

## CLASSIC TRACTOR TALES

# The tractor and the bread van

By Ian M. Johnston, the Tractor Historian

*The following is a personal account of an event, involving a Ferguson tractor, that took place in 1947 when the author was a tousle haired school boy in Scotland. It has taken him over half a century to own up and confess to the experience!*

### THE VIEW

Grangehill Farm was located on the summit of a high elevation that extended like a pointing finger out into the Firth. The panoramic view from the farm house and cow field was breathtakingly beautiful.

Immediately below, hugging the crescent curve of the bay, lay the adjoining villages of Elie and Earlsferry. To the left, the ancient stone jetty towered above the salmon cobbles and the colourful array of rowing boats moored within the protection of its massive granite structure. At the opposite end of the bay, perched upon a craggy escarpment, the skeletal remains of the historic chapel dating back to 1124, frowned perpetually down upon the tireless waves crashing on the rocks below.

Beyond the village, the broad expanse of the often treacherous, but occasionally sublime waters of the Firth of Forth unfolded into the distance. On a clear day the Lothian Coast was easily visible, but frequently obliterated by the thunderous clouds rolling in from the North Sea.



A real estate agent would describe the view from the farm as “a million dollar asset.” But this was not the Cote d’Azur nor was it Queensland’s Sanctuary Cove. This was Fife!

Back in 1947 the principle benefactors of the “asset” were Mr Black’s Ayrshire dairy cows that either lay around like overfed large dogs, luxuriating in the balmy heat of a summer’s day, or huddled together for warmth and protection from the

driving sleet, which could also be experienced on a Fife summer’s day!

The splendid elevated location of Grangehill Farm had its downside (if you follow me). The road leading up to the farm from the village deteriorated from a level straight crossing of the golf links into a tortuously steep and winding rutted track.

### THE BREAD VAN

Mr Boulet, the local baker, operated a battery powered electric bread van which silently and efficiently went about its deliveries in the village, immune from the restrictions of petrol rationing. But each Friday it was required to negotiate the steep climb to the farm with Mrs Black’s weekly supply of bread.

But Mr Boulet’s weekly expedition to Grangehill was made under protest, as the electric van was not designed for mountaineering. The energy required to climb the steep rough road was nearly beyond the capacity of the batteries and the

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“At the opposite end of the bay, perched upon a craggy escarpment, the skeletal remains of the historic chapel dating back to 1124, frowned perpetually down upon the tireless waves crashing on the rocks below.” In this photo the sea is uncharacteristically calm. Normally, waves rolling in from the North Sea pounded the rocky headland. Taken half a century after the events described in the text, the picture shows the author walking along the beach in a reflective mood during one of his occasional visits to the village of his youth. (Photo M. Daw).

exhausted little vehicle could only crawl the final yards at less than walking pace.

Upon Mr Boulet's eventual arrival at the farm house, a cup of tea always awaited him, while his van was plugged into the mains for the necessary replenishing of the

## Ferguson Facts

- During the first nine years of manufacture (commencing 1946) 500,000 TE Fergusons were produced. During this period 318,000 were exported from Coventry (UK) to 117 countries.
- During its production life, 20,000 Ferguson tractors were sold *each year* to British farmers, resulting in 50 per cent of all British farms being worked by Ferguson tractors.
- The first Ferguson tractor, the Model A, was introduced in 1936 and was manufactured by David Brown Tractors Ltd.
- In 1953 Harry Ferguson sold his Ferguson tractor interests to the Canadian giant Massey Harris.

batteries. On his departure he was generally presented with a bulging bag of Golden Wonder potatoes or a turnip or two to take home to Mrs Boulet.

### THE FERGUSON

In 1947 Grangehill Farm boasted a grey Ferguson TED tractor in addition to four heavy draught horses. A tractor at that time was still a rarity in the district. Those farmers who had ventured into the new technology generally did so with a clanking steel wheeled Fordson. The Ferguson was therefore a matter for regular discussion in the bar of *The Ship Inn* or that of *The Nineteenth Hole*.

At age 12 I was somewhat of a celebrity at the local school as I had been seen on numerous occasions driving the Ferguson. It started with Mr Black letting me have the occasional wee drive. But when he became confident I exhibited no maniacal or suicidal driving tendencies, he put my talents to use. During a busy period he would despatch me to the 'plood field' where I could be trusted to put in a long day driving the Ferguson performing a variety of tasks ranging from harrowing to hay raking.

### THE TATTY HOWKIN'

Undoubtedly the busiest time at Grangehill was the Tatty Howkin' (potato

harvest). During World War II the local school closed for the first two weeks of each October and the children were 52 ▷



The ancient Kingdom of Fife is located on the East Coast of Scotland, between the Firth of Tay and the Firth of Forth. In olden times it was known as "The Beggar's Mantle with the Fringe of Gold," on account of the fertile farmlands which surrounded the high country of its interior.

encouraged to earn two shillings and six pence per day working at the local farms “picking” potatoes. Despite the plaintive protestations from the children, this bonus and rewarding holiday was discontinued in 1948. Re-introduced was the pre-war custom of the work being carried out by teams of itinerant Irish female labourers. During the potato harvest season, these always boisterous and occasionally slatternly young women were shepherded around Fife, Perthshire and the Lothians under the somewhat questionable control of their male Irish gaffers.

In October 1947 the Tatty Howkin’ was in full swing. A neighbouring farmer had been brought in, with his Fordson Major equipped with a potato spinner, to do the ‘digging’. Multitudes of local school bairns were earning their two shillings and six pence by picking the potatoes that were spun out of the rich tilthy soil.

Much to the envy of each child present, my job involved driving the Ferguson, hauling a two wheeled tipping trailer along the rows. Into the trailer were tipped the Golden Wonder potatoes from the wicker baskets, one of which was allocated to each child.

When the trailer was piled high, I was

These advertisements for Grangehill Farm and The Elie Bakery appeared in the “East Fife Observer” of October 1947.

required to drive with all haste up to the farm yard, tip the load into the potato “clamp” and return *without malingering* to the field, ready for another load.

As it happened the rutted track from the field joined the steep winding farm road near the top of the hill. On this particular Friday I urged the Ferguson along the field track at full throttle in fourth gear, no doubt with the occasional potato bouncing off the trailer.

The intersection where it joined the farm road was totally obscured by a high drystone wall and involved a sharp right hand blind turn. I swung the speeding tractor into the bend, still at full throttle in order to maintain the speed necessary to

climb to the top of the hill without the involvement of a gear change.

### DISASTER

For the entire week I had successfully manipulated the tractor and loaded trailer at full speed around this corner without mishap, and certainly without the thought of encountering another vehicle. I mean, nobody ever drove up to the farm — *except of course Mr Boulet in his bread van.*

Careering around the blind corner, I was appalled to suddenly be confronted by the rear of Mr Boulet’s van. It was just managing to struggle up the final section of the hill and was barely moving.



Pictured is the actual Grangehill Ferguson and trailer featured in the text. The Ferguson was a TED type which was fuelled on kerosene following a warm up period on petrol. The trailer was a converted horse cart equipped with World War II RAF bomber wheels and tyres. The driver is Willhugh Black. (Photo J. Black).

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Mr Boulet, sitting at the controls, was patiently reading his newspaper to while away the time as his van gasped its way to the summit. Suddenly his van became a missile! Within the wink of an eye it had arrived at the summit, albeit with the sleek bonnet of a Ferguson tractor wedged in among the bread, custard tarts and upside-down cakes. Struth! What a situation!

Mr Boulet staggered from his van in a state of utter shock. In my case, being only a lad, the enormity of the situation was only just starting to filter through. But when I looked behind, I wished I had not!

The impact had released the trip locking mechanism on the tailgate of the tipping trailer. I watched helplessly as an avalanche of plump Golden Wonders cascaded down the steep hill in the direction of the village. The trailer was empty!

Quite incredibly Mr Boulet's electric van was undamaged apart from a dint and a severe scuffing on his rear bumper bar where the front tractor tyres had made

contact. The fact that the rear roller door of the van had been open had prevented the need for a major panel beating job.

As for the potatoes, two hours later, with the assistance of a gaggle of children, they were back in the trailer. By that time Mr Boulet's composure had been restored following his unprotesting acceptance of several generous drams of Mr Black's best malt.

Having determined the damage to his electric van was minimal, he acknowledged philosophically and with a grin that never before had his van experienced such acceleration, which he likened to that of a Bentley Speed 6!

The Tatty Howkin' children? Well, they found considerable joy and hilarity at my abrupt fall from grace. Instead of being held in respect, I was now the subject of ridicule.

Mr Black, who had been summoned to the spectacle, aimed a volley of words in my direction that no 12 year old should ever have heard. But the very next day I was back on the Ferguson and by mid



A greatly magnified (thus poor quality) image taken from a tiny portion of a photo of Elie High Street. Clearly evident is Mr Boulet's electric van parked outside his baker shop. (Taken from a promotional pamphlet produced by The Royal Burgh of Elie and Earlsferry).

afternoon Mr Black was demanding to know why it was taking me so long to complete the round trip.

"Can ye no gang a wee bitty faster son?" he inquired.

Readers are invited to visit Ian's website at <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~ianmjohnton>

## IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR

**QUESTION:** Can you identify the tractor and the non-original feature?

**CLUE:** To a tractor purist, this is bordering on the unforgivable!

**DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** Will require a great deal of pondering.

**ANSWER:** See page 64.

