

BUYING TIPS YOU CAN USE

Randomly selected farmers “tell it like it is” in nominating their “best” and “worst” buys.

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Heath Barrett, Stuart, Iowa: Last year 17-year-old Heath won an FFA award for the custom-baling business he started in 1996. Last season he baled 2,800 6 by 5-ft. round bales for a dozen customers within a 50-mile radius of his hometown west of Des Moines. Customers were pleased with his work, he says, except for the net wrapped bales he produced with his 1991 Deere 535 baler he bought used for \$17,500.

“I originally owned a Deere 530 and traded for the 535 after the first year because I needed the ‘net wrap,’” says Heath. “But the wrapper never worked properly and doesn’t to this day. It leaves about 4 in. on each side of the bale unwrapped. A mechanic from the dealer was out and looked at it four times. He told me the reason I was having problems was that I didn’t know what I was doing. For his four trips and the three I made hauling the baler back to the dealer myself, I racked up \$1,600 in repair bills even though the wrapping problem was never resolved.

“I still owe \$9,300 on the baler and I’d be much happier about paying it off if it had ever worked right. I’m pretty hesitant to throw good money after bad on more repairs that may not even help. The problems with this baler should have been resolved by the dealer or the manufacturer sometime in the last seven years. I tracked down the man who

“All Gehl offered us for all our trouble was \$1,000 off the price of a new 170 grinder/mixer, which lists for \$17,000. But we put thousands of dollars worth of work in on the machine.

“We finally bought a new Farmhand, which is basically the same machine, for \$11,000. We still have the Gehl.”

Lee Hostetler, Cottage Grove, Tenn.: “We bought our 1996 Ford F-350 pickup last spring. It already has more than 65,000 trouble-free miles on it. I’m still driving a Ford F-250 pickup equipped with a 390 cu. in. engine that I bought 23 years ago. It still runs great and isn’t all rusted out like Chevy and GM models would be by now.

“My worst buys are Goodyear tractor tires. They crack and fall apart before the tread is even worn down. Maybe they hold up better in other areas that have different soil types than ours.”

Irvin L. Schulmeier, San Antonio, Texas: “My 1994 Chevrolet 1-ton pickup gets 16 mpg even when hauling a 1-ton load. It performs well pulling a trailer loaded to a 28,000-lb. gross weight.

“My 1996 Buick Roadmaster is a better car than my 1990 Cadillac.”

Wayne Todd, Denton, Mont.: Wayne likes his 1991 Deere 9400 hoe drills. “They work good and come with a transport hitch that’s well designed and easy to use. The metering is fairly accurate and seed placement is consistent. However, the single front wheel is too small for wet conditions. Also, the shanks around the pivot area should be built heavier. Otherwise, these drills are a pleasure to use.”

His 1995 MK hydraulic drill filler heads his “worst buy” list. “It’s the worst piece of farm equipment I’ve ever owned. Installation is time consuming and difficult. The hydraulic foldup doesn’t have enough power to lift the auger and comes down way too fast. The electric solenoid valve that controls the auger doesn’t completely shut off the flow so the auger dribbles seed constantly. Another problem is that the latches on the cleanout doors are built too light. Also, the auger safety chain is too light and doesn’t stay hooked. I wish I had bought a Westfield or Brandt model instead.”

“My 1982 New Holland TR 85 combine is also a worst buy. It’s probably the best overall designed and the most poorly engineered machine I’ve ever owned. It has adequate capacity for its size and threshes clean. It works well in nice, uniform, 40 to 50-bu. per acre wheat. However, it doesn’t take in heavy straw fast enough and it absolutely refuses to feed in lighter crops, particularly barley. The unloading system is too slow and is comparable to an old Deere 95. Also, the steering linkage is built too light, the hydraulics are marginal - particularly the reel speed control - and the sickle drive has problems. However, it’s an easy machine to operate and, under good conditions, saves more grain than some other brands. I’d probably buy another TR model hoping that the company engineers had learned a few things after this machine was built.”

Dennis Kelsey, Connell, Wash.: “My 1983 Gleaner N5 combine equipped with a 24-ft. grain head is my best buy. I ran it flat out in second gear in 83 bu. per acre white wheat and got only 1/10 of one percent dockage at the elevator. One time I spent an entire day trying to find a shorted-out electrical wire.

“My worst buy is my Haybuster 28-ft. sweep plow equipped with 36-in. sweeps. I bought it used in almost-new condition. I

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leased the baler the year before I bought it and he said he had the same trouble.”

Elton Kropf, Seymour Mo.: Elton’s “worst buy” in 20 years of farming is a 170 Gehl grinder/mixer he bought new in 1990 for \$8,900 plus the trade-in of his old mixer.

“It’s actually not a bad mixer, but we got poor company support for numerous problems that started early-on,” Elton says. “Within three months, the chain had rubbed a hole in the U-trough that carries corn from the hammermill to the mixer. We took the machine to the dealer we bought it from and they put on a new trough, but they installed smaller sprockets than the mixer was equipped with to correct the problem.

“From that point on, the mixing auger would jump off the gearbox as you were filling the mixer. Then we had to climb inside to empty the mixer to reconnect the auger. This would take two guys two or three hours to do, and it happened as often as twice a day. At the same time, the mixer started to eat gearboxes. We had to put in a new gearbox nearly every six months at almost \$1,000 a pop. I assumed the two problems were related but our dealer’s mechanic couldn’t find the problem. Finally, in the spring of ‘96, a sprocket went out. After two weeks, Gehl replaced it, along with a second sprocket matched to get the right speed on the auger. After that, the gearbox never wore out and the auger never jumped off the gearbox again. So it’s quite clear to me the problem was the mismatched sprockets put on by the dealer.