



# Never flails to amaze

## Machinery On Farm Opinion

**A heavy-duty flail-topper, bought to keep rough vegetation in check, has put in a surprising amount of work for a Beds family business. CPM finds out.**

*By Rob Jones*

**With over 800ha of arable ground to look after, much of it broken up into small parcels surrounded by hedges and field margins, William Parrish has a fair workload in just keeping the vegetation under control.**

Based close to Henlow in Beds, the family business has always relied on contractors to deal with hedges, ditches and verges. But with an increased area of conservation areas and field boundary strips in the past decade, the bills climbed and the Parrishes decided to start managing a proportion of the work in-house.

"The invoices that were coming in for hedge-trimming weren't insignificant — and all for a job that doesn't provide

any direct financial return," says William Parrish.

"So we started to use our 20-year-old flail topper to do as much as we could, pushing right up to the hedge bottoms and the edges of the ditches. But to be honest it wasn't really up to the job of dealing with two to three-year-old growth and couldn't be angled to work on banks."

So two years ago the business started looking at the options for a replacement capable of handling tougher, woodier vegetation and working on banked ground.

### Robustly built

"Having looked around, the Maschio machine looked like the best option for us. It's the most robustly built topper we've seen and, being offset, it can be rotated right through from upright for siding up hedges to a downhill angle for clearing ditch banks.

"Most importantly it was reasonably priced and supplied by our local dealer Olivers who we've dealt with for the past 85 years so we're pretty confident we'll get well looked after should anything go wrong."

The machine the Parrishes settled on was a 2.6m Maschio Giraffona 260. A heavy-duty flail-topper, its double-skin frame re-enforces the main structure of the

machine and also protects the external sheet of steel from wear and damage from debris inside the mower during work.

Hammer flails work in conjunction with two rows of stationary counter knives within the hood to ensure that the discharged material is mulched into fine pieces. Upper counter blades enable the Giraffona to produce a fine mulch of harder, coarser materials.

The hydraulic offset means the machine can be run out to one side of the tractor or directly behind it while the floating headstock and mechanical break-back means it'll faithfully follow contours and is protected from damage when unseen obstacles are encountered.

The hydraulic head tilt allows the flail to work alongside ditches, with it angled down banks of up to 65°. Within seconds

**“ We’ve used the Maschio flail for every imaginable job. ”**

it can then be rotated through to a 90° upright position and will work at any position in-between.

“Over the past two years we’ve used the Maschio flail for every imaginable job from tidying up simple grass verges and tracks through to trimming out hedge bottoms and ditches post-harvest,” explains William Parrish.

## Side up hedges

“In fact, it’s an ideal wet-day job for a harvest student and it’s safe. Because you can see it out to one side from the tractor seat we don’t end up with kit in the ditch. We wanted the tilt so we could keep ditches clear and to allow us to side up hedges which has really helped keep the contractors’ bills under control.

“At the same time it’s really good for maintaining the grass areas to ensure we comply with our EFA requirements. The Giraffona is capable of doing all that and more.”

Just to prove that, last year he put the Maschio machine through its toughest test to date. An area of scrub-land with three year’s worth of Poplar growth needed clearing and so it was sent in to do the job.

*The Maschio topper can be rotated right through from upright for siding up hedges to a downhill angle for clearing ditch banks.*



With the saplings standing 2.4m-3m (8-10ft) tall and their trunks up to 5cm (2in) in diameter, the flail chopped its way through the lot without a grumble, leaving a neatly mulched chip residue.

Even after that workout there hasn’t yet been a need to change the hammer-flails after two years of action — being self-sharpening, they’ve worn evenly. The only maintenance requirement is a simple tweak of the belts to keep their tension adjusted up.

“The Maschio flail is the ideal machine for us — it’s simple to operate and there’s no hassle with maintenance,” says William Parrish.

“I can send anyone out on it and they can do pretty much any work that’s required.” ■



*William Parrish was looking for a machine that was robust and reasonably priced for a job that doesn’t provide any direct financial return.*

## Farm Facts

*K Parrish and Son, Beds*

- **Farmed area:** 810ha
- **Cropping:** Winter wheat 388ha; spring barley 243ha; oilseed rape 113ha; beans and peas 65ha
- **Soils:** Amphill clay loams and Chiltern chalk downland
- **Mainline tractors:** John Deere 7530 and 6920-S; Claas Challenger 55E; Case Quadtrac STX480
- **Handler:** JCB 531-70
- **Staff:** William and Bill Parrish plus two others full-time

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