

## Harvest Power Cable Incident At Manor Farm 28/08/05

Last Harvest was the first harvest of our joint ownership of a Lexion 580 Terra trac with our neighbouring farm. The agreement involves myself being the main combine operator and each farm supplying a tractor, trailer and driver for each neighbour's grain cart,

We moved into our Neighbour's last field of Wheat at about 4.30pm, the field called Lower Mills is found just off the A361 between Shipton under Wychwood and Fulbrook and is about 16.5 ha in area. The field is split in two by a wall which sections off a small 2ha paddock from the main field and requires all operations to be done separately from the main field. The whole of the field is located on the side of a fairly steep bank, which runs down to the bottom of a valley below the field. My Father opened the Field up, going round the 2ha paddock, whilst I had a cup of tea, once the combine came round I took over again and continued with the second time around the field, this time however I did not go around the 2 ha paddock. We continued to combine the main field and by 8.45 we must have harvested some 8 or 9 ha, the long bouts of the field had been finished and only the short work of the main field remained.

The plan was to finish the field that night and so I decided to move into the 2 ha paddock to finish the headland and rest of the field before it was completely dark, as I was aware of a telegraph pole in the field. The first run of the headland was down the slope to the bottom corner of the field and then across the slope to the next corner. As I put the header back into work the combine was now facing up the slope with a telegraph pole in line with me just the other side of the brow of the bank, some sixty metres away. Behind the combine in a different field further down the valley, some twenty metres away was another telegraph pole, the line of the wires was almost in line with that of the line of Wheat.

At this time I had no concern for the wires as the combine had already been around the field once earlier that afternoon with my Father and I continued to combine up the slope. As the combine was going over the brow of the slope with my concentration still involved in the header I became aware of something flashing in the cab, for a moment it confused me, trying to work out what it was, I realised it was a flashing reflecting off the black plastic trim of the cab interior, still perplexed I turned around to look into the grain tank only to see huge purple flashes of light and sparks flying in all directions. As the shock hit me I turned back around to see what only now looked like fire coming out of the straw chopper. At the same time the grain driver the other side of the field saw the incident from a distance and said it looked as if the combine was being hit by lightning and rushed to the combine.

My instant reaction was to shut the combine off, I opened the cab door and standing on the platform I could then see that the right hand grain tank lid was positioned in between the twin electricity cables but not touching. I knew not to

jump off the combine and threw down the powder fire extinguisher to the grain driver who managed to put the fire out on the left hand track and round the back of the machine .The machine now was not on fire but I was unsure if current could arc across to the machine. There was a house at the end of the power lines which had it's lights on so I knew the cables were back live. We then called the fire brigade, as I knew it was not safe to get off the combine or even how we would get it out! The fire brigade arrived, told me to stay on the machine and then called out the electricity board, who disconnected the line.

Using a long pole they held up the cable, I started up the combine and drove it out without even losing the preset channels on the radio!!

The only evidence of the incident is a mark on the tank lid which resembles something like a spot weld. The Electricity board measured the height of the cables at the point of contact, which was something like 16ft, it had been a hot day so they may have sagged in the heat but they admitted the cables are too low and they are about to install taller telegraph poles and make them closer together.

The Electricity board also informed us that the cables were carrying 11,500 volts, all in all I feel we had a very lucky escape!!

Fortunately for myself I knew not to jump off the combine from hearing of other similar incidents, however I feel it would be extremely helpful if there were safety precaution stickers in the cab alerting operators of the danger and instructions on what to do in that situation. I'm sure with today's technology it wouldn't be difficult to fit a live wire detection device onto the tank lids of combines, this in itself would save many accidents, as it is frightening how easy it is to do!

Richard Hartley  
Manor Farm  
Milton under Wychwood  
Oxon  
OX7 6EX