Barn Moved 1,500 Miles To New Farm Home

Dean Leatherman recently took barn moving to the ultimate extreme when he moved a barn from the family farm 1,500 miles from Bedminster, Pennsylvania to Hesston, Kansas. The result is a traditional red and white Pennsylvania bank-barn at home on the Kansas prairie.

"Coordinating the removal from 1,500 miles away was the most difficult part, but thanks to my brother and brother-in-law, it went well," says Leatherman, a professional contractor who also has a tree farm in the Hesston area.

Planning was key to the enterprise. A nephew who is a structural engineer sketched the frame and helped Leatherman label each beam and joint for reassembly. A rented crane and an electrician's cherry picker aided in tear down, which only took a couple days. Roof, barn boards and flooring were left behind, as were several lean to's that had been added over the years. All the framing was shipped to Kansas, as well as rock from the original foundation.

Exact measurements were taken before the barn came down to allow Leatherman to prepare the Kansas site. More than 100 dump truck loads of dirt were used to recreate the hillside for the haymow entrance. Stone foundation walls on three sides had to be built.

"I was really amazed at how well it fit," he says. "I know that if you get good accurate measurements, you are usually okay, but the barn sagged in some places. I didn't know if all the logs would go back together the same, but they did."

Putting the barn back together was a matter of following the chart and the numbers. Even with modern tools and cranes, the job was not easy. Beams up to 50 foot in length and weighing over 1,000 lbs challenged the modern day builders and created new respect for the original craftsmen.

Leatherman did as much as he could himself in the evenings, though he did bring his construction crew in for final assembly. His Sunday school class helped with painting and other friends stopped by during the process to help out.

A couple changes were made to the old barn. All new kiln-dried pegs were used along with steel angle reinforcements at key stress points.

"My nephew ran load rations on his computer to identify where the greatest stress would be," says Leatherman. "Those wood joints just wouldn't hold up to our Kansas winds."

The old barn no longer serves its original purpose. The downstairs has been made into a meeting facility for church and community groups, with kitchen and bathroom, tables and chairs. The old haymow now holds Leatherman's tree nursery equipment.

Dean Leatherman moved this traditional red and white bank-barn 1,500 miles from Pennsylvania to Kansas.

Some things do remain the same. A rope swing and a basketball hoop were installed in the haymow. Family memories remain strong and more continue to be added. A niece recently held her wedding in the barn.

While the move may not have made business sense, it continues to make sense to Leatherman. "It's a lot of fun just to look out and see the old barn," he says.

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Realistic Mini Combine Is A Big Hit at Parades

Elvin Pritts' combine won't thresh grain, but it sure draws a crowd.

Pritts, a retired Guide Rock, Nebraska, farmer, says when he quit milking cows and tending his beef herd, he turned to model farm toys to keep busy. He collects them and builds them. Several pieces he's made will be on display this summer at the National Farm Toy Museum in Dyersville, Iowa.

To date, the largest "toy" Pritts has made is a scale model John Deere 55 combine. Built on an old Snapper riding mower, the ride-on combine has a cab, platform head, grain tank, working augers, and a straw chopper. "I'm busy most of the summer taking it to parades and farm shows," he says.

Pritts and a friend cut down the cab from an old Baldwin-Gleaner combine and put it back together so it looks like a 55 combine cab. "It's just big enough for me to ride in," he says.

He shaped the header from a couple of 30-gal. plastic barrels which he cut in half lengthwise and then pieced together, to make it about 5 ft. wide. He installed a small auger as a feederhouse auger. And above that, he added a reel that he fashioned out of wood, using strips of house siding as bats. The reel is ground driven, so it turns if the combine is moving.

While the old drive wheels from the mower still power the combine, Pritts added dummy wheels in the right place to look like combine drive wheels.

He built the grain tank and rear end of the combine out of plywood cut to look like a model 55 combine. Concealed inside the grain tank are two smaller steel tanks.

Pritts added a clean grain elevator and auger to fill the grain tank. It's put together so grain flows into the top of the hopper and then into one of the hidden steel tanks, where it runs back into the elevator and is returned to the tank in a continuous cycle. There's about half a bushel of grain in this loop. A belt from the power take off that ran the mower deck powers the elevator.

To make it look authentic, the unload auger on the grain tank is connected to the second, hidden grain storage bin on the model combine, which holds about 3 bu. of grain. A 12-volt motor runs the unload auger.

Pritts built a miniature gravity flow wagon to go with the combine, using the cut down hopper from an old pull-type Baldwin combine. He mounted it on a lawn mower frame. "I bought the hopper 40 years ago and used it to store feed for my dairy cows," he says.

Originally, a friend pulled the wagon with a lawn tractor and would position the wagon under the unload auger. Then Pritts would flip the switch on the auger motor and put a little grain into the wagon. "It was difficult to get the wagon positioned right, though, so I built a hitch on the combine and now I pull the wagon alongside the combine," he says.

To make the combine even more realistic, he added a straw chopper and spreader, built from a squirrel cage fan salvaged from a car heater, with strips of rubber belting added on the bottom side. A second 12-volt motor runs this.

Of course, a straw spreader needs something to spread, so Pritts put a length of 6-in. auger through the body of the combine, to empty onto the spreader. He packs the auger with sawdust prior to a parade. This motor has a gear reduction drive, allowing the auger to turn so slowly that he can leave it on for most of the time during parades. "It holds about 20 lbs. of sawdust, which is usually enough for most parades," he says.

The weight of the model combine on the old lawnmower chassis was too much for the original 8 hp engine, so Pritts replaced it with an 11 hp Honda engine.

Pritts built this scale model Deere 55 combine on a Snapper riding mower. It has a cab, platform head, grain tank, working augers, and straw chopper.

The demands of the added 12-volt motors proved to be too much for the mower's electrical system, too. "The battery was usually so low after a parade that if I shut the motor off, there wasn't enough power to start it again," he says. To relieve some of that, he mounted another 12-volt battery inside the combine. A full charge on this battery is enough to power all the motors throughout a typical parade.

Pritts added a radio to his combine cab for even more realism. "That little cab can get pretty hot on a summer day, so this winter, I've added a water cooler-type air conditioner on the roof," he adds.

Pritts' combine measures about 10 ft. in length and is roughly 3 ft. in width. While he'll take credit for the ideas that went into making his little combine, Pritts says he had a lot of help in building it. "We put it all together in my neighbor Owen Konzack's shop. He did all the welding and metal work for me and he's a very talented mechanic," he says. Another change he's making this year is replacing the augers with brush-type augers, thanks to a friend at Ewing, Nebraska, who custom-made the new augers for him.

Pritts and Konzack worked about 6 months, off and on, putting together the combine. That doesn't count the time spent on changes and additions made since. He figures the cost to reproduce it at this point would be close to $5,000. "If you put a value on the labor that's gone into it, it would be cost prohibitive to build."

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