

# Giant "Rite Tractors" Still Going Strong

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

After 94 and 40 years, respectively, Dave Curtis and his Rite tractors are still going strong. One of the biggest tractors, nicknamed the Earthquake, will be on display this summer at the Half Century of Progress Show in Rantoul, Ill. It's one of 38 200 to 750 hp tractors built by the D.L. Curtis Co. since 1973. The last one was built about four years ago, according to Curtis.

"We built 38 of them, and they are all still running," he says.

Curtis and his brother Jack were first covered in FARM SHOW more than 36 years ago (Vol. 1, No. 3). Their Rite tractor was described as the first to offer an Allison automatic, infinitely variable speed, mechanical transmission. The articulated, 400 hp Model 404 weighed 45,000 lbs. and measured 15 ft., 11 in. wide with duals.

"We used all standard components," recalls Curtis. "People could order what they wanted. We used late model, low hour components to reduce costs, but added new technology as it was introduced. We had computers on the later models."

The tractors commonly featured big Cummins diesels with Detroit or Caterpillar engines optional. They used Spicer drivelines, Clark or Caterpillar axles, Budd-type wheels

and conventional or the then new clutchless transmissions. Over time, most were built with the Allison automatic transmission.

Years ahead of their time, the tractors allowed the operator to "dial" in the desired speed. The transmission shifted up or down to maintain that speed.

The Curtis Rite tractors featured custom cabs and Curtis designed transfer cases. Tractor cabs and hoods tilted out of the way for ease of service. They also had a patent on the hinge, which eliminated vibrations previously common in articulated tractors.

The Earthquake is one of a handful of 750 hp Rite tractors built. It later received a power boost bringing it to 850 hp. Originally purchased for use in Oregon, it's now in Ohio.

"We've invited Dave Curtis and hope he can attend the show," says Darius Harms, show chairman. "People will be able to get up close to the Earthquake."

Though he currently offices at home, if Curtis is at the show, he will be ready to take orders for more tractors. The price will be a bit higher than the \$171,000 quoted for the 750 hp tractor in that first FARM SHOW article.

"I've still got a good crew ready to build another one if someone wants it," says Curtis.



Rite tractors were introduced 40 years ago. One of the biggest models, nicknamed the Earthquake, will be on display this summer at the Half Century of Progress Show in Rantoul, Ill.

"A new Rite 750 would be about \$450,000 today with all new components."

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## He Turns Sawdust Into Nutritious Cattle Feed

Instead of buying hay to feed his beef cattle last winter, Bob Batey fed them a blended feed of corn, vitamins, minerals and 70 percent sawdust. The 85-year-old inventor/entrepreneur is patenting the easy and inexpensive method he uses to treat sawdust to make it into a digestible and nutritious feed, and he's devising a plan how he can share it with others.

Between January and April he fed more than 50 tons of sawdust to his 40+ cow and bull herd at a cost of \$1.40/day/cow. "My cattle gained weight through the winter," Batey says.

Despite some skeptics who say sawdust has low feed value, Batey's veterinarian confirms that the Angus and Charolais cattle are healthy and happy from the sawdust blend, and calving season went well. According to Wisconsin and Missouri lab testing, the sawdust has 13 to 14 percent protein. Batey ran informal tests of his own, putting out bales of hay, then filling the feed bunk with the sawdust blend. The cattle moved from the hay to the feed.

He first recognized sawdust as a feed option in the 1970's when he watched cattle eating the sludge runoff from a paper mill in

Indiana. The farmer who owned the cattle was upset about it and told Batey he was thinking of suing the mill. When the farmer mentioned his cattle had been eating it for two years, Batey recognized an opportunity and suggested the farmer buy more cows instead.

Batey started experimenting and used nitric acid and heat to treat sawdust. In order for it to be digestible, the lignin that is wrapped around the cellulose of the wood has to be broken down. Once freed, the cellulose provides high food value.

Batey fed his cattle sawdust through the late 70's but, when feed was cheap, he discontinued the project. Later, he built his own sawmill near Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

With high hay prices last year and sawdust available from the sawmill, Batey decided to experiment with sawdust feed again. He came up with a simple solution, but until the patent is finalized, he isn't giving away details.

He does say that any wood – except walnut

– is safe for cattle. It must be finely ground, like the sawdust from a band saw.

"Grinding up tree limbs would be even better than sawdust. The cambium would provide more food value. It would have to be ground up fine and kept at high moisture," Batey says. He adds that his treatment would also work on cornstalks.

His method has attracted the attention of Iowa State University extension beef specialists who are working with cornstalks. While Iowa typically has plenty of feed, Batey says feeding sawdust – that is often wasted – is an option that would work anywhere cattle feed is in short supply.

"I don't plan to keep this a secret," Batey says. He welcomes letters from people who are interested.

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## Lift Assist Kit For Pickup Tailgates

"It eliminates the struggle of opening or closing a heavy tailgate when you're holding something," says Brandon Parks, inventor of the GateGlide II.

Like the gas spring that lifts hatchbacks, Parks figured out how to use a gas spring to slowly lower a tailgate and close it effortlessly.

"It takes 90 to 95 percent of the weight off," Parks says.

The employee of Geno's Garage, a Dodge/Cummins parts distributor in Georgia, calibrated the gas spring to work on Dodge pickups (1994 to 2013). The \$100 GateGlide II comes with directions where to drill two small holes in the tailgate and install mounting clamps on the truck bed's sidewall lip.

"I'm working on adapting it for other pickup models," Parks says. "You have to get the gas spring right for the right weight of the tailgate and calibrate it to the pivot point."

He's shipped the GateGlide II to a wide variety of people in the U.S. and overseas. "It just make life easier for anyone who drives a pickup, whether it's for work, travel or everyday use," he says.

His other truck accessory also makes life simpler.

The Excelsior Block Heater Bumper Plug is specifically designed for Dodge (Cummins) diesel trucks (1994 to 2012). Instead of having an engine heater plug hanging out the front bumper in the winter, Park's \$50 plug



Lift assist kit uses a gas spring to slowly lower pickup tailgate and close it effortlessly.

accessory mounts in the bumper with a flip-open, waterproof cover and a molded plug and cable that plugs directly into the engine heater. The plug is easy to access and hidden when not in use.

Both items can be purchased through Geno's Garage (www.genosgarage.com).

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