

Here's A Terrific Trio Of Repowered 8N Fords

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

For the past 40 years, Mike Schwanke and his father Virgil have worked side-by-side on tractor and truck restorations and in the family's tractor and truck parts business. Mike says he's probably restored and repowered more than 150 farm tractors, many that reside in the Schwanke's own museum in Willmar, Minn.

Mike recently completed work on a good-looking trio of 8N Fords. "I really took a liking to the small Fords after buying a repowering kit," he says. "Removing the stock 4-banger and replacing it with a flathead Ford V-8 turned the junker that we found abandoned in a farmer's grove into a museum and parade-ready specimen." The near-perfect tractor now has twin stainless steel exhaust pipes and a triple-coated enamel paint job.

"That first one really gave me the bug," Mike says. "I used a 110 hp V-8 from a 1951 Mercury. The motor fit right in place with the kit components, and it uses the original transmission, gauges and steering."

Schwanke's next 8N project was more ambitious. He installed a 120 hp 1948 Lincoln Zephyr V-12 motor in an 8N body. He used custom-made components, built a frame from 1 by 4-in. steel, machined a new bell housing, and installed a 5-core radiator. He also fabricated a new hood that's 10 1/2 in. longer than the original. "I used the front from one hood and the back from another one, then rolled and formed an extension in the middle," Mike said. The result is a seamless sheet of gray that looks factory-original. The finished conversion has 4 gleaming stainless

exhaust pipes, an authentic console, and original gauges. The three-coat enamel paint job and new rubber all around make this conversion a proud partner to the V-8.

Schwanke's next project was repowering another 8N with a smaller 60 hp Vedette, a French-made 1959 Ford V-8. Rather than buying a kit, he fabricated a frame, bell housing and steering arms himself. It turns over twice and springs to life, purring like a kitten compared to the throaty V-8 and V-12. All three of his 8N gems have 12-volt electrical systems.

Schwanke doesn't plan to stop at three conversions either. On the docket is a pile of parts and a motor-less 8N waiting for an overhead cam V-6. "It's just a matter of finding the time to get at it," Schwanke says.

His spare time is at a premium because the family's tractor and truck repair business has been going non-stop. "We just about get caught up and Dad will come in with something to rebuild or restore for the museum, so it's a never-ending process," Schwanke says.

It's obvious he enjoys practicing the skills he started learning at age 10, nearly 40 years ago. When most kids were playing ball and watching cartoons, Mike was fixing Kirby vacuums and learning how to rebuild magnetos. He doesn't intend to abandon the trade anytime soon.

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Virgil Schwanke and his son Mike have restored hundreds of tractors and trucks over the years. This trio of repowered 8N Fords are parade-ready and museum quality.



There's a 120 hp 1948 Lincoln V-12 under the hood of this snazzy repowered 8N Ford.

Big Straight-8 Powers Ford 8N

Charles Scudder has always liked 1951 Buick straight-8 and Ford 8N tractors, so it was logical for him to combine both favorites into one machine. He worked on his Buford Field Rod, as he calls it, from 2005 to 2013, and had help from a number of friends. His goal was to have it look as much as possible like a Ford factory product.

"I had to have the engine rebuilt by a machine shop, but I did everything else," says Scudder.

Everything else included fabricating a bell housing to match the engine to the tractor drive train. With all components, Scudder made patterns first. Here's how he made the bell housing.

"I transferred the location of mounting bolts on the rear of the engine and the holes on the tractor's drive housing to an aluminum pattern," says Scudder. "Then I cut pieces of 1/2-in. plywood to match the 2 faces, and mounted them in place."

When he moved the pilot bearing of the engine driveshaft into the transmission, he left 1/8 in. for slop and measured the difference between the 2 wood plates. It came to 1 7/10 in. After covering the plates with 1/8-in. plywood, he had a complete pattern that he took to a friend with a plasma cutting table.

"He cut pieces to match the pattern out of 1/2-in. steel, and I drilled holes to match the bolts and bolt holes on the aluminum pattern," recalls Scudder. "The bell housing came out looking smooth, thanks to the plasma cutter. I just filed off the corners and installed it."

He fabricated a new gas tank and replaced the wiring harness. He also made alterations to the front axle. The pivot previously bolted directly to the Ford's cast iron block. Scudder extended arms from the Buick engine motor

mounts to accept the axle pivot. He also ran a couple of struts from the new bell housing to the motor mounts to further strengthen the connection.

"I had to extend the radius arms and steering rods by 14 1/2 in.," says Scudder. "I had seen some simply stretched, and they looked ugly. I wanted it to look stock."

He decided to replicate the 1939 8N front axle, which had tapered I-beam radius arms. Here, too, he made wood patterns to ensure fit and look before making the steel parts.

The bigger engine required extending the hood. Scudder welded together parts from 2 hoods. What he couldn't do was match up the tapered ridge that ran down the center.

"I decided to cover it up with a replacement ridge," says Scudder. "I bent a piece of metal that imitated the original taper and bolted and bonded it in place."

Scudder wanted to go with stock headers from 1941 and 1942 straight-8s. They had a compound manifold with 2 carburetors and split headers. The split headers and 2 Hollywood glass pack mufflers would give him the exhaust sound he wanted.

"With stock manifolds, the carburetors would have stuck through the hoods," says Scudder. "Instead, I modified the manifold to mount them alongside the hood."

With the engine in place, Scudder quickly discovered additional cooling was needed. Though the Ford radiator held 12 quarts and the Buick held 13 quarts, it was enough to cause overheating at idle. To compensate, he mounted a heater core in front of the radiator and hooked it into the heater in/out locations on the engine. He had already modified the radiator in/out locations and the fill location. With the additional volume from the heater core and hoses, the engine could run for 20 min. without overheating.



Charles Scudder repowered his Ford 8N with a straight-8 engine out of a 1951 Buick. "I had to have the engine rebuilt by a machine shop, but I did everything else," he says.

"The 263-cu. in. engine is rated at 125 hp. at 3,600 rpm's," says Scudder. "With the 4.13-in. stroke, it produces plenty of low-end torque. You need a firm grip on the steering wheel when you open up the throttle, even in 4th gear, which is a road gear. I estimate top speed at 50 mph or better."

He gave the Buford Field Rod a fresh paint job. The Ford had been outfitted with turf tires

that were ideal for the high-torque engine.

"The turf tires slip," says Scudder. "I was afraid that with that much traction, conventional ag tires would stress components too much."

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