



I let off steam and you can too

By Ian M. Johnston

FRUSTRATIONS

It seems that almost each night on the TV news, we are subjected to the spectacle of protesters marching through city streets waving banners and shouting incomprehensible slogans. Long suffering overtaxed and over regulated motorists have to endure the added indignity of being grid locked whilst these scruffy looking individuals perversely do their thing.

But you know something? I am just starting to have some sympathy for these unwashed zealots. You see, I too feel like protesting! No, not about some of the (usually) wacky concerns that drive these guys to such degrees of fanaticism. But I am becoming increasingly disenchanted with the rate of escalation of bureaucratic red tape.

The late Kerry Francis Bullmore Packer pointed out that each individual item of legislation that is passed by Federal and State Parliaments means yet another rule to which we citizens must comply. Each year the number of new laws legislated runs into the hundreds. In other words, the Big Brother Factor just keeps growing!

We can all cite examples of ludicrous regulations, dreamt up by seemingly brain-dead civil servants whose soul objective in life is to flaunt their domination over we mere mortals. Traffic regulations drafted by ministers, who are driven around in the back seat of government limousines, seldom beyond the outer suburbs. Agricultural land clearing rules politically influenced by rabid Greens. Petty but costly Local Government requirements, guaranteed to drive a decent man to drink!



New Zealand rallies are more relaxed affairs than the Australian events. At this South Island Expo there were several hundred tractors and not a barrier in site. Spectators were free to wander around the tractors for a close up look. (Photo IMJ)

So what has all this got to do with old tractors, the subject matter for which I am press-ganged into writing by the management of this praiseworthy and prestigious publication who, I might add, have never during our 15 year association insisted upon any ground rules whatsoever (bless 'em)? Permit me to explain.

I may be forgiven for assuming that it is well known that, following a life-long connection with farms and farm tractors, I now vigorously promote the preservation of vintage tractors through the medium of my books, magazine articles, plus my support of vintage tractor rallies and my membership of four tractor clubs.

For over a decade I have travelled afar researching the history of farm tractors.

Up until a few years ago all doors were open to me. But sadly in recent times, whilst engaged in this innocent but important pursuit of knowledge, I am continually encountering totally unnecessary and ill-considered restrictions.

Following a visit to a world renown transport museum in America, specifically to obtain information and take photographs which could be later shared with enthusiasts in Australia, I received a registered letter on my return home. It contained a threatening document stating in legalistic terms that if I published my own photos taken at the museum, without first submitting them for approval, along with a substantial payment just to cover the cost of their scrutiny, I would be subjected to



The Brits also are not paranoid about fencing off their tractors, as this photo of a Hampshire rally indicates. (Photo IMJ)



At this Australian event, spectators were not permitted closer than 50 metres from this fine display of Fergusons. (Photo IMJ)



I exhibited these four tractors at a recent agricultural show. Regulations dictated that I "secure" them behind a fence, thus effectively preventing interested spectators from walking around the tractors for a detailed inspection. (Photo IMJ)



The Great Timbertown Vintage Tractor Show will not be the first tractor rally staged at Timbertown. The photo shows a street parade held there in the mid 1990s. (Photo IMJ)

the full wrath of their (no doubt) high powered corporate lawyers.

While I am fully conversant with the commercial realities of protecting copyright etc, this heavy handed approach was clumsy and ill-considered. My inbred Scottish instincts dictated that I certainly would not pay anyone to inspect my photos.

Accordingly I was prevented from sharing the research obtained at that establishment with my fellow Australian tractor enthusiasts. Additionally, the museum missed out on the promotional flow-on that would have resulted from my writings.

On the same US trip, I visited by invi-

tation one of the world's largest tractor manufacturer's headquarters, where I was welcomed royally and offered unrestricted access to the Company Archives. No restrictions were placed upon my free usage of information and graphics obtained. But in the intervening period, that company now has in place costs and conditions relating to any publication of the brand name!

IN AUSTRALIA

Here in Australia, I am cordially welcomed by museum committees and indeed encouraged to visit and inspect their col-

lections. It is considered by them free publicity if I include information about their artefacts in my writings.

Therefore my grievance in Australia is not with museums, but with the increasing tedious and unnecessary restrictions enforced at many (but not all) vintage tractor rallies.

I freely confess, that in the past I have been critical of insurance companies for foisting unreasonable restraints upon tractor clubs during the performance of rallies. But it is now becoming clear, that in many instances, it is the club committee's over

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This zany tractor game at Timbertown is a competition that involves cranking the tractor into life and then racing to the line. (Photo IMJ)

<55...CLASSIC TRACTORS

zealous interpretation of the fine print in the policy that is the cause of my frustrations, which are shared by a large percentage of the vintage tractor fraternity.

A common practice is for tractor and machinery clubs to associate with a specific organisation which serves as a regulatory or national body. It has no legal control over its member clubs, but lays down guidelines for rally procedures. It also has negotiated insurance coverage, in which associated clubs may choose to participate. The theory being, that by so doing, clubs will obtain less expensive insurance than if they organised their own individual club coverage.

Some clubs dispute any such financial advantage and have arranged their own insurance coverage, which they claim is less restrictive than that offered by the national body.

Certainly if practiced to the letter, the national body insurance conditions, in my opinion, take the fun and motivation out of rallies. This is unquestionably a contributing factor to the drop in attendance at some of the club rallies that adopt the national body rulings.

The ridiculous restricting conditions include:

- Tractors on display must be behind security fencing. This effectively prevents interested spectators from having a close up look at the tractors. And let's face it — how dangerous is a parked tractor?
- Tractors being moved into or out from the secured compound must only be driven at walking pace and have a person walking ahead to alert spectators to the perceived danger. Just plain stupid! Britain abandoned this practice on public roads over a century ago.

- Only licensed drivers are permitted to move tractors. We "mature" enthusiasts are very aware of the necessity of encouraging youngsters to participate in the preservation of old tractors. Many young teenagers, especially those reared on farms, are more competent with their tractors than some adults — and we are talking tractors here, not souped up V8 hotrods!

SO, WHAT AM I DOING ABOUT IT ?

I have gathered together an influential band of classic tractor enthusiasts who share my philosophy of "freedom from red tape". We have joined forces to create an informal group, calling ourselves "The Friends of Rusty Old Tractors".

We are not a club. We have no president, secretary, treasurer or committee. We are not incorporated. We have no funds, therefore no expenditure. There are no rules, therefore none to break. But what we do have is our passion for our grand old tractors and a determination to have fun, free from the frustrations of petty regulations.

On Saturday 9 and Sunday 10 June we are going to hold our first tractor rally at that marvellous heritage gem — Timbertown. But it will be a rally with a difference! Our tractors won't be incarcerated behind fences or barriers. On the contrary, the public will be encouraged to wander amongst our machines and yarn to their proud owners.

The only fence will be around a small area, within which those who wish will engage their tractors in occasional zany games, guaranteed to generate laughter from the spectators. But there definitely will be no trophy or awards. I have seen all too often how the comparing of these

can create envy and resentment. We want none of that!

Should any of us have an urge to take our tractor for a wee drive, then he or she is free at anytime to take it for a meander around the town or along the bush trails.

Timbertown is located on the outskirts of Wauchope, on the Mid North Coast of NSW. It is an authentically re-created early 20th Century village and includes all the activities you would have expected to see in a rural setting a century ago. Yes, even a fully operational steam driven timber mill, a bullock team, a steam locomotive with its carriages, a smithy, sheds crammed with vintage steam and oil engines, plus an old pub and a tea house. Then there is the steam roller. And everything is operational!

YOU ARE INVITED

I am confident this rally will prove to be a winner. The support that is flowing in is most gratifying and an indication that folks are responding to our "back to basics" philosophy.

All country folk (and in particular farmers) are interested in tractors. Therefore all readers of this magazine are warmly invited to come to Timbertown and join in the fun.

Yes, I am aware that for most farmers the tyranny of distance and the timing will render it nigh impossible. But I also know that many rural families head for the coast during school holidays. June 9 and 10 fall during the NSW school break.

So I shall keep my fingers crossed that The Bush will come to The Coast to enjoy the fun at The Great Timbertown Vintage Tractor Show.

Please don't forget to tap me on the shoulder and say "Hello".

IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR

QUESTION: Can you identify this strange looking tractor?

CLUE: It was never a threat to the Ferguson.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Easy if you are into lemons.

ANSWER: Page 64.

