



# Green tea and orange tractors

By Ian M. Johnston, the Tractor Historian

As the proprietor of a Sydney based firm, specialising in the marketing of both new and used earthmoving equipment in the 1970s, our intrepid tractor historian believed there had to be a better way of designing a loader/backhoe, than mounting it upon a barely disguised two wheel drive farm tractor. So he decided to check-out the latest European tractor technology at The Hanover Trade Fair in Germany.

### GERMANY APRIL 1972

Rather absurdly, my association with Furukawa actually commenced not in the land of the Rising Sun, but in the land of foaming ale, sauerkraut and worrying sausages.

I had attended The Hanover Trade Fair in the hope of acquiring the Australian agency for an innovative four wheel drive loader/backhoe. My aim was to find something that would knock the socks off the two wheel drive Massey Ferguson, John Deere and Case machines, that were the volume sellers back home in Oz.

After clambering over several machines, I had narrowed the field down to two potential candidates. They were the Kramer 311 and the Schopf L45, both



The Furukawa FL70 loader/backhoe was a brilliantly conceived industrial loader with a superb side shift backhoe that could be dismounted in two minutes. It featured four wheel drive, an articulated chassis, four speed fore-and-aft shuttle transmission, four wheel brakes and was powered by a powerful Isuzu diesel engine. (Photo courtesy Furukawa).

excellent German products. But in the end the sums did not work out and the retail price in Australia of these units would have been totally uncompetitive.

Empty handed and somewhat dejected

and morose, I pointed the Hertz Opel in the return direction of Frankfurt. A fleeting glimpse of an orange coloured compact four wheel drive loader/backhoe abruptly changed my mood to one of anticipation. The machine was excavating a trench along a parallel side road. A closer inspection suddenly became a priority.

This all occurred as I was racing along an autobahn with threatening "Parken Verboten" signs everywhere, so there was no opportunity of pulling off the road and walking over to take a closer look. The next exit ("Ausfahrt" — yes really!) was some 30 kilometres south, which created a problem. So when I did eventually exit the autobahn I was faced with a challenging navigational exercise.

It took a couple of hours to return to the work site and this involved threading my way through the cross-country maze of meandering farm roads, back to the orange machine. But my efforts were not in vain. I had discovered the Furukawa FL70 four wheel drive loader/backhoe! I was fairly confident this was the machine for which I had been searching. The only snag — the manufacturers were in Japan and I was in Germany!



Manufactured in Britain, the Massey Ferguson loader/backhoe was Australia's top selling unit in 1972. The base tractor was a thinly disguised agricultural MF 35 with farm type brakes and transmission. Its performance on a work site was restricted by the two wheel drive configuration and driving in heavy traffic was dangerous, owing to the inadequate brakes and poor stability. Despite these short comings, which it shared with each of its competition, it was possibly the pick of the crop. (Photo I.M.J.)

76 ▷



Ian M. Johnston (fourth from left) wearing the protective clothing issued to all visitors, inspects a Furukawa FL70 at the dealer's premises, which he visited during his first morning in Tokyo. (Photo courtesy T. Karashima).



The Kramer 311 being put through its paces at the 1972 Hanover Trade Fair, was a well engineered four wheel drive unit. But the cost of adding a backhoe would have rendered it over priced for the Australian market. (Photo I.M.J.)

< 74...GREEN TEA, ORANGE TRACTORS

### JAPAN MAY 1972

Spending an intolerably long night packed into the cattle class section of a jet liner is not my definition of jollification. Having breakfasted on plastic food and been told to fasten my seat belt, the big Boeing eventually thumped down at Tokyo's Narita airport.

It was a cold and grey morning — and that is exactly how I felt. My shirt was rumpled, I was badly in need of a shave and fancied I must smell a wee bit off. Further, the front of my suit jacket displayed a prominent stain, the result of a glass of red wine being passed by a careless steward to the gentleman sitting on my left. In other words I looked and felt a wreck!

Having cleared immigration and collected my bag from the carousel, I was suddenly aware of a throng of approaching gleaming Japanese businessmen. They each had gleaming white shirts, gleaming dark blue suits, gleaming polished black shoes, gleaming teeth, and each was bearing a gleaming briefcase.

This was my welcoming committee from the Furukawa corporate headquarters. They gave not the slightest indication of the dismay they must have felt when they set eyes upon this scruffy unkempt apparition from Australia.

In strict pecking order they introduced themselves and proffered business cards. I had been briefed that it was impolite not to immediately scrutinise the contents of a card presented by a Japanese.

I gratefully observed that each card was printed in English (for my benefit?) but there was no chance I could commit to memory the unfamiliar names. Indeed, these unbelievably immaculate businessmen, appeared to my befuddled mind, as if they could have been almost clones of one another.

I surveyed the smiling bowing assembly and wondered how I could possibly ever be able to recognise Mr Ayabe from Mr Hashida, from Mr Kobayashi, from Mr Tezuka, etc. And there were around a dozen of them!

Accompanied by the two most senior of the welcoming committee, I was ushered into the rear of a company limousine. We sped our way along two and three storey freeways until our chauffeur was obliged to slow down as he negotiated his way through Marunouchi — the commercial centre of Tokyo. It took nearly 90 minutes for the journey from the airport to the glitzy New Otani Hotel, where I had reserved accommodation.

With much bowing and beaming, it was somewhat pointedly suggested by my escorts that I retire to my suite for a freshen up. They intended returning to their office but Mr So-so and his colleague Mr So-so, whom I was assured I would instantly recognise as they had been part of the welcoming committee, would meet me in the lobby in precisely two hours time.

For what purpose I was not sure. But presumably to attend a conference at the Furukawa headquarters to discuss the matter of the Furukawa earthmoving equipment agency for my company in Sydney. After all, that was why I was in Tokyo.

## FRESHENED UP

At exactly 11 am, showered, talced and with a change of suit and shirt, I stepped out of one of the New Otani silent express elevators. For the life of me, I could not conjure to mind the image of the two gentlemen I was due to meet. Whilst descending in the elevator, I decided the best approach would be to smile at every businessman I encountered, which would surely prompt an acknowledgement from my chaperones.

At mid morning The New Otani lobby is *awash* with Japanese businessmen. My tactics of grinning inquiringly at each resulted in a lobby-full of returned bobbing heads and broad smiles.

But two of the bobbing heads disengaged themselves from the throng and approached and awkwardly shook hands — to them an unfamiliar western custom. I assumed these were my companions and, as if sensitive to my discomfort, they decently again presented their business cards.

I was wrong in my belief we would initially visit the Furukawa HQ. Instead, the black limousine with its pristine starched white linen antimacassar headrests, wound



The well designed articulated Schopf T45 was eliminated as a contender, owing to its poor under-axle ground clearance.

its way through a prefecture of narrow streets to eventually arrive at a Furukawa dealer's premises. It was here that I came to the conclusion that Japanese businessmen are endowed with heat proof finger tips!

A traditional greeting cup of green tea is apparently a mandatory component of Japanese corporate etiquette. Accordingly, upon our arrival at the dealer's premises, I was conducted to a formal sitting room where I was introduced to a small gathering of awaiting senior managers. I was requested to be seated in a capacious low

lounge chair. A delightful hovering handmaiden then invited me to accept a cup of green tea from a tray. Traditional Japanese tea cups do not have handles. Now the sparks were not actually flying off the cup, but as I grasped and lifted it, I let out a totally unexpected and undignified yelp.

The cup fell to the floor. My finger tips were scorched!

As is their way in an embarrassing situation created by an obtuse Westerner, the assembly sprang to its feet in a body and in unison exclaimed over and over "Ah! So sorry." They really were concerned. But there was little

damage, except to my ego — apart from a stained carpet and my shoes were splashed. A great start to a meeting!

I quickly learned to grip a proffered cup of boiling hot green tea from the base and lip of the cup, holding it between my thumb and first finger.

The formalities of the green tea concluded, we adjourned to the workshop where Furukawa loader/backhoes were being serviced. An inspection of compo-

nentry left no doubt of the engineering integrity built into these machines and I was indeed impressed.

The articulated tractor was powered by an Isuzu diesel engine. Castings of high quality and beautifully machined were used liberally at strategic loader and backhoe points. The steel fabrications were of QE 2 proportions, guaranteeing there would be little or no structural failures.

An hour passed and it was time to depart. I was totally astonished, quite embarrassed and even a trifle amused, to note that the entire workforce of the dealership was lined up, again strictly in pecking order, to farewell our departure. A boiler suited mechanic, exhibiting great courage and a suspected suicidal tendency, strutted out into the busy thoroughfare and with a red flag halted the dense approaching traffic. The traffic screeched to an abrupt halt. It occurred to me that Japanese drivers are infinitely more courteous and amicable than their Australian counterparts.

As the sleek black limousine left the inner courtyard and entered the now static roadway, the line-up of assorted company personnel bowed deeply as a token of their respect and appreciation of my esteemed visitation. In a reflex response I gave a faultless Queen Mother royal wave, of which even Dame Edna would have been envious.

#### STRUTH — WHAT NEXT ?

Ian's introduction to the customs and protocol of the Japanese tractor industry, combined with his never-to-be-forgotten visit to an exclusive Ginza "club", will be continued in the next issue of *The Australian Cottongrower*. 🍵



The Furukawa Group can trace its origins back to 1875. One hundred years later it had become a vast industrial and commercial enterprise embracing 32 organisations. These included Yokohama Rubber Co. Ltd., the giant Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank Ltd., Fujitsu Ltd., and Fuji Electric Co. Ltd. This 1972 photo is of the corporate headquarters in Marunouchi — the commercial hub of Tokyo.

## IAN'S MYSTERY QUIZ

**Question:** These are the controls of which 1930s tractor ?

**Clue:** It is American and although, in its day, cutting edge design, did not prove popular with farmers.

**Degree of difficulty:** The only way to identify this tractor for most readers, is to cheat and look up the answer first.

**Answer:** See page 88.

