



Wayne Volk built his trencher out of an old Minneapolis Moline combine and other miscellaneous parts.



The Ditch Witch attachment on back of combine gets a lot of use running water lines to cattle troughs and underground irrigation.

By Dee George, Contributing Editor

Nebraskan Puts More Power In His Homemade Trencher

After wearing out two ditching units that were old when he bought them, Wayne Volk was excited about buying a used Ditch Witch in 1980. But it didn't have the power he wanted, and by 1991 he had scrounged enough parts to build his own trencher. The Bloomington,

Neb., man estimates he's buried about 75,000 feet of pipe with it since then.

"Instead of miles per hour like a tractor, a trencher has to travel feet per minute," says Volk, explaining why he put together parts from so many different machines.

He started with an old, retired Minneapolis Moline combine and used the cab, engine, power steering and hydrostat transmission. He added an old John Deere drive and front axle, and a 4-speed transmission from a Studebaker to get seven speeds and the ability to drive slowly. He used the transmission and clutch assembly from a 1948 self-propelled Cockschutt combine to operate the digger chains on the Ditch Witch attachment on the back.

Volk worked on his trencher during his free time for about nine months and was pleased with the results.

"It went slow enough, and the 383 Chrysler engine gave me all the power that I needed,"

he says, noting it was a huge improvement over the Ditch Witch. "The Ditch Witch was supposed to have a 60 hp engine, but I told everyone it was 60 ponies, and 20 died, and I was dragging them along."

The only thing he doesn't like about his homemade trencher is that the road speed is slower than he likes, so he hauls his trencher on a trailer when he moves from job to job.

The benefits outweigh that problem. Volk appreciates the added comfort of working in a heated cab, and trenching is made easier with a used Pathfinder Freedom Drive he hooked into the hydraulic steering and attached to the front. Volk marks a shallow line by securing a shovel to his pickup's bumper and driving where he wants the trencher to go. The Freedom Drive follows the line - whether it's straight or curved - for hands-free steering.

"I wouldn't trade this ditcher with another one produced commercially," Volk says. He



A hydraulic-operated Pathfinder Freedom Drive system on front allows hands-free steering.

estimates it cost \$1,000 to build, and after years of work, it's still doing the job. Though he's old enough to be retired, Volk enjoys digging trenches and takes on jobs installing underground irrigation and piping rural water to cattle water tanks.

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The Mystery Of The Funny-Looking Chicken

We recently spotted a story in Backyard Poultry Magazine titled, "Is It A Phicken Or A Cheasant?"

It featured a photo by Jerry Fuller of an unusual looking bird that he claimed was a hybrid cross between a pheasant and a chicken. The photo was taken three years ago on the farm of an acquaintance in California. However, Fuller had lost touch with the friend and couldn't recall where the hybrid chicks had been purchased.

We were intrigued by the strange-looking bird and decided to find out if such birds actually exist.

We started our search on the internet where there was very little information. The tidbits we found discussed the problems of crossing the two breeds, which includes the fact that the birds have different incubation periods (21 days for chickens versus 23 to 26 days for pheasants) and that the hybrid birds produced are sterile.

The most detailed information we found was in a February, 2008 article in the same magazine that ran Jerry Fuller's photo - Backyard Poultry Magazine (www.backyardpoultrymag.com).

It seems that more than 50 years ago, Charles Peterson of Iron Mountain, Mich., decided to cross chickens and pheasants. Despite doubts from poultry experts at the time, Peterson successfully hatched two chicks from a BB Red Old English Game hen and a ring-necked pheasant.

To get them to breed, he placed the pair in a wire pen away from his other poultry and included plenty of shrubbery in the pen. The chicken laid 45 eggs before she decided to set. Peterson had marked the eggs and removed all but the freshest dozen. The pheas-



Jerry Fuller took this picture of a "Phicken" or a "Cheasant" on a California farm.

ant showed interest in the nest, but didn't bother the hen, who faithfully stayed on the eggs through inclement spring weather.

Peterson said incubation took two days longer than normal for chickens. Only two chicks hatched.

"They looked like striped chipmunks, taking coloration from both parents, but acted more like chickens than pheasants," Peterson wrote in his article. "The pheasant seemed to be so proud. He'd stand on his tiptoes and beat his wings."

Peterson was thrilled to be able to send photos of his hybrid birds to the poultry experts who had said it would never work. He observed the birds daily and watched as one grew to look like a hen and the other a rooster.

He removed the parents after three months, and made the hybrids a simple shelter in which they survived through temperatures as cold as minus 20 degrees. Unfortunately, the hen escaped and disappeared the following spring. The rooster lived and later won a county fair ribbon. He weighed 5 lbs., had a domestic nature, and characteristics more like a hen than a rooster - with no comb, spurs, wattles or earlobes.

After trying to sell the one-of-a-kind bird with no luck, the hybrid fowl became the main entrée for Thanksgiving dinner.

If you have more information about crossing pheasants and chickens, let us know at 800-834-9665 or editor@farmshow.com.