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**9 HP GAS MOTOR POWERED
SHOP-BUILT ANIMAL**

Mechanical Horse “Wowed” Parade-Goers In The 1950’s

People who visit the Saskatchewan Western Development Museum in Moose Jaw can see “the only horse in the world that you have to choke to start.”

Although his galloping days are over and he’s been put out to pasture, a mechanical horse named “Blowtorch” still attracts a lot of attention,” according to Ruth Bitner, collections curator at the museum.

The life-sized mechanical horse was hand-shaped from sheet metal by the late inventor W.J. McIntyre of Swift Current. It was the last of three such horses he made between 1947 and 1952. Weighing 600 lbs., Blowtorch was equipped with a 9 hp gas engine, concealed inside his belly. Riders used a foot throttle located inside one stirrup and a break cable incorporated into the reins to control the beast which could travel up to 12 km/h on small wheels located under the hooves. Its legs were hinged, and moved back and forth to simulate natural motion. McIntyre used real horse hair for the main and tail, and a levered seat that moved up and down to mimic the motion of a live horse.

According to the Western Development Museum, “Blowtorch” delighted thousands of Canadian parade-goers in the 1950’s and even captured the interest of Walt Disney.

“At the height of its popularity, Blowtorch was mentioned in an edition of Ripley’s Believe It or Not, and McIntyre received a letter from Walt Disney inquiring about his invention,” Grosse says. “A decade later, Blowtorch sat forgotten in a leaky shed behind McIntyre’s shop. Mr. McIntyre died in 1965 and two years passed before Allan Jacobs, a welder at McIntyre’s manufacturing business, spotted Blowtorch’s rusted body.”

Because it had been exposed to rain and snow, all the bearings had seized. McIntyre’s son, Jim, suggested he and Jacobs restore

Blowtorch and ride it in the 1968 Swift Current parade. Jacobs rode the horse on a \$20 dare from McIntyre, and the outcome was an entertaining surprise for everyone.

“Blowtorch was rolling along at full throttle until its tiny wheels got caught in an expansion joint on an overpass along the parade route. The rear wheels locked and the horse shot forward, as if trying to buck its rider,” relates Noelle Grosse at the museum. “It was more than the poor horsey could take,” according to Jacobs. “Rivets broke and Blowtorch’s head tumbled to the pavement. Jacobs held Blowtorch’s head in place with the bridle, but disaster struck again when he crossed the overpass and turned a corner.”

At this point, the right leg bolt suddenly snapped, tipping over horse and rider. It was still running, so Jacobs, who was dressed like a cowboy, got up and pulled out a toy gun and shot the horse.

Parade watchers roared with laughter, proving that even a frail Blowtorch was still a hit with the crowd, Grosse says.

Blowtorch was donated to the Saskatchewan Western Development Museum by Jim McIntyre in 1979. Since then, Blowtorch has called Moose Jaw home, with his own stall in the livery stable of the museum branch where “transportation” is the theme.

“It may be retired from the parade circuit, but Blowtorch still inspires curiosity and fascination from visitors,” Grosse concludes.

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Photo shows a couple of Madison’s prairie detectives out on a job.

P.I. SAYS WORK REWARDING

Rural Sleuth Must Blend In To Solve Cases

When rural private detective Ron Madison takes an assignment, he never knows what character he may have to assume.

Whether playing the role of an insurance agent, used car broker, or computer salesman, Madison tries to fit into a community “in the best way possible without attracting attention.”

Madison knows his limitations though. “I could never pass for a farmer,” he says, noting that he always informs the local police of his activities. The Saskatoon-based private eye employs five other investigators across western Canada.

Madison says his job is not glamorous and exciting. He describes his job as a litany of late nights in smoky bars, endless roaming of country roads, and sitting in a parked car for hours waiting for a small drama to play itself out.

Madison says that while rural cases have some unique circumstances, such as the need to blend into tightly knit communities, the problems he investigates compare to those of urbanities.

He has three main areas of investigation: marital (or relationship) surveillance, missing persons, and insurance fraud.

Before Madison agrees to accept a marital surveillance case, he cautions the prospective client to get ready for reality, whether good or bad. “I don’t get paid to pass judgments.

What you’re going to get is the truth.”

In marital trust (or fidelity) cases, Madison believes his clients usually know the answer, they just want proof. He scouts out the facts of who, where, and when. “What I saw is what I saw. Where they went is where they went. What time the bedroom lights went out is when they went out. Straight facts, no trivial pursuit,” he says.

His “missing persons” cases consist of parental abductions and adopted people searching for blood relatives. In the last few years, a new type has surfaced, Madison noted. “Old boyfriends looking for old girlfriends,” he says. “It’s often divorced people looking back into their past and remembering their high school love.” Although some people are just curious, he has re-united lost loves, occasionally with happy endings like friendship and marriage.

As far as rural disability claims, Madison has discovered that the fraud artists come in all ages and types - “everything from grandmothers to church ministers,” he says. He’s typically hired by a national insurance firm to investigate suspected cheaters. A little bit of video tape can answer a lot of questions, Madison added.

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