

Cast Iron Seat Collecting

Charolette Traxler purchased her first cast iron implement seat to paint as a household decoration. More than three decades later, she and her husband, Gordy, have a collection of dozens of old seats, and Charolette is secretary/treasurer for a group of 415 collectors who belong to the Cast Iron Seat Club.

"Our first seat was from a Deering, because we collect International Harvester tractors and farm with them," Traxler says. She and her husband soon discovered just how many models of seats were made. The "bible" for collectors, *Cast Iron Implement Seats*, by John D. Friedly, Jr., lists more than 2,000 seats.

Cast iron seats were common until the early 1900's. Some Amish and other "plain community" manufacturers still make them. People often mistakenly call them tractor seats, but they were made for horse-drawn implements and some old steam engines. Many different companies built the seats, and designs range from simple to intricate, sometimes including the manufacturer's name. While many were scrapped during WWII metal drives, the old seats can still be found on equipment parked in fencerows or stashed in sheds.

As with any collectible, rare ones in good condition net the best price. For example, Emerson-Brantingham Implement Co. of Rockford, Ill., made about 20 seats with their name in the design for implements sold at a

World's Fair. Those seats have the highest rating (10) among collectors and sell for \$700 to \$1,000.

When collections sell at auction, prices generally range from \$25 to \$400, Traxler says. The seats can still be found at flea markets and farm sales and on eBay, though collectors need to be wary of reproductions.

Traxler notes that sometimes people incorrectly believe a seat is a certain model because of the implement it was found on.

"Some farmers used to move one seat from implement to implement because it was the most comfortable to sit on," Traxler says.

Members of the Cast Iron Seat Club are dedicated to preserving the seats as well as corn planter lids, footrests, cast iron toolboxes and a variety of other items. Anyone interested in learning more is invited to attend the club's annual meet open to the public at the Little Log House Show in Hastings, Minn. (July 29-31, 2011). Or they can contact Traxler for more information.

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Seats like these have sold for as much as \$2,500 in recent years. Some members like to paint their seats in a whimsical fashion to coincide with a variety of holidays or whatever suits their fancy. Sometimes the paint job costs more than that cast iron seat.



Charolette Traxler and her husband, Gordy, have a collection of dozens of old cast iron implement seats.



Photos courtesy of Cast Iron Seat Club

This Cat's Blade Opens Mailbox

Terry Brouillette admits he spent an insane amount of time building a detailed D11 Caterpillar mailbox, complete with gas shocks to open and close the blade door. Then, after 2 1/2 years of spare time labor, he decided he didn't have the heart to actually use it as a mailbox, for fear of vandalism.

It would have been difficult to break, though, because it's made of solid steel 1/8 to 1/2-in. thick and weighs 130 lbs.

"The hardest part was scaling it down," Brouillette says. Without any blueprints to go by, he started making every piece with just a die grinder, welder and "a lot of hard work."

The only help he had from a professional shop was bending the 3/8-in. metal for the blade and drilling the ball bearings he used for cab controls.

Welds are hidden inside. He made jigs to bend some of the pieces such as the tracks — complete with the sag that is in real dozer tracks.

He also got creative with a few parts. The dual air cleaners are carriage bolts with the

threads ground off. The glass bowls on top are off of motorcycle in-line gas filters.

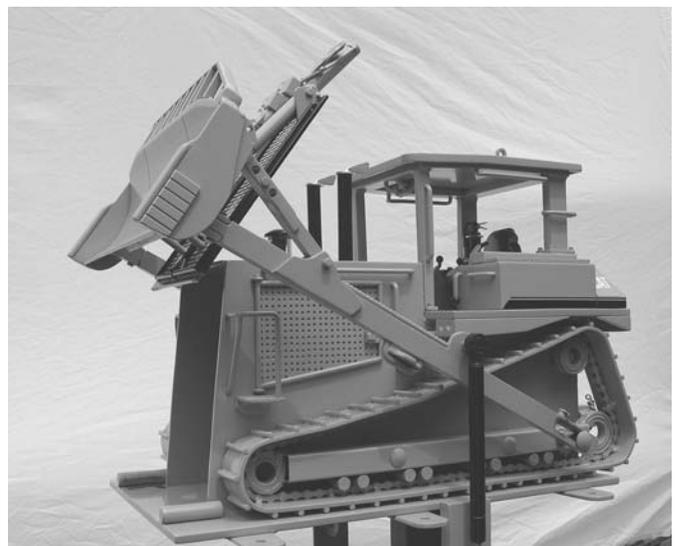
Brouillette was determined to include every detail of the D11, no matter how challenging. The cab interior has a seat, fire extinguisher, toolbox with tiny wrenches, and a rear view mirror.

The shocks lift the door automatically by pulling out the blade 1/16-in. Since shocks come in 10 lb. increments, Brouillette made several trips to an auto supply store to get the right speed for opening and closing.

The whole project cost less than \$20, including the genuine Caterpillar paint he finished it with.

He only has one regret about building the D11 that often kept him up until 4 a.m. "I should have made 10 at the same time," he laughs, noting people have offered him a lot of money for the mailbox.

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Detailed Caterpillar D11 mailbox is complete with gas shocks to open and close the blade, which serves as the door.

"Steam" Engine Created From Childhood Memories

As a child, Tino Ferro played in nearby rail beds with a close-up view of passing steam engines. As an adult, he decided to make a miniature version of an engine from memory.

"Everything is recycled," says Ferro, who makes his living as a sculptor. "The boiler was an old barrel, the transmission and steel wheels came off a rototiller, and the idlers are rollers from a cabbage planter. The bell is made out of propane tanks."

The only new thing is the 6 1/2 hp motor that allows the engine to travel about 8 mph. The unit is 10 ft. long and 8 1/2 ft. tall. It weighs 1 1/2 tons.

The steam engine fits well with Ferro's eclectic mix of metal sculptures that include horses, chickens, frogs, dragons, tractors and

more. He sells those pieces at art shops and does commissioned pieces such as "flying pigs" on a roof, a metal tree with rainbow-colored leaves, and colorful hot air balloons.

The train engine is more mobile than most of his work. "I think its most interesting feature is that the stack belches white smoke from a fogger machine that looks like steam," Ferro says.

He invites people to contact him for more information about how he made the engine and to check out his website to view his other creations.

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Tino Ferro made this miniature version of an old steam engine from memory. It's powered by a 6 1/2 hp motor and can go about 8 mph.