

Big Collection Of Rare Antique Snowmobiles

By Bill Gergen, Senior Editor

Big collections of rare antique snowmobiles greeted visitors last summer at the LeSeuer County Pioneer Power Show in Minnesota. Snowmobile collectors Bill Thelemann and Jason Johnson both had several models on display.

"I ride all my antique snowmobiles every winter to keep them in shape, and because I like riding them for fun," says Thelemann. "There's a lot of history behind these machines."

Here are the models Thelemann showed:

1964 Fox Trac 510 2-seater - Built by the Fox Body Corporation in Janesville, Wis., this model is powered by a 10 hp Kohler engine. "The Fox Trac was built during the 1960's just as snowmobiles were making the transition from work to play machines," says Thelemann. "It was made to go back in the woods and was used by farmers and trappers. It has steel tracks riding on no. 60 roller chain. The cleats are separated by pieces of canvas that provide flotation.

"The machine is fitted with wide metal skids, with an angle iron wear rod underneath for making turns. It has a headlight, but

1962 Polaris LA 55 - It's powered by a 5 1/2 hp engine and was the smallest snowmobile Polaris made at the time. "It's lightweight and easy to handle, which made it perfect for kids. It's also very lightweight - you throw it in the back of a station wagon and take it out for the afternoon," says Thelemann.

1961 Polaris 0-13 Sno Traveler Trail Master - The Sno Traveler was originally powered by a 13 hp Onan engine, but Thelemann's model has a 10 hp Kohler engine. "It was one of the biggest snowmobiles Polaris made that year," he says. "The company cut holes into the sides to reduce weight, and to let snow inside to help lubricate wooden slides that support the snowmobile's steel track. The track has a plastic liner that bridges the cleats for flotation. Wooden skis run all the way back on both sides of the machine for flotation."

The big engine made the machine heavy and prone to getting stuck, so the company mounted a tripod winch on back to get you out of any jam. "The winch is fastened to wooden skids on back. If you get stuck, you lift the tracks out of the snow and then put branches or something under them so you can get out again. The machine even came with



1964 Fox Trac 510

it's very small. This was one of the first snowmobiles equipped with a reverse gear."



1962 Polaris LA 55



1961 Polaris 0-13 Sno Traveler Trail Master

a pair of snowshoes strapped to one side so you could get off the machine and walk in deep snow."

Thelemann says he plans to replace the Kohler engine with an Onan this winter.

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Jason Johnson of Belle Plaine, Minn., also showed several antique snowmobiles including:



1957 Chaparral Belair

1957 Chaparral Belair - Johnson custom-built this model for a local snowmobile show. It's built on the undercarriage of a stripped-down 1974 Chapparral SSX snowmobile

and has a fiberglass body. The machine is powered by the original 340 cc liquid-cooled motor. "It looks so real that a lot of people think it was factory-built," says Johnson.

Wheel Horse Wrecker - A friend, Jeff Krocak of LeSeuer, Minn., built a stainless steel wrecker on back of his early 1970's Wheel Horse. A hand-cranked winch is used to lower a sling fitted with a pair of metal hooks, which attach to loops on the snowmobile's skis. A flashing beacon mounts on top.

"Jeff's dad built a similar wrecker on a Wheel Horse snowmobile back in the mid 1970's, in order to help anyone whose snowmobile broke down. He used a Wheel Horse snowmobile because it was a big machine with a wide track," says Johnson.

Home-Built "Side By Side" - Johnson converted a pair of 1969 Massey Ferguson snowmobiles into this side-by-side machine, adding a boom-mounted, hand-cranked cable hoist on back. "The original MF snowmobile was called a Ski Whiz. I call mine the Tow Whiz," he says.

He shortened the chassis on each machine by 18 in., then removed one of the engines and welded the 2 machines together, adding heavy steel bracing. The remaining engine chain-drives the planetary drive gear out of an old Owatonna swather.

He made a windshield and customized the dash. He also made the fiberglass hood.

Then he installed the boom "recovery unit" on back. He started with a commercial cherry picker designed to mount on a pickup bed. A 5-ton hydraulic jack is used to raise and lower the boom, and a winch mounts on top of the boom.

A pair of steering control levers off the swather are used to steer the snowmobile. The snowmobile's throttle mounts on one of the levers.

"It steers much like a Caterpillar," says Johnson. "I can make either track stop, depending on how much pressure I put on the levers. I can go forward, backward or in a circle. The rig's 2 tracks provide a lot of

Hitch Hiker Cutter - This fiberglass Hitch Hiker Cutter was built by the Autoboggan Mfg. Co. and has a swivel hitch on front. "My Hitch Hiker was painted Polaris blue and white, while the red model setting next to it owned by Tom LeBrun was built for Chapparral and is painted Chapparral red," says Johnson. "Such cutters were made in the late 1960's and early 1970's so the family could ride together. There aren't many of them around any more. Arctic Cat made something similar called a Cat Cutter."

AMF Ski-Daddler - A saucer-shaped cutter built by AMF sat on a trailer behind an AMF Ski-Daddler snowmobile. "AMF bought Harley Davidson in the early 1970's and even made a Harley Davidson snowmobile," says Johnson. "It was a clone to the Ski-Daddler, except that it had a white hood with red and blue graphics."

1970's Custom-Built "Snow Plane" - Johnson bought this custom built "snow plane" from a local junk dealer. The first thing you notice is its aerodynamic "torpedo" shape. It had a propeller on back and was powered by a 4-cyl. Continental airplane engine. The machine originally was equipped with 3 skis - one on front for steering and 2 on back.

"The builder used this snowmobile for hunting timberwolves in North Dakota in the late 1970's," says Johnson. "It was custom-built, but Polaris made a similar machine. It was made for the open plains and could go fast, but these types of machines never became very popular because they were dangerous to operate. There were no brakes, which made them hard to stop, and there was no suspension so they took quite a beating.



Wheel Horse Wrecker



Home-Built "Side By Side"



flotation. I've never been stuck. It'll go up to 15 mph.

"I've used it to tow snowmobiles, and one time I even used it to pull a pickup out of a ditch. Once I get the tracks locked in it'll really go."



Hitch Hiker Cutter



AMF Ski-Daddler



1970's Custom-Built "Snow Plane"

My machine has shotgun shell holes in it and is all dented up from going through corn fields."

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