

# Gopher-Trapping Pickup Truck

By Janis Schole, Contributing Editor

Don Selby is on a crusade to help farmers take back hay fields from pocket gophers whose tunnels and dirt mounds cause untold millions of dollars of damage to crops and equipment each year.

To attack the gophers in the area around his home near Vimy, Alberta, the 75-year-old Selby built a "trapping truck" that has helped him remove close to 10,000 pocket gophers over the past few years from farms in his area.

Selby bought a 1980 Datsun for \$50 and modified it so he can quickly zip around fields to set and check traps. He has a bird's eye view of the fields he's working from his perch behind and above the cab.

He removed the passenger seat in the King Cab to make room for extra supplies such as warmer clothing. His traps, marker flags, and miscellaneous supplies are stored in the truck box.

He focuses his gopher control efforts on two-week periods of about 20 hrs. per week - first thing in the spring before the hay starts to grow, at end of June following the first cut of hay, and then again in the fall, after the last cut.

When he first started trapping Selby had the help of his young grandkids who drove the truck for him between gopher colonies while he stood in the box. However, as the kids got older, they eventually lost interest and didn't want to drive for him anymore.

"I almost quit trapping because it was hard to see the mole hills while driving the truck, making the job a lot harder to do," he says.

But two years ago, Selby decided to make his rig a lot handier by extending the steering wheel and other controls out through the roof.

He left the truck's original steering wheel intact, but extended it with a universal joint and shaft that runs up to a steering column off a 1966 Ford pickup.

Next, he removed the back window and ran plastic weed trimmer line from the accelerator pedal up through pulleys to a gas pedal that works like a teeter totter. Pressing on the pedal accelerates the truck normally.

Since the truck has an automatic transmission with a floor shift, Selby duct taped the

locking mechanism permanently shut, so he can shift at random into any gear he wants, thanks to two pieces of strap iron that extend the gear shifter up to the top of the truck.

A 1/2-in. dia. metal pipe bolts to the brake pedal and runs up to a pedal on the operator platform so Selby can brake normally.

The end result of all the modifications is that once he has started the truck, Selby can drive normally while standing on the lookout deck.

"It wouldn't win any safety awards," he admits, but Selby drives his rig carefully and slowly through the fields.

"I should have a kill switch for the ignition because that would be good to have if I was ever in a bind, but other than that, this outfit has everything I need," he says.

He built wooden steps inside the truck box to make it easier to climb up on the platform.

Since the truck isn't road-worthy, he made a tow bar on front with scrap metal and part of an old grader blade. He uses this to avoid getting a ticket when moving the unit from job to job. When not in use, it's held out of the way with a bungie cord, which hooks to the center of the hood.

Selby marks the traps he has set with flags he makes from wire clothes hangers bent straight with bright-colored material taped to the top.

Selby admits that, when he first started trapping, he didn't know what he was getting into. It's much more challenging than he thought it would be. Selby says the only way to be successful is to keep expanding the trapping area to prevent new gophers from moving in.

Once he realized what he was up against, he took hold of the challenge and tried turning it into a business, but now it's more of a hobby, he says. Initially, he started out doing it on foot, and then on a quad, before graduating to the trapping truck.

When he started out trapping, Selby knew he would need a large number of traps. Instead of buying traps that sold for \$10 to \$15 apiece, he built 150 of his own traps by using components from inexpensive Victor rat traps, which he could buy for about \$2.50 each.



Don Selby made this "trapping truck" by extending the steering wheel and other controls up through the roof.



Steering, brakes and accelerator can all be controlled normally from the roof. He uses drag rail, above right, to level gopher mounds a day or two before trapping.

Selby learned a trick that helps him spot active gopher mounds. A day or so before he starts trapping an area, he drags an I-beam rail over the field. He added a couple skids to the ends of the rail and he pulls it at an angle so it won't scalp the alfalfa. The next day, the new mounds that appear are the ones he sets traps on because he knows they're active.

"You can't even make minimum wage doing it, but I like the work and I like helping my neighbors," he says. "We kind of use a tit for tat system. I help them with their gophers, and they help me with other things, like plowing out my yard in winter."

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Selby used inexpensive Victor rat traps to make 150 box-type gopher traps. So far he's caught over 10,000 gophers with them.

## New "Accumulator" Designed For Smaller Bales

"My new bale accumulator is designed to handle the smaller 32 to 40-in. long bales favored by many smaller hobby farmers. It's built simple with no hydraulics or electronics, and it groups 15 bales at a time," says custom baler Ken Kuhns of North Bloomfield, Ohio.

The accumulator is designed to handle 14 by 18-in. square bales that weigh 40 to 45 lbs., which is about 15 lbs. less than a conventional 50-in. long bale. The machine hitches to the baler drawbar, with the hitch centered 5 to 8 in. back from the end of the baler chamber. It has a single wheel on front and two wheels on back, which support a floor that's permanently mounted at a 45 degree angle. A twisted chute mounts on front of the machine and hooks up to the baler chamber.

The baler pushes bales to the top of the chute, which turns bales on edge for better curing in storage. Bales fall downward out of the chute into one of six rows. As gravity moves the bales downward, the last bale in each row swings a door to open the next row. The last bale in the "grab" opens the back gate. As the accumulator unloads itself, springs and counterweights return all the gates back to their starting positions.

"I built it because of the booming horse industry and the rising popularity of other hobby animals. I wanted to sell a smaller, lighter bale that's easier to handle," says Kuhns. "I couldn't find a bale accumulator that did everything I wanted it to do. It'll handle bales as fast as the baler can make them. Most other bale accumulators can't handle bales shorter than 36 in. A 45-lb. bale is a lot easier to handle than a 60-lb. bale. Other accumulators form bales in groups of 10. Being able to handle 15 bales at a time reduces pickup time by 50 percent. I've been able to load 210 bales on a wagon in less than 8 minutes. Other accumulators store bales flat, but I think they cure better in the barn when they're on edge.

"My machine won't work with balers that have 16 or 18-in. wide chambers. I plan to eventually offer a model for such balers."

Sells for \$8,325. Kuhns also offers a 10-bale model that sells for \$7,950. A loader-mounted bale grabber is also available.

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Bale accumulator is built simple with no hydraulics or electronics. It's designed to handle the smaller 32 to 40-in. long bales favored by many smaller hobby farmers.

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