

“ Plough and Be Counted 2 ”

By Ian M. Johnston, the Tractor Historian



THE CHALLENGE

All roads led to Cootamundra, during the 2004 Easter weekend, and along these highways and bye-ways travelled never ending convoys of every conceivable type of trailer and truck, all loaded to the hilt with a colourful array of ancient tractors. An old-timer gaping at the continuing procession as it wound its way through his town or village, could have been forgiven for thinking he was witnessing the rebirth of Wirth's Circus.

If fact, the occasion to which the old tractors were heading was *Plough and Be Counted 2*, the attempt to regain for Australia the Guinness World Record for the greatest number of tractors ploughing in the one paddock simultaneously.

We Aussie tractorsmen (and women) felt fairly smug, when in 2001 we captured the record from the South Africans, by mustering 298 tractors in a paddock at Yass. Such a performance, we felt, could never be bettered. How wrong we were!

The following year South Africa well and truly wiped the smile off our collective faces when it retook the record with an amazing 730 tractors. Wow — **that** would take some beating!

A mere four months later, the land of the shamrock and foaming black Guinness stunned us all by amassing 1,832 tractors — thus easily snatching the record from the South Africans. An astonishing number of tractors indeed, but it was also incredible that Ireland could find a paddock



An International Titan being made ready for the challenge. Note the front mounted self steer device and also the exposed final drive sprocket and chain. (Photo I.M.J.)

sufficiently large! And believe it or not nearly half of these tractors were grey Fergies!

So the stiff upper lip Brits had an obvious obligation to put these wild Irishmen in their place. They would show the world how it should be done, by jove.

In August 2003 tractors started pouring in to the Hullavington Air Base in Wiltshire. Despite Union Jacks flying from the mastheads of noblemen's castles throughout the realm, summoning tractor drivers from every corner of the Sceptre Isle, only 771 tractors arrived on the scene. Mind you, 771 is not a bad effort, but a long way short of the record set by the Irish. Perhaps the difference was,

the Irish tractorsmen were each promised a free glass of Guinness?

It seemed therefore that it was up to us in the Land of Oz to set a definitive record that would stand the test of time. Vic Muscat and Brian Sainsbury took the initiative to repeat their fine efforts at Yass by organising our second challenge — this time against Ireland — and naming it “*Plough and Be Counted 2*”. George W. Bush would have been proud of us — we had declared war upon Ireland (in a friendly amicable way of course!)

EASTER FRIDAY

I arrived at the Cootamundra site late Friday to a scene of utter chaos. Tractors of all descriptions, as far as the eye could see were being off-loaded, parked, driven around, fixed, polished, cursed, fuelled or simply abandoned. The truck parking area resembled a giant Californian used truck lot. In the camping area folks were setting up, cooking, complaining, congratulating, but most of all — yarning!

The official registration tent was staffed by a squad of overworked, overstressed and greatly harassed ladies, each of whom should be awarded Australian of the Year in recognition of their dedication, patience and good cheer. Somehow they dealt with an endless queue of tractor drivers, anxious to register and be told where to go (politely no doubt). A pretty lady in red with a charming smile but the stoicism of a New York cop, insured that each tractor was



The tractor pull competition, held on the Saturday, provided fascinating entertainment for the spectators. Pictured is a petrol/kero Fordson E27N, driven by an obviously experienced operator who knew how to coax his old tractor into a commanding position in its class. Interestingly, a souped-up snarling hot-rod, which pretended to be an Allis Chalmers but in fact resembled a cross between a dragster and a pensioned off rickshaw, failed to move the sled off the mark. (Photo I.M.J.)

registered prior to entering the sacred four kilometre circumference arena.

In the centre of all this mayhem were the two masochists responsible for the whole affair. Vic Muscat, weighted down with a forest of walkie talkies and mobile phones — all seemingly in use and demanding his attention, while at the same time throngs of agitated tractor drivers barged him with shouted questions. His compatriot Brian Sainsbury scooted from place to place upon his overworked quad-drive in an endeavour to create some semblance of order.

My assignment was simple. I had been entrusted with providing a running commentary of the tractor pull competition on the Saturday and the main event on the Sunday. A scary looking cherry picker was provided specifically for me, guaranteeing to inject a nervous tremor into my Fife accent. *I don't like heights!* My microphone was connected to a battery of amplifiers aimed at the anticipated legions of paying spectators.

SATURDAY

By Saturday morning around 1,000 tractors had been admitted into the arena by the Red Lady. Trucks continued pouring into the unloading area at the rate of one a



Although the estimates vary, approximately 300 Fergusons lined up for the record attempt. The photo shows a portion of the Ferguson parking area, with a few Massey Fergusons thrown in for good measure. (Photo I.M.J.)

minute. Spectators also arrived in droves, even though the challenge would not take place until the following day.

The vintage tractor pull competition commenced around 10.30 am. There were two sleds and the crowd watched in fascination as thumping Field Marshalls and Bulldogs competed against roaring GM powered Chamberlains and purring Internationals. I did my best to provide an informative account of the proceedings.

It is perhaps as well that the operators of the three screaming super modified feral

tractors were unable to hear my somewhat caustic comments aimed at these ear shattering monsters, which were utterly destroying the ambience of the morning. I confess to joining the crowd in applauding when one particularly obnoxious machine failed to move the sled from its base.

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday dawned full of expectation. Yet another glorious sunny day. Glorious unless you were one of the local farmers



A rare sight indeed in Australia. Two Waterloo Boy tractors (circa 1919) awaiting the starting signal. The proud owners are (left) cotton grower Ian Toop from Wee Waa and vigneron David Mansur from Mudgee. (Photo I.M.J.)



They're off! 1,897 tractors responded to the flashing lights of the starting vehicles. A certain female pedestrian looks somewhat confused as she checks her street directory. "Is this really the main street of Cootamundra?" (Photo I.M.J.)

◀ 69...CLASSIC TRACTORS

praying for rain to break the drought. The arena now contained around 1,500 tractors.

But to take the record from the Irish we required 1,833. By noon we were still short of about 200 contenders. It was unthinkable that having come this far we Australians would fail in our challenge.

At 1.30 pm, from my perch aloft in the cherry picker, I appealed to the dense throng of spectators for any of the many farmers present, who had tractors in their sheds, to dash home and bring them to the site. There were hundreds of unloaded trucks available for the transportation. I

announced that the start had been delayed in order to facilitate the hoped arrival of these desperately needed tractors.

A Toyota pick-up was used to shuttle willing volunteer farmers to the truck parking area. I am certain a world record was achieved for the greatest number of farmers ever crammed into the rear of a Toyota

The situation was tense. Was it going to be a case of so near but yet so far? By two pm a steady stream of returning laden trucks could be seen speeding to the unloading area.

Around three pm a tractor drivers' briefing was called. A count was taken and I was able to announce to the anxious crowd that finally we had the numbers, but only

just, and what if there were some breakdowns or non-starters?

At 3.15 pm the drivers emerged from their briefing and like an army of ants strode purposefully as they fanned out across the paddock heading for their awaiting tractors.

I had previously advised the anticipating spectators to start shooting off film the moment the tractors started to move, as dust would soon obliterate the far extremities of the field. But no one was more surprised than me by the amount of dust created by the tractor drivers en-route to their machines, and not an engine had yet been started!

Ron Keech, with whom I shared the



In Australia the German firm of Stihl is noted for its range of chain saws and few are aware of its early involvement with tractors. This ultra rare 1954 Stihl tractor, with its single cylinder 763 cc air cooled 14 hp engine, has been imported by classic tractor collector Howard Pryor (Photo I.M.J.)



This technically fascinating Emerson Brantingham Big 4-20 was brought all the way from South Africa. It is one of three tractors shipped to Cootamundra by Sandstone Estates, who operate a 10,000 hectare state-of-the-art arable farm in the Eastern Free State. Wilfred Mole, a director of the company, accompanied the tractors with a team of operators. He was responsible for initiating the Guinness World Record Attempt in 1999. The Big 4-20 was added to the Big 4 line-up in 1913 and features a 4 cylinder engine with a 5 x 7 inch bore and stroke capable of producing 20 drawbar hp. (Photo I.M.J.)

cherry picker, was in radio contact with the control centre. He kept receiving changing and confusing figures to pass on to me for relaying to the crowd. These figures did however confirm that the necessary 1,833 tractors needed to defeat the Irish, had been surpassed.

Ron is no lightweight and occasionally he would move to the other side of the cherry picker platform, causing our precarious elevated view-point to sway alarmingly. I hoped that somebody had checked the hydraulic lines plus all the nuts and bolts. As mentioned, I have a poor head for heights.

Success

Shortly before four pm the flashing lights of the attending rescue trucks signalled the commencement of the challenge. The ground shook, the thunder from the multitude of exhaust pipes shattered the quiet rural tranquillity, and a dense column of red dust dimmed the sun.

The sound could be clearly heard back at Cootamundra, five kilometres away. The packed crowd of spectators clapped and cheered and some even danced. Cameras clicked, whirred and flashed. Grins extended ear to ear on the countenances of the tractor drivers, many of whom also waved and cheered.

Everyone present was privileged to experience a once in a lifetime staggering occurrence. The word came through that a **record breaking 1897 tractors** successfully traversed the paddock simultaneously pulling an assortment of soil engaging implements.

We Aussies had done it! The nation now owes a debt of gratitude to the organisers Vic Muscat and Brian Sainsbury, the Mayor of Cootamundra Paul Braybrooks and his team, Mr R White who kindly made the land available and of course the tractor drivers and importantly all those dedicated folks behind the scenes who made it all possible.

Tailpiece

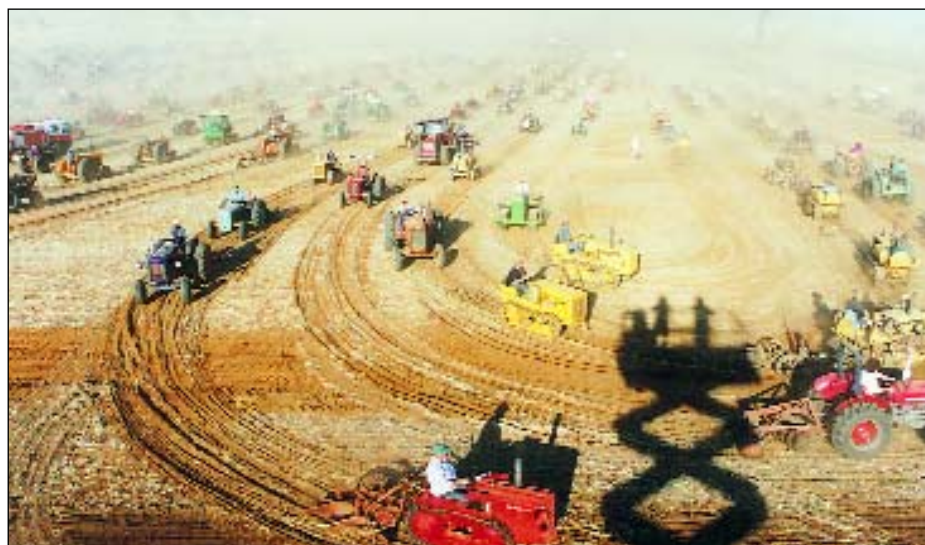
I was certainly pleased to have played a small part in such a massive undertaking, and it was just great meeting-up with so many long-standing tractor collector acquaintances. The support from the local and also national media was even greater than expected. Apparently even the London Times carried the story on its front page.

All profits over expenditure were allocated to a number of worthy local charities. This added significantly to the pleasing results of the challenge.

So a great historic occasion, a great buzz and a great Australian achievement!



Allan Harris is ecstatic. And so he should be, having shipped his Caterpillar 2 Ton to South Africa, Ireland, England and now back to Australia, and competing with it in each of the record attempts. A big round of applause for Allan, I think. (Photo I.M.J.)



Once started, the tractors wouldn't stop! The shadow of my "lofty perch" indicates the lateness of the day. In the foreground is a 1940s Bristol crawler. These interesting British lightweights were powered by an Austin A70 petrol engine. (Photo I.M.J.)

IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR

QUESTION: This tractor belongs to prominent Western Australian tractor collector Jesse Martin. The crank handle cannot be engaged if the engine is stopped, unless the front wheels are pointing straight ahead! Can you identify the tractor?

CLUE: The tractor is the British cousin of (what was) a well known American brand.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: If you know how to operate a cat's whisker radio then the answer will be a breeze.

ANSWER: Page 80.

