

Thieman Kit Tractors Ran On Model A Power

Nearly 80 years ago, the Thieman brothers of Albert City, Iowa, had a modern, practical idea - recycle. They manufactured kit tractors that farmers could power with engines out of old Model A car engines no longer being used. The ability to purchase a tractor kit for half price - \$300 to \$400 - was particularly popular during the Depression.

Don't look for similar bargains now, says Dean Thiemann, who owns three of the 1930's tractors. He's seen Thieman tractors go for as much as \$12,000.

The Versailles, Mo., man became interested in the tractor six years ago after hearing stories from his father about a dealer coming to the farm during the Depression trying to sell a tractor kit with a name similar to theirs.

After Thiemann placed a wanted ad, he found and purchased a 1938 Thieman, which was unusual because it came with a factory-installed, 85 hp, V-8 engine - the only one he is aware of in the U.S. The company made custom tractors and even installed Model A engines for farmers who didn't think they could do it, Thiemann says.

Thieman tractor frames are made of 5-in. bent pipe. The early ones had over-the-top

steering, no front grill, and an exposed chain drive, which was quite dangerous. The tractors also have a single front tire and hand brakes. They were sold mostly in Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota and Nebraska.

Though a fair-size tractor, at 8 ft wide and 12 ft. long, Thieman tractor with Model A engines were light in front and tended to tip backwards. With a V-8 engine, Thiemann says his tractor is stable.

His other tractors are more typical of the 1,600 to 2,000 tractors Thieman made from 1931 until World War II shut down production. His steel-wheel 1933 model has a 1929 Model A engine.

"If it was any other kind of tractor, it would have been scrapped out," Thiemann laughs. "It was very rusted. I had to manufacture motor mounts. Everything was locked up."

He has before and after photos to show the dramatic difference of his restoration work. Thiemann is currently restoring a third Thieman tractor that wore out two Model A engines and ended up with a V-8 engine.

"Basically I collect these tractors because of the name," Thiemann says. When he takes his tractors to shows they attract both tractor



Prior to World War II, Thieman Harvester Co. employed 150 people working 24 hours a day to keep up with demand for kit tractors.

and car collectors.

There aren't many Thieman tractors around, due to interest by Model A collectors in the 1960's. They bought the engines, transmissions and rear end to put back into

restored Model A cars. Remaining tractor parts were often scrapped.

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Mini Caterpillar Looks Real

Jim Golly can't push dirt with his D8 mini Cat dozer, but it operates like the real thing. Popular at parades and with anyone who sees it, the D8 was built without a pattern.

"I worked on it for about a year and rebuilt it several times to get it right," recalls Golly. "I got the original design by looking at an old D8 in a junk yard. I took pictures from all angles to get the proportions right when I started building."

Golly used sq. tubing for the frame and 1/8-in. sheet iron for the body and blade. He has tried several motors and has settled on a 13 hp Honda to drive the hydraulic pump. The pump powers the drive motors on the tracks and raises and lowers the blade.

The tracks are made from no. 55 chain from an old combine. Golly made a jig to bend 2-in. wide, 8-in strips of metal to look like track sections and welded them to the

chain. Drive sprockets and idlers off the old combine keep the track tight and in place. Beveled spools on the motors drive the tracks.

"I steer with the orbital motors," explains Golly. "I have a double spool control with two handles, one for each motor. I put a spring on them so it's always in forward, but when I pull one back, it goes into reverse."

The battery sits under the seat, which is fashioned from wood with a foam cushion. A hydraulic cylinder under the floorboard raises and lowers the all-metal blade. The hood metal was custom bent. The grill is fashioned from an old hammer mill screen.

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"I worked on it for about a year and rebuilt it several times to get it right," says Jim Golly, who built this Cat D8 mini dozer without a pattern.

He Builds Scale Model Barns That Restore Memories

By Jan Shellhouse

Barns built 100 or 150 years ago by wood framers still dot the North American landscape. Lowell Finley builds scale model barns that restore memories of these barns for folks who long ago left the farm, but want their families to know how and where they lived.

He builds scale models of early barns and homesteads, including cabins, using the timber framing method that was popular in the 1800's. Timber framing makes use of mortise and tenon joints, in which a tongue fits into a square hole to hold the beams together. Wooden pegs are also used to fasten everything together. Barn interiors have hay lofts, built-in ladders, and large one-piece wooden beams.

"I believe that barns are a part of America's past that needs to be preserved for our grandchildren and for future generations," says Finley, who has exhibited his work at farm shows.

Finley, of Mansfield, Ohio, was in the construction business for many years and used to build new homes. Even though he's

now retired, he's still in the building business. He uses the models and designs of the past to guide his building skills. Often, he works from old photos.

Finley builds barns using oak wood. His barns have sliding doors, which in real life were big enough to drive a load of hay inside or to park a tractor on the barn floor. There's even a ladder leading up to the hayloft.

Finley builds to order and puts at least 100 hours into every barn that he builds, depending on the design and amount of detail. His barns have lightning rods, downspouts, and cupolas. There are stalls for horses and cows. One barn that he built has a standing seam, shiny metal roof. Some barns have stone foundations and a Chew Mail Pouch tobacco sign that looks just like the ones painted by Harley E. Warrick, the early Ohio barn painter.

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Lowell puts at least 100 hours into every barn he builds. The barns have lightning rods, downspouts and other realistic details.

