

# Green tea and orange tractors

## PART II

By Ian M. Johnston, the Tractor Historian



an's initiation in May 1972 into the protocol and customs of the Japanese tractor industry is continued.

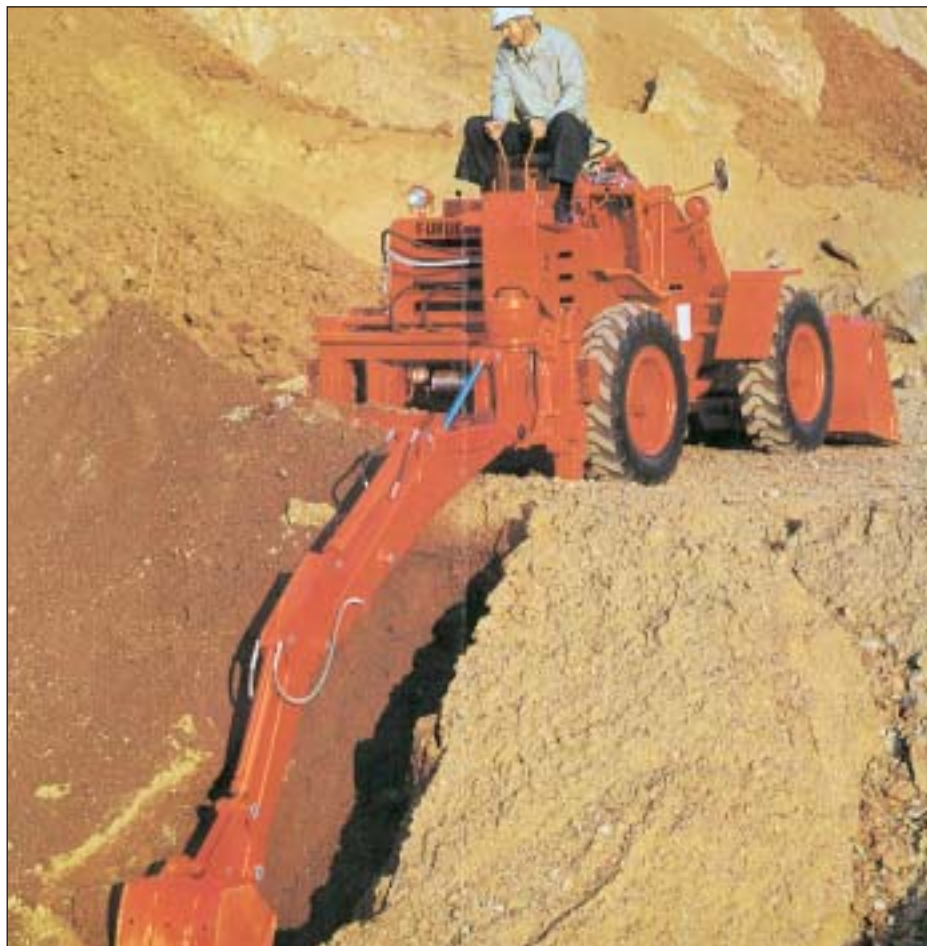
### SASHIMI

Having minutely inspected the Furukawa FL70 Loader Backhoe at the Tokyo dealer's premises — it was time for lunch.

Ensnconced within the luxury of the corporate limousine, my two escorts pointed out some of the city's famous landmarks as we made our way to a restaurant in Marunouchi. The gardens and moat of the Royal Palace were breathtakingly beautiful. The centre of Japanese government was the Diet building — a sombre grey edifice built at a time when strict height limits were imposed on all structures in Tokyo, on account of the frequently occurring earth tremors.

We duly arrived at a small traditional style restaurant, an obvious haven for many of the business men and women from the surrounding corporate office blocks. Sitting on a cushion with my legs curled under a 30 centimetre high table and trying to remain dignified, took some doing. But I must confess to a degree of acceptance of the situation when a bevy of young Japanese damsels approached the table, bearing platters of enticing gourmet mysteries.

By now I had discovered that my two accompanying young Japanese business executives were extremely likeable characters with a well developed sense of humour. I found I rapidly formed a friend-



This graphic photo shows the ability of the Furukawa backhoe to be side-shifted and also excavate a vertical bulkhead. Also obviously apparent is the excellent vision obtained by the operator. (Photo courtesy Furukawa)

ship with them, which endures to this day. We were able to laugh on the unfamiliarity of each other's customs and traditions.

They exploded with mirth at my expression when a plate of Sashimi (a type of raw fish) was placed before me. Following a hesitant start I soon discovered that Sashimi is a delicious epicurean delight. Actually, during my brief first visit to Japan, I acquired a great appreciation and fondness for Japanese cuisine.

Being well gastronomically satisfied, it was now time to get down to business.

Our immaculate liveried chauffeur, complete with dazzling white cotton gloves, drove us the short distance to the Furukawa Corporate Headquarters.

A uniformed commissionaire bowed us through the imposing entrance to a waiting luxuriously appointed elevator. Arriving at the executive floor, I was shown into an immense carpeted and draped conference room.



"The gardens and moat of the Royal Palace were breathtakingly beautiful". (Photo I.M.J.)

62 ▷

### DOWN TO BUSINESS

Unlike western style boardrooms with their imposing but somewhat daunting long table surrounded by formal stiff-back chairs, Japanese corporations endeavour to create an ambience of warmth and relaxation. The room I entered was furnished with a central low-set oval table surrounded by a dozen or so opulently plush armchairs. Beside each chair was placed a small individual table bearing an ornate large ashtray and a crystal carafe of iced water.

The setting would have been great except for the fact that the awaiting eight divisional managers, who sprang to their feet upon our entry, were all smoking and had obviously been so engaged for some time. The fug in the room was the equivalent to running a Lanz Bulldog in a garden shed!

During the three hours of our conference I must have inhaled passively the equivalent of a carton of cigarettes. My eyes ran, my nose ran and my throat ached. Over the following years I was to find myself similarly entrapped at meetings with chain-smoking Japanese businessmen, both in Japan and Australia. I cherish the friendship with my Japanese associates, but I just wish they would not all chain-smoke in confined areas!

But I digress. The eight executives represented the eight departments of the organisation. They included finance, export, manufacturing, design, marketing, technical service support, etc. Armed with our mandatory cups of green tea, they all listened intently as I outlined the structure of my

Rydalmere based company and its aspirations for the future.

They asked polite but searching questions and scribbled copious notes in corporate jotters of my responses. They spoke fluent but accented English.

Occasionally, in response to one of my questions, they would excuse themselves and conduct an animated conversation in Japanese, at the end of which, the appropriate departmental manager would again apologise for deviating from English and provide the answer to my question.

One interesting aspect of the Shinto business psychology took me some months to fully comprehend. In Japan, if a negotiation between a Westerner and a

Japanese becomes heated, accompanied by some table thumping, the Japanese negotiator will appear to give ground and concede to the other's demands.

He does this as a polite gesture to his Western guest. He would lose face in front of his peers if he continued to argue aggressively with his opponent. At a later date however, the Westerner may be shocked to find that the Japanese company has reversed what he understood to be a firm undertaking. A face saving explanation for all concerned is provided by the Japanese by stating that "There must have been some misunderstanding".

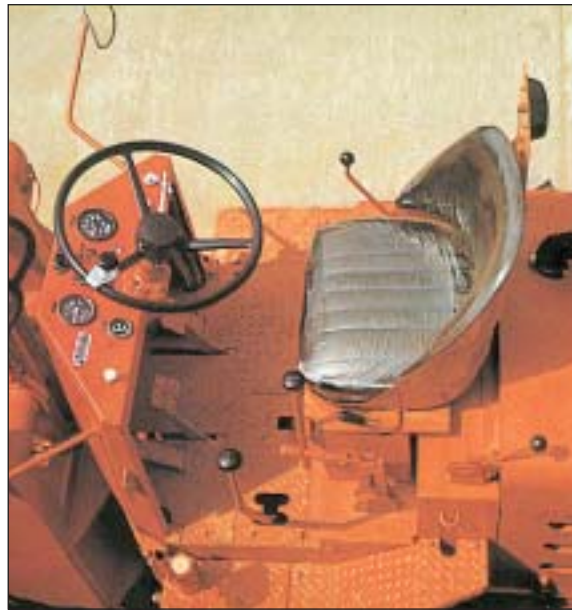
Therefore the message, seldom completely understood by Western negotiators is — don't push an issue to the point of being ungracious or discourteous.

Late in the afternoon, following the consumption of untold cups of scalding green tea, I was returned to the sumptuousness of the New Otani Hotel. The successful culmination of the lengthy discussions was contained within my briefcase. It was a document of agreement, which was the prelude to a warm and profitable relationship with Furukawa and its range of innovative and well engineered earthmoving equipment.

However it was now time to experience and savour the very best of Japanese corporate hospitality!

### THE GINZA

The Furukawa Divisional Senior Manager, with whom I had developed a cordial friendship, called for me at 7 pm in his limo. We were whisked through the labyrinth of the narrow streets of the Ginza Prefecture. Gaudy



Pictured is the easy access uncluttered control centre of the FI 70. Some of the units sold in Australia were equipped with either canvas sun-canopies or fully lock-up cabins. (Photo courtesy Furukawa)



An FL 70 being put through its paces in outer Sydney by operator Chris Wight of Wycarp Pty. Ltd. A two wheel drive conventional rig could not have handled these steep wet conditions. (Photo I.M.J.)



The Furukawa FH2A was also imported into Australia and indeed was the first lightweight hydraulic excavator seen in this country. The unit pictured was purchased by Reg Lee Excavations and proved to be the most reliable item of earthmoving equipment in his extensive fleet. (Photo I.M.J.)

neon lights illuminated the bars, cafes and restaurants which were everywhere.

But there was none of the sordid Oriental squalidness one sees in the back streets of Bangkok or Hong Kong. The incapacious footpaths were packed with mainly youngish professional men and women attired in immaculately tailored clothing, obviously heading to or from one of the establishments.

The long black car pulled up in a lane which could barely accommodate its width.

We passed through a small door leading directly off the footpath and were confronted by a tiny elevator, into which we entered. My colleague pressed a button and uttered some brief words into a screened microphone.

Immediately, the elevator glided gently aloft before coming to a smooth stop. A door at the rear slid silently open.

There before us were three impossibly beautiful sloe-eyed girls attired in fluffy white bunny suits, lined up in the tradition-

al Japanese deep bowing position of welcome. I was exceedingly privileged to have been admitted into the sanctum of one of Tokyo's most exclusive Ginza clubs.

I was to learn later that no individual could afford to be a member. This was strictly a corporate executive retreat for which his company would foot the bill. One nip of Johnny Walker Black Label would set the company back the equivalent of 100 Oz dollars!

We were escorted to a low table. I was getting the knack of reclining instead of sitting. After a while we were joined by two young ladies, elegantly dressed in classic kimono attire. They engaged us in light hearted chatter sprinkled with many compliments, whilst endless plates of Japanese delicacies were washed down with that curiously alluring warm Saki.

In the background was an unusually rotund Japanese piano player, who introduced his numbers with a hoarse New York taxi driver accent. His intricate silky smooth Errol Gardner chords were hypnotic in their brilliance. We paused in our chatter and listened enthralled.

Warning signals started sounding in my surprisingly still alert brain. Was I possibly putting myself into a compromising situation? So I introduced into the conversation details of my wife and two schoolboy sons. The girls were genuinely interested and asked me questions about my home in St Ives.

## IAN'S MYSTERY QUIZ

**QUESTION:** This is the engine of which well known of Italian tractor ?

**CLUE:** It dates back to the 1940s and has no resemblance to its modern high tech. counterparts, which are sold widely in Australia.

**DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** This is a real humdinger!

**ANSWER:** See page 78.



As it turned out, there was absolutely no threat to my marriage fidelity.

These girls were extremely highly paid university graduates, capable of intelligent conversation on any subject ranging from nuclear physics to Formula One racing. Each could speak a minimum of four languages and their presence was purely to create a pleasant intellectual atmosphere for relaxing executives. Put simply — these girls were definitely NOT 'available' and any improper suggestions on my behalf would have resulted in a polite but firm request to leave.

I am however well aware that unlike the morally faultless Furukawa Group, there exist a few less ethical organisations, who are known to lure Saki befuddled visiting businessmen into sexually compromising situations. This can provide a psychological advantage to the host during future hard-line negotiations.

### THE NEXT DAY

The next morning I was taken to the Furukawa Construction Machinery manufacturing plant. Following the obligatory green tea I was able to inspect the lines of orange coloured loaders, dozers, backhoes and excavators being assembled, many for export.

I was greatly impressed by the degree of quality control but had a negative comment to make about some of the paint-work. My more-or-less off-hand remark created a furore, resulting in a hastily convened round-table conference, which included a chastened paint control overseer. I had no idea that my minor criticism would receive such attention. But this was Japan — and I was learning!

In the afternoon I was provided with a tour of inspection of the Isuzu factory at Fujisawa, from which Furukawa sourced its engines. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that each engine destined for a Furukawa machine was bench tested for one hour by Isuzu technicians, prior to its delivery.

### THE CONCLUSION

There is little else to tell. Arrangements were made with the giant trading company Kanamatsu-Gosho Ltd. to ship the consignments to Australia, thus relieving my company of the minefield of export/import documents, customs clearances, foreign currency exchange and so forth.

The Furukawa FL70 Loader/Backhoe was well received in Australia and my Rydalmere based company considerably

exceeded its anticipated first 12 month's targeted sales. One Commonwealth Department placed an order for 15 units and we placed 30 units into Western Australia alone. But not surprisingly our main market was in New South Wales.

Today, Furukawa large capacity 4WD loaders are among the sales leaders in Australia and indeed world wide.

Such was my enchantment with this colourful gentle land that I returned a few months later with my wife and, following some brief business meetings, spent a glorious two weeks exploring the length and breadth of the main island Honshu, plus discovering the delights of the southern island of Shikoku.

Over the years my enthusiasm for green tea has not waned, nor has my taste for sashimi and tempura! I rate Japan as one of the most hassle-free nations to visit. It is pristinely clean, the people are friendly and welcoming, and travel within the country is efficient and easy. Once clear of the cities, the countryside is quaint and unique, often back-dropped by devastatingly spectacular scenery.

## THE RILEY RE-VISITED

Those who read my article about the Riley Roadster, which appeared in *The Australian Cottongrower* earlier this year, may be interest to learn that as a result of the story and a fair bit of detective work, the car is now back in the ownership of the family which purchased it in 1949.

Darling Downs grain and cotton growers Rob and Beth Carter read the article and recognised the car. They successfully convinced me that the correct domicile for such a classic old roadster is back with their family. I asked myself how I would feel if I was able to obtain a car originally purchased by MY parents. So now the Riley has returned to the fold, having completed a full circle of owners.



Pictured is an early 1950s photo of the Riley when it was first purchased by the Carter family. It can be seen that the original colour was red, although it is now cream as illustrated in the February–March 2004 edition of *Australian Cottongrower*.