

CLASSIC TRACTOR TALES

The remarkable Ransomes

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IN THE BEGINNING

The name of Ransomes, Simms and Jefferies Ltd is synonymous with the evolution of British farm machinery. It is over 200 years since the name first appeared on hand-crafted horse ploughs, beaten into shape over a roaring blacksmith's forge and anvil at the Suffolk factory.

Steam engines had become a major product by the middle of the 19th century. In 1849 Ransomes produced what was possibly the first self-propelled farm engine. It consisted of a chassis mounted on three wheels with a vertical boiler powering a steam engine, which in turn drove the single front wheel by a chain drive.

But apart from some prototypes developed in 1903, the firm did not enter the tractor scene until 1936. In that year the Ransomes MG 2 was introduced and few farmers would have predicted that the diminutive oddball machine would become Britain's number one selling crawler tractor.

The MG (Market Garden) series was upgraded in 1949 and the MG 2 became the MG 5. The new model proved extremely popular and production accelerated to over 1000 units per year. The MG 6 and finally the MG 40 were later introduced, still retaining the same miniature concept but with additional refinements.

When manufacturing of the MG series was terminated in the early 1960s, an astounding 15,000 Ransomes crawlers had been produced. This represented an all time record for any brand of British crawler tractor.



A Ransomes MG 5 crawler magnificently restored by Maureen Creasey of WA. The MG 5 was not fitted with hydraulics and three point linkage so the rear implements had to be raised by the large hand lever located on the right side of the operator. Note the throttle control and stop button on the left hand steering lever. (Photo IMJ.)

MG 5 (1949-1954).

The MG 5 was promoted as being a versatile tractor, easy and safe to drive “even for a boy.” Versatile it was, easy and safe to drive — it most certainly was not! In fact in the hands of an operator unfamiliar with its idiosyncrasies, the MG 5 could prove an extremely dangerous machine.

The seven hp single cylinder, four stroke 600 cc, air-cooled Sturmev Archer engine was built to a very high standard of robustness and hand cranking it into life was generally a simple operation. But with an incorrectly-timed magneto, it could kick back and break a wrist if the crank handle had not been grasped with the operator’s thumb pointing forward around the handle grip.

Built into the engine flywheel was a centrifugal clutch that automatically engaged the transmission drive at 600 rpm — slightly above idling speed. When initially started and thus still cold, the engine would normally run roughly for a while and if throttled back would simply stall. Accordingly it was not uncommon for the single forward or reverse speed to be grated into gear, by an impatient farmer, before the clutch had disengaged. This rough and inexcusably bad operating practice resulted in the little tractor taking off like a startled rabbit — a highly dangerous state of affairs indeed.

So the clue was to start the engine, then walk away for a few minutes and have a cup of tea. This would permit the engine to heat up to operating temperature. It could then be throttled back to an idle and the single forward or reverse gear engaged safely. It was a simple matter then to increase the revs with the hand throttle and the clutch would take up smoothly.

BRAKES AND TRANSMISSION

The operator had to be mindful that, if the engine was allowed to rev back to idle whilst negotiating an incline, the effect of engine compression braking abruptly disappeared as the clutch automatically disengaged. So Newton’s law of gravity would apply and the little tractor would head for the sound barrier. In this situation it was imperative that both hand-



Various designs of dozer blades were fitted to the MG 5. This particular outstanding example of an MG 5, fitted with a dozer blade, was on show at the National Rally in Tasmania 2001. The raising and lowering of the blade was controlled by the large hand lever. Despite having no hydraulic assistance, this raising and lowering did not require a great deal of physical effort by the operator. (Owners D & G Perry, Tas. Photo IMJ.)

steering brakes be applied smartly with the hope they had been properly adjusted. Definitely not a tractor for the slow witted!

The gear casing was bolted to a square fabricated box, not much larger than an old-fashioned Arnott's biscuit tin, into which were shoehorned the steering brakes and the bevel drive differential.

The hand-operated turning brakes, consisting of contracting bands, were basic but effective, providing they were free of yuk and oil. With the brakes correctly adjusted a skilled operator could spin and waltz the MG 5 through barn doorways and around headlands with great dexterity.

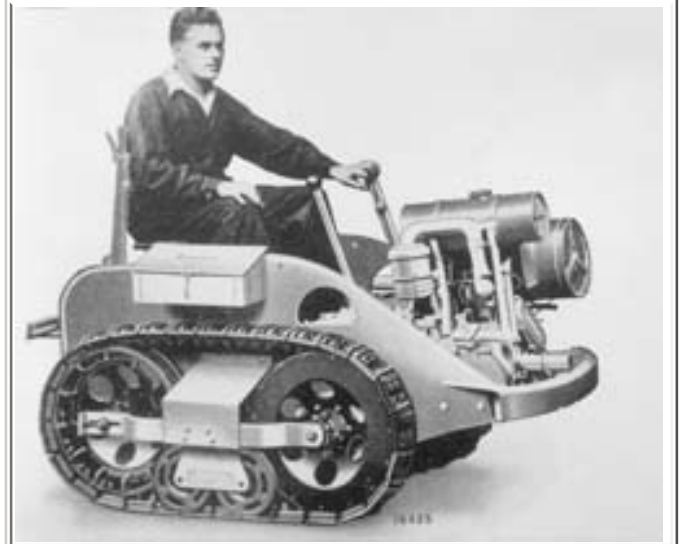
THE TRACKS

The frontal layout of engine and transmission produced an unusual design feature. The driving sprockets for the tracks were at the front of the tractor and the idlers at the rear. Apart from some military track vehicles this is a concept seldom seen in farm crawlers. (By way of interest, the first front drive crawler seen in Australia was the German made Stock 28 PS manufactured in Berlin and introduced into Australia in 1925).

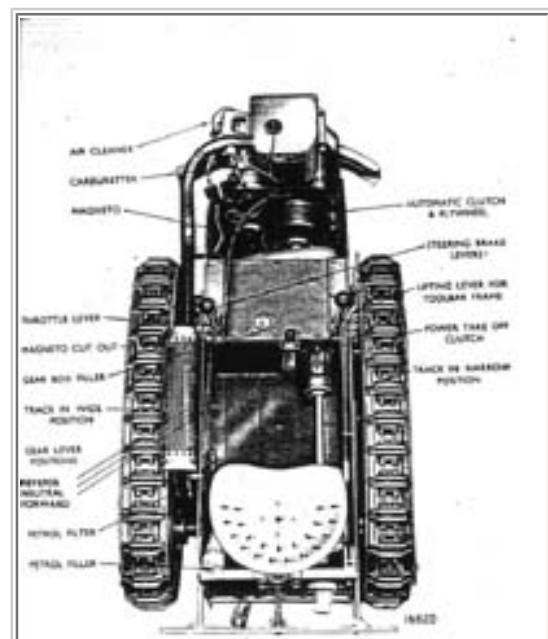
The Ransomes MG 5 tracks incorporated patented rubber joiners which dispensed entirely with pins, links and bushes. Surprisingly the durability of the rubber joints was greater than conventional pins and bushes. The rubbers were easily replaceable if or when necessary and there was a big price advantage when compared with conventional track wear components. Lateral track tension was simple to adjust by means of two eye bolts.

MG5 SALES IN AUSTRALIA

The MG5 was exported from Britain to over 30 countries. The principal Australian agent was Demco Machinery Co Pty Ltd. The firm first demonstrated it to a group of market gardeners in 1949 at a field day held on a vegetable farm at Lugarno, near Sydney. The onlookers were greatly impressed with the performance of the machine and in particular were astonished at its ability to pull a mouldboard plough.



The original Ransomes MG tractor was introduced in 1936 and designated the MG 2. It featured a Sturmev Archer air cooled single cylinder side valve engine developing 6 hp.



Drawing showing location of controls and components of the MG 5.

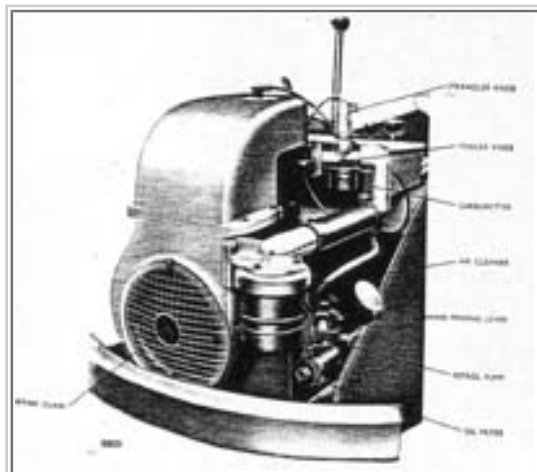
Even with a track ground pressure of only five pounds per square foot the MG 5 could pull a single furrow plough to a depth of nine inches in medium soil and achieve one acre per day. This roughly equated the output from a pair of Clydesdales, but with the Ransomes the ploughman rode instead of walking. Plus, he did not have to spend an additional tedious couple of hours each day feeding, grooming and harnessing the horses.

In 1951 a power take off shaft was added to the MG 5 as a standard feature included in the retail price in Australia of £390.

RANSOMES CRAWLERS TODAY

There are quite a number of Ransomes crawlers preserved in classic tractor collections throughout Australia. This, no doubt, is testimony to the engineering integrity that went into their construction half a century ago.

Regrettably some collectors consider a Ransomes an ideal choice for a youngster or a 'beginner'. They are a fascinating little tractor but definitely not for kids. Even adult 'beginners' have to know what they are about and should be thoroughly tutored by a Ransomes crawler expert.



Drawing showing engine details.



A historic photo taken in 1925 of a German imported Stock crawler tractor featuring front drive. The demonstration took place somewhere in Victoria and is interesting because it was the first front drive crawler ever seen in Australia. The concept was re-invented by Ransomes in the 1930s. (Photo from IMJ archives.)