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Photo courtesy John Chilese

"Prairie Sailing" Catches On Fast

If you like speed, and you're looking for a new way to have fun right on the farm, take a look at kite bugging.

"It combines the fun of kite flying with the thrill of go-carting," says Bill Benson of St. Joseph, Missouri. He saw the sport demonstrated at a fair three years ago and has been involved in the sport ever since.

Having lots of room, with no electric wires or trees to tangle the kite, is important, he and Rob Baptie of Merced, California, agree. Power kites have four lines and an air foil design. They can be steered across wind like a sailboat.

Kite bugging has been around for several years in the U.S. It's most prevalent on the East and West coasts, where competitions are held, but has been catching on fast in other areas as well. However, it's a very accessible sport for rural landowners throughout the country, who have flat pasture or ranch land. The 3-wheeled, go-cart style buggies are only a couple of inches off the ground.

The buggies, with their large wheels, run easily over smaller snake and gopher holes. Grass can also be up to 4 in. tall. Bigger

wheels, suitable for rolling on sand, can handle taller grass, but there's more resistance, which reduces speed.

The sport can be dangerous. Changing winds and failure to correct the power kite can flip the rider and buggy. Worse yet, the kite can pull the rider (attached by a harness) right out of the buggy.

Getting into kite bugging is relatively inexpensive. New buggies cost \$600 to \$900; medium-size kites run \$250 to \$300. Kites come in many shapes and sizes. Good used equipment costs about half that on internet sites, Baptie says, and talented welders make their own buggies for a fraction of the cost.

To research the sport, Baptie recommends three websites: powerkiteforum.com (good information and a place to talk to others); windpowersports.com (a Las Vegas business that sells products, and has good information by kite buggy competitor, Corey Jensen); and nabx.net (covering events, products and forums).

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Power kites can be steered across wind like a sailboat.

One-Of-A-Kind 4-WD Oliver

The Oliver Company never built a 4-WD 880 Oliver. There's only one of them and it's on display at Ollie Schaefer's on-farm "museum" near Greenville, Ill.

The unusual home-built tractor – which was inspired by Oliver's 1650 4-WD forklift – is the centerpiece of Schaefer's American Farm Heritage Museum, which hosts an annual tractor show. In its first year, 2004, it drew 138 tractors. Last year, 450 tractors showed up. This year Ollie is expecting to have 600 tractors on display.

At the show entrance, Schaefer built an eye-catching display from scrap steel beams he salvaged from a local elevator after a tornado passed through. He puts three tractors on display on top of the structure.

The 880 4-WD tractor really throws old Oliver men for a loop because it looks like a factory-built model. But real collectors know the company never made one like it. So Ollie



Ollie Schaefer built this 4-WD 880 Oliver tractor. "It really throws old Oliver men for a loop because it looks like a factory-built model," he says.

has fun talking to people trying to figure it out.

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"Decoy" House Catches Pest Birds

George Reisner had a problem with starlings taking over his purple martin bird houses. To solve the problem he built a "decoy" bird house that traps pest birds in a big plastic downspout.

"It lets me quickly dispose of any undesirable birds and release the good ones," says the Jewett, Ill. man.

The fake wooden bird house is located about 200 ft. from his martin houses, and is mounted on a pole about 10 ft. above the ground. There's only one hole leading into the bird house, and it has a small aluminum "teeter totter" mounted just inside it. A length of 8-in. dia. pvc pipe attaches to a hole at the bottom of the house. When the bird lands on the teeter totter, it drops to the bottom of the bird house and into the pipe, sliding down to a wire mesh cage at the bottom of the pipe. It has a hinged door on it for removal of birds.

"It's mounted close to our house so I can watch the birds come in," says Reisner. "The only problem is that some birds started carrying in nesting materials and wedging them against the teeter totter, which kept it from working.

"I painted some imitation holes next to the real hole to help attract birds but that was a mistake, because when birds fly up to them and can't get in they go somewhere else."

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To keep starlings from taking over his purple martin bird houses, George Reisner built this "decoy" bird house that traps pest birds in a big plastic downspout.

Tractor Lift Helps Him Keep Farming

Wallace White built a tractor lift to help an 80-year-old friend get in and out of his two Deere tractors.

"I designed the hydraulic lift to mount on the right side of the tractor," White says. He made the lift out of flat iron on edge and bolted it to the tractor using existing holes. He secured an electrically operated hydraulic pump to the frame below the cab and runs it off the tractor's 12-volt battery.

To operate the Power Step, his friend stands on the lift, opens the tractor door, reaches inside and presses a switch. The lift raises him to the cab.

White says he will make custom lifts for other farmers as well.

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To get into the cab, the operator stands on the lift, opens the tractor door, reaches inside and presses a switch. The lift raises him to the cab.