

Tractor treasures

By Ian M. Johnston



Motor car museums have been around for years. Following the end of World War II and the easing of petrol rationing, I can well remember my father on many a weekend bundling the family into the Flying Standard Twelve and heading out into the Scottish countryside to visit yet another car museum.

I had inherited my father's profound fascination with all things mechanical and eagerly looked forward to these weekend explorations. Our interest also embraced vintage aircraft, omnibuses, trams and motor cycles. Within a day's drive from Edinburgh there were umpteen museums which catered for these varying modes of transportation.

Significantly however there was a total lack of tractor and farm machinery museums. In retrospect this is surprising, considering the fact that Scotland had spawned numerous innovative manufacturers of tillage, harvesting and grain threshing equipment and indeed its own indigenous tractor — the Glasgow. Even in the 1940s, these machines would have been classified as old.

As a schoolboy growing up in a farming community my ultimate passion was tractors. (To the annoyance of my form master, I was frequently detected studying



"Plough and Be Counted — 2" was a successful attempt by Australian vintage tractor enthusiasts to reclaim the world record for the greatest number of tractors ploughing at the one time in the one paddock. The event was held at Cootamundra, NSW in 2004, when a staggering 1897 tractors simultaneously commenced ploughing and created a cloud of dust that eventually blotted out the sun. The photo shows only a small fraction of the total number of tractors. (Photo IMJ)

tractor brochures at a time when I should have been swatting up on Latin verbs.) Therefore I was puzzled and disappointed that there was nowhere we could go to inspect a collection of old farm tractors.

The same situation existed in Australia when I arrived here in early the 1950s. I discovered that my new country had a rich history of celebrated farm machinery designers plus a range of home-grown brands



BEFORE and AFTER: Restoring a tractor can be an enjoyable challenge. The term "restore" literally means returning it to original condition, and can be a major engineering accomplishment. The author hesitatingly decided to proceed with the daunting task of restoring this 1935 Marshall 12-20, only on account of the tractor's rarity and its historical significance. A mere 212 of this model were produced at the Lincolnshire factory. The 12-20 was the forerunner of the post war Field Marshall tractors and was powered by a single cylinder valveless two stroke full compression diesel engine. Simply everything in the tractor was seized and rusted. But the end result was extremely gratifying and it has now been assessed as possibly the finest example remaining in the world. It is currently preserved for posterity in a tractor museum located near Macksville, NSW. (Phone 02 6569 3190).

of tractors, including McDonald, Sunshine, Caldwell Vale and Ronaldson Tippet. It appears, at that time farming folk were too busy to concern themselves with the preservation of their heritage icons and city people were simply not interested.

It was not until the 1980s that Australia (and the rest of the world) discovered the magic and character of early tractors. Historians realised that they had overlooked the important roll these old clattering machines had played in the development of nations.

Almost overnight, rural museums sprang up, tractor clubs were established and intense individuals from a diversity of backgrounds could be observed combing the countryside for ancient and abandoned tractors.

For a few years these rusting pieces of ironmongery were relatively easy to locate. One had only to ferret around a farm dump or check the nature of a derelict under a peppercorn tree. Inquiries at farm homesteads would likely result in clues that would yield positive results. Having unearthed a suitable acquisition, very often the offer of a carton of ale or at the most a few dollars would clinch the deal.

By the early 1990s, the combination of a rapidly growing number of tractor enthusiasts and the diminishing number of yet undiscovered relics, saw prices escalating. By the year 2000, a tractor that five or six years previously could have been purchased for a hundred or so dollars, might well require a bid of some thousands to acquire.

Today, there are tens of thousands of old tractors in the hands of collectors



Ferguson tractors are among the most collectable of all old tractors. Parts are plentiful and they are easy to transport in a trailer behind the family car. Photo taken at Lake Goldsmith, Victoria in 2000. (Photo IMJ)

throughout Australia. The same is true in New Zealand, North America, South Africa, Britain and the rest of Europe. Each rural community in Australia has its own vintage tractor and machinery club, with a combined membership running into thousands of like-minded dedicated preservers of our farming heritage.

Select brands of old tractors have particular appeal to collectors. Notable among these are any model of John Deere and Lanz Bulldog, both of which now command premium prices. In general, the older the tractor the more it is valued. Also odd-ball tractors that did not sell in any

quantity, perhaps because of their technical and/or performance inadequacies, are very keenly sought.

Some of the more rare tractors change hands for as much as \$30,000. Even the more common tractors that five years ago would have been considered by many collectors as very "ordinary", and here I include Fordsons and Fergusons, are escalating. Be prepared to pay at least \$3,000 for a tidy grey Ferguson. While a restored Half Track Fordson Major, of around 1950 vintage, is now worth \$10,000 and rising.

It follows that as the years roll on and tractors automatically become older, they become more rare. Each morning, when a collector awakes from his slumbers, his collection has increased in value. Therefore some collectors look upon their tractors as investments for the future. A nest egg for retirement perhaps.

Each weekend tractor rallies are held throughout the more populated rural areas of our country. Hordes of enthusiasts flock to these events, either as exhibitors or spectators.

Up until a few years ago it was customary for the exhibits at rallies to be parked on static display. But today, tractor owners are encouraged to enter their machines into competitive games and competitions, in order to entertain themselves and the paying public. These include tractor pulls, tractor balancing, blindfold navigating, grand parades, etc. It is indeed a memo-

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This mammoth truck was hooked up to a 1950 Lanz Bulldog single cylinder crude-oil burning 45 hp tractor owned by Bill Galea, in a tug-of-war contest. The event took place near Richmond, NSW, with the tractor remarkably out-pulling the truck. (Photo courtesy Colin Galbraith)

rable experience to see and hear these old machines gallivanting around the arena.

Many of the tractors on display have been painstakingly restored and are resplendent in their newly painted livery. Others are in their original working clothes and look as if they have come directly from the paddock. Either way, they have their individual appeal.

The important issue here is that these tractors have been retrieved from their places of abandonment and are now in the caring hands of dedicated enthusiasts. They are preserved for posterity. Future generations will be able to experience their individual sounds and idiosyncrasies. They will be able to marvel at the variety of designs and often extraordinary technology.

Not surprisingly, many farmers have caught the collecting bug. I know of several who have obtained great satisfaction from lovingly restoring an aged tractor that was originally purchased by a now deceased relative. They will display their family artefact at a rally, with a sense of pride and warm nostalgia.

I know of other farmers who are perhaps experiencing a slight sense of guilt. They are mindful that there is an old tractor parked at the back of their shed, where it has sat for a forgotten number of years. They know there is little chance of ever resurrecting it, despite earlier intentions, and are not quite sure what to do about the situation.

My urgent recommendation is to act now, before the unit becomes a complete basket case. Advertise the old tractor in the classifieds of a rural newspaper under the heading of "Vintage Tractor". Have

IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

QUESTION: Can you identify the tractor from this photo of its bonnet and engine?

CLUE: The diesel engine has two vertical cylinders.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Too hard for most I'm afraid. It will take a real vintage tractor connoisseur to provide the correct answer.

ANSWER: See page 64.



no worries. There are legions of collectors who diligently peruse these journals in the hope of coming across a "find".

Remember if the old tractor is in bad shape, the cost to a buyer of recovering it can be greater than its worth. In other words — don't be unrealistic with its price. But if the tractor is complete, straight and a goer, don't hesitate to insist upon a reasonable figure.

So what is a reasonable figure? After all, in this epistle I have banded around prices ranging from a carton of ale to \$30,000.

In this regard I would gladly assist any of our readers with a valuation. But please contact me by fax only and only if you genuinely require a valuation. Just supply an honest detailed description of the unit and a return fax number. My fax is 02 6553 6253. Please do not endeavour to contact me by telephone or email.

Even if you do not own an old tractor but would like to become involved with the vintage tractor fraternity and maybe intend acquiring a machine later on, I suggest you research the location of your nearest tractor

club and consider becoming a member. I can guarantee you will meet some fine people. I have discovered that anyone who has an interest in old tractors, is a beaut person.

If you intend purchasing a tractor you should give consideration to how you will transport it. It is self evident that a tractor weighing two to three tonnes, such as a Fordson Major, will require a light truck to cart it around. A heavy tractor, such as a Chamberlain Super 90 which if ballasted will turn the scales at around six tonnes, will require a fair lump of a truck. But if your transport is limited to a Falcon ute plus a trailer, then I suggest a Fergy, an Allis Chalmers B, a Farmall A or one of those fascinating lightweight Lanz Bull-dogs, could be the way to go.

In conclusion there are two important points to consider.

If you own or know of an old tractor rotting away, please do your best to have it transferred into the hands of a caring enthusiast.

If you wish to become involved in a rewarding interest, join a tractor club. 🗺️



Trailer loads of vintage tractors arrived at Kukerin, WA, for a special 1999 End of the Century Rally. (Photo IMJ)



Eric Howe uses this old Volvo truck to cart his tractors to rallies in Tasmania. On board is a super rare Glasgow, followed by a Farmall F12 and an International WD9. (Photo courtesy E. Howe)