gas as the alternative system does, as I’m not convinced of the effects that this has on engine performance.

**Fuel consumption**

“A 1,000-litre IBC of AdBlue and a pump were delivered with the tractor, and we’ve found that the tractor’s AdBlue tank requires refilling once for every three diesel refills — it’s no hassle to top up AdBlue at the same time. To be fair, fuel consumption has been good on both our current Fastracs, despite the fact they have different engines, and only the newer one is fitted with an AdBlue system.”

Nigel Bates attributes much of the reason for this to the two Fastracs’ P-tronic CVT transmission, the internals of which are supplied by AGCO/Fendt, but which is controlled by JCB-developed software.

“A lot of CVTs seem complicated to learn and operate, but the JCB controller is very easy to work with. The joystick and particularly the control terminal are simple to understand.”

Bearing in mind previous tractor troubles — there’d been problems with the old Fastrac 2135, and serious mechanical issues with the John Deere 7920 shortly before it was traded in — Nigel Bates has made an additional investment in a five-year warranty.

“The tractor’s coming up for just under 1,000 hours already now, but I’m not unduly worried about reliability with this tractor. It has a very good full-time driver who looks after it very well, ensuring that servicing is kept up to date. If a service interval occurs during a really busy period, we would change oils ourselves, but the tractor would go to the dealer for a full check as soon afterwards as possible.”

Up in the cab, things are a little different for those used to the original Fastrac’s wide yet shallow accommodation.

“We have one tractor driver who is over six feet tall, and struggled to get the seat back, but generally speaking it’s a deeper cab than that on other Fastracs. Room and all-round vision are very good.

“Now that we’ve had this machine for six months or so, I’m happy I made the right decision. Some might look at the 8310 and think that it’s heavy because it looks big, but in reality, it’s not as large as it seems, and it does make a good, light, fast drilling tractor.”

The larger, 850mm tyres on the 8310’s rear axle make it a good drilling tractor, reckons Nigel Bates.

The combination of a Stage 3B AGCO SisuDiesel engine with the Fendt-sourced CVT makes the 8310 a different beast from the 8250.
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Fastrac and power harrow

The JCB Fastrac 8310 with the Brevi 6.0m power harrow, the combination supplied by main dealer Pecks.

By David Williams - Machinery Editor

Running a fleet of four JCB Fastracs and modern implements, DEM King’s Lynn is well-equipped to provide an efficient and timely contracting service to its regular customers, as well as to carry out operations on its own farm at Outwell, Cambridgeshire.

The company’s base, in the Cambridgeshire fens, means it is well-located to look after specialist vegetable growers in the area and, during cereal harvest, to bale and haul straw for large growers in Lincolnshire.

The company grows wheat, peas and vegetables on the 80ha (200 acres) it owns, carrying out most of the field work itself, while neighboring farmer John Clifton helps out with some of the tasks. DEM also carries out field operations for farmers and growers near its base, preparing land for a wide range of crops including peas, pumpkins and sugar beet.

Land work includes up to 283ha (700 acres) a year of subsoiling using a Cousins five-tine V-Form, ploughing with a Vogel and Noot 6f plough, power-harrowing with a Brevi 6.0m machine and drilling.

Three Massey Ferguson 2190 twin-axle balers are operated and two Heath super chasers collect and transport the bales. For general transport, 15t Stewart trailers and 17t Richard Larrington trailers are used.

Specialised haulage contracts include transporting vining peas from fields to the chillers, and the company works with Big Bale North, baling and transporting straw in Lincolnshire.

“The JCB Fastracs are ideal for our needs and for 90 per cent of tasks they perform better than a conventional tractor,” said director Matt Jackson.

“Comfort is a big factor for us and the reliability is outstanding, as is the back-up from local JCB dealer Pecks.”

As well as Matt and his (soon-to-be) father-in-law and joint company founder, Trevor Sieley, there is one full-time tractor operator employed and up to three casual staff are taken on during busy periods. “The JCBs are very easy to operate, and it takes little time for casual staff to get used to them,” said Matt.

JCB dealer Pecks was one of the first dealers to take on the Fastrac franchise in the mid-1980s seeing them as ideal for growers in the company’s trading area, whose tractors typically spend a lot of their working time carrying out transport tasks. DEM has had a long trading relationship with Pecks and was an early customer for the Fastracs, now running a 170hp 2170 with four-
wheel-steer, a 230hp 3230 Smoothshift, a 3230 Xtra and a new top-of-the-range 310hp 8310 which has replaced a 270hp 7270 model.

“We have a good working relationship with Pecks, which we consider to be an excellent dealer, and especially with Jon Wareing who looks after our account. The dealer provides superb back-up and the service staff have considerable experience of the Fastracs,” he commented.

“We get on very well too with JCB staff that are keen to hear our feedback regarding various models. We were asked to try out one of the pre-production 8310s between April and September last year and were very impressed, particularly with the fuel efficiency. Despite having a lot more power than the 7270 and carrying out heavier work, the new engine was far more economical and we were able to operate for two days on a tank full.

“The 7270 had a smaller tank but on heavy work struggled to operate a full day which meant we used valuable time running around with a bowser for refueling. We estimated that it used 5-10 litres/hr less diesel than the smaller tractor, and its AdBlue consumption was approximately four to five per cent compared to diesel on transport tasks and up to 12 per cent when working hard on cultivations. Average was approximately 10 per cent,” pointed out Matt.

“We had no hesitation placing an order with Pecks for the new model for delivery as soon as it was available, and we believed the extra power it offered would enable us to get jobs carried out more quickly which would be an advantage.”

The tractor was displayed by Pecks at its annual open day in February and the business took delivery immediately after.

The extra power of the JCB 8310 meant a fresh look was taken at the implements on the fleet, and the order was placed with a local dealer for a used Vogel and Noot plough, with wide frogs and longer bodies more suitable for the wider tyres.

A lot of land preparation with power harrows is undertaken by the company, and two 6.0m machines were due for replacement. Pecks had recently taken on the Brevi range, and Matt was impressed with the build quality. “We spend a lot of time operating power harrows, and because they are used as the final operation prior to drilling, it is important that the finish is even, the land is left level and that the reliability is very good as down-time would hold up the drilling. Having looked at the Brevi harrows, and discussed them with the staff at Pecks, I decided to trade in two 6.0m harrows we were using and replace them with a single 6.0m Brevi.”

Matt said he liked the appearance; the main gearbox looked very beefy, it looked well designed and easy to adjust, and the rear packer roller has a larger diameter than the company’s existing power harrows which sometimes struggled in wet conditions.

“With the five year manufacturer’s warranty it looked an excellent package.”

DEM took delivery of the new tractor and power harrow in early March and Farmers Guide went along to see how they were performing. Matt was preparing a seedbed for sugar beet in the Cambridgeshire fields and said he was very pleased with the performance.

The previous crop had been peas, and the land had been ploughed and cultivated a few months earlier, and granular fertiliser applied the day before. “The Brevi power harrow took very little setting up and in operation it is very smooth. The levelling board is easy to adjust and the packer roller is leaving a good finish ready for the beet drill. I think the times will last well but the quick-release feature means if we do break one, or when they need replacing, it will be a quick job with minimal downtime.

“Maintenance is easy; the grease nipples are all easily accessible. The power harrow folds quickly and the lock which secures it when it is folded is very positive. It feels safe.”

Matt had used the Fastrac for some haulage work, but this was its first test in the field. “It has plenty of power for the power harrow and I am surprised how quiet the cab is,” he said. “The visibility is very good forward and to the sides, but the rear mudguards are large and restrict the view of the implement, so I tend to use the large rear mirrors to keep an eye on it instead. The tractor we tried was pre-production so our new tractor is better finished. I am very pleased with it.”