

**Gary A. Schultz, Janesville, Wis.:** "Back in 1966, I bought a new **Chevrolet** 1-ton pickup equipped with a hoist for \$3,580. The pickup is powered by a 327 cu. in. V-8



engine with 4-speed transmission. The engine has never been rebuilt. This pickup has a big rear window, dual ram hoist, and wooden bed with steel overlay floor. I used to do concrete work and at times broken concrete was piled higher than the pickup's roof. This pickup has never seen snow or salt. I'm the only one who drives it, and now I only take it out in nice weather."

**Michael E. Myers, Iron Ridge, Wis.:** "My 2008 **Peterson WPF** sawmill does everything the company said it would, and more ([www.petersonsawmills.com](http://www.petersonsawmills.com)). It cuts logs into lumber consistently and quickly, with minimal setup time. Solid construction and good materials make it virtually indestructible. If you want to see it in action, look for videos on YouTube."

"My **Woodmaster** planer/sander/moulder bogs down even when planing pine or other softwoods. Changing the blades is a chore. This unit is heavy and takes up a lot of space in my shop. It might work better as a boat anchor."

**Steve Straus, Ham Lake, Minn.:** "I bought my 1972 **Bolens** 1886 hydrostatic, heavy-frame garden tractor used in 1988. I use it to cut 4 acres of grass, which takes 3 to 4 hrs. I've also used it to blow snow, till my garden, and pull a 12-in. moldboard plow. It still has the original rear tires. You can fix these tractors yourself, and once they're fixed they stay fixed."

**Robert A. Johnson, Bagley, Minn.:** "I bought my 2001 **Chevrolet** 2500 3/4-ton extended cab pickup used two years ago with about 126,000 miles on it. It now has more than 155,000 miles with no problems. It's the quietest running and smoothest riding pickup I've ever seen. It warms up quickly in cold weather, and the air conditioning works great."

**L. Rob Gifford, Brainerd, Minn.:** "I'm well pleased with my **Dremel Roto-Wizard** multi-tool ([www.dremel.com](http://www.dremel.com); ph 800 437-3635). It paid for itself in the first two days. I use it to cut sheet rock and wallboard, and to make cuts in new door lock assemblies with ease and precision."

"The **Red Devil** propane wand I recently bought at Menards to burn weeds barely puts out more than a 5-candle flame. I bought it to light brush piles, but it has too many safety features to be effective. It isn't half the wand torch the company used to make."

**Scott Shackelford, Elkton, Ky.:** "My 1996 **Dodge** 1-ton diesel pickup has had its share of downtime but with about 200,000 miles, many of them offroad, you'd expect that. It starts in the coldest weather and can haul big loads. I really like the Cummins 6-cyl. in-line diesel."

**Tiny Simpson, Kernersville, N.C.:** "I've been a heavy equipment mechanic for 40

**"It's dangerous for anyone to stand near the back hoe when I'm digging."**

years, and I really like the **Gear Wrench** 8-piece reversible ratcheting combination wrench set that I bought at Sears.

"I don't like the hydraulic system on my 1999 **Case** 590 backhoe because there's no way to activate the rear hoe without it jerking. As a result, it's dangerous for anyone to stand near the backhoe when I'm digging."

**Roger Vavricek, Schuyler, Neb.:** Roger's disappointed with the expandable **HCC Orbit Reel** he uses on his combine flex head. "It's designed to close the gap between the reel and auger, which is supposed to result in more even crop feeding. When it worked, it did what the company said it would do. However, it wasn't reliable. At times, it would bind up and break the reel teeth, and the plastic track showed a lot of wear. It came off the track once. The company didn't reply to my email asking for help."

**Lane S. Bishop, Mineral Bluff, Ga.:** "Our 2008 **New Holland** 85 hp tractor is large enough for our 320-acre farm. We use it for haying and light grading work. Unfortunately, the tractor developed several small electrical problems and the dealer wouldn't come out to fix them, even though I had no way to take the tractor to him."

**Allen Bradley, Willow Creek, Calif.:** Allen's impressed with his all-steel **Struck MH7000** Magnetic crawler tractor equipped with a backhoe/loader. "It's a terrific little tractor that does everything the company says it will. No problems ([www.struckcorp.com](http://www.struckcorp.com); ph 262 377-3300)."

**Christopher Sibert, Star City, Ark.:** He likes his 2008 **Stihl** FS80R weed trimmer. "I use it for everything from trimming around flower beds to cutting trails through the woods. I even used it one summer to cut down a 1/4-acre of 6-ft. tall thick grass. All I've replaced is the air filter. It's a great product."

**Will Rogers, Fort Wayne, Ind.:** "I like my 2010 **Mr. Heater** radiant tank top heater. It fits on top of a 20-lb. LP tank and delivers 10,000 to 15,000

btu's. At a cost of just \$30, this single head heater can't be beat. It covers an area of about 25 sq. ft. and can be used indoors or outdoors. I use one to heat my computer room, and another one at our lake cabin. I can easily pick the unit up and take it out on the ice when ice fishing. It's a good little heater for power outages."

**Dennis Huwe, Aguila, Ariz.:** "I like my 2009 **Lincoln** 115-volt wire feed welder. I already had one of these welders but didn't want to transport it to Arizona and back so I bought a second one. This new welder works as well or better than my other one."

**Kirby Kluger, Forsyth, Mont.:** "Over the years my 1984 **Stihl** 064 chainsaw has worn out five different bars cutting many cords of firewood. It always starts on the third pull and restarts whether it's warm or cold. The only trouble I've had was with the mounts holding the handlebar. They wore out and had to be replaced."

"My worst buy is my 2001 **Earthquake** posthole digger. The problem is that the drive gear wears out with very little use. We replaced the gear but it wore out in no time at all."

**Jake Herzog, Slingerlands, N.Y.:** Jake nominates his 2009 **New Holland** 1409 discbine as his "best buy". "This machine has performed beyond my expectations and is easy to service. It has easily accessible grease fittings. Also, it's made in the U.S."

"**SAS** handcrafted shoes are the most comfortable and durable shoes I've ever worn ([www.sasshoes.com](http://www.sasshoes.com); ph 877 782-7463). They cost a little more, but they're U.S.-made and



## 16-Year-Old Solar Water Heater

A simple open loop solar heat collector has provided hot water for Don Ficker and his wife for more than 16 years. From mid-April to mid-October, the Maine couple hardly ever has to turn on their electric water heater.

The home-built solar collector measures 4 by 30 ft. and is built right onto the roof. It consists of a plywood base overlaid with 2 by 4's. Plate glass from salvaged sliding doors lays over the 2 by 4's, which are notched on the bottom to accommodate ten 30-ft. sections of copper pipe that run across the collector. The pipes rest directly on the plywood.

"I used black Rustoleum to paint the plywood base and the copper pipe for increased heat absorption," says Ficker. "The ends of the copper pipe are connected with flexible automotive heater hose."

Fresh well water enters at the bottom of the collector and exits out the top where it's piped to an intake tap on the water heater. Well pump pressure is all that's needed. Draining the system for the winter is easy, says Ficker.

"The system has stood up well, and even



**Roof-mounted solar collector has provided hot water for Don Ficker for 16 years with no maintenance or repairs.**

at today's dollars, it wouldn't cost much," he says. "Once I got all the joints tight there was no leaking, and even 13 years later the flexible pipe has showed no sign of cracking."

Ficker is well aware that he's only saving \$10 to \$15 a month on his electric bill. But he appreciates that the heater makes him a little more independent. "And anything we can do to cut down monthly expenses is worth doing," he says.

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last twice as long as less expensive shoes. Unfortunately, the company doesn't make heavy-duty work shoes."

He doesn't like aftermarket tractor parts made offshore. "I bought a cheap replacement manifold for a customer's **Deere** 420 tractor. The casting and machine work on it were terrible. It took at least three hours to rework the manifold so it would fit without leaking. I would've been better off paying twice as much for the OEM part."

**James J. Countryman, Ontonagon, Mich.:** "My 2008 **Montana** 5740 C tractor starts and runs well and has controls that are easy to operate. I use this tractor to plow, plant, cut and bale hay, and to load and feed round bales. I also plow snow with it using an oversized snow bucket."

"I've put more than 800 hours on my 2007 **Kubota** RTV 900 utility vehicle with only routine maintenance. I use it to pull a water wagon and to haul wood and hay, and to do numerous other hauling chores around our farm and garden. It works great with a front hitch for backing 4-wheel wagons into place."

"My 2008 **Vermeer** Rebel round baler has performed as advertised. No problems."

**Russ Wahl, Cut Bank, Mont.:** Russ is impressed with his 2008 **Honda** Rincon ATV. "As with the other Honda ATV's we've owned, including four 3-wheelers, this model is dependable and starts every time. We use it to maintain more than 60 miles of fence and to do general farm work."

**Karl Malafey, Tiverton, R.I.:** "They're simply the best mowers on the market. No problems," says Karl, pleased with his 2008 **Scag** Turf Tiger 72-in. zero turn riding mowers ([www.scag.com](http://www.scag.com)). "We use one model to mow 8 acres every 5 or 6 days from early spring to late fall. We use the other one to mow 50 to 60 lawns on a regular basis."

**Frank Przybylski, St. Catharine, Mo.:** "Two years ago I bought a used 2001 **Chevrolet** 1/2-ton 4-WD pickup with about 198,000 miles on it from a local public works department. I drive this pickup on the road every day. It does a great job pulling trailers and is reasonably fuel efficient. No problems. I really like the tow/haul feature on the transmission."

"About eight months ago I bought a 1964 **Deere** 4020 tractor. I wish I had left the tractor where I found it. It ran good at the auction sale, but when I got it home it ran

poorly. I put new spark plugs in, but it still runs poorly and it drinks gas like a fish. On the plus side, I really like the tractor's powershift transmission."

**William Norris, Dowling, Mich.:** William's impressed with his 2008 **Toyota** Tundra 4-WD SR5 extended cab pickup equipped with a 5.7-liter engine and 6-speed automatic transmission. "This pickup has excellent fit and finish, and the automatic transmission is flawless. It pulls our 28-ft. fifth wheel RV like it's not even there. The 5.7-liter engine is a real beast. The company issued two factory recalls that were quickly taken care of. My only complaint was with the **Goodyear** tires on this pickup. I replaced them with **Michelins**, which work great."

**Ken Wittlief, Oronoco, Minn.:** "I'm well pleased with my 2007 **Deere** Gator CX utility vehicle. It's handy and dependable and will go almost anywhere. The box tips up easily. My wife loves to drive this machine."

**Alan D. Stevenson, Ulysses, Kan.:** "In 2004 I bought a used 2001 **Dodge** quad cab 3/4-ton, 4-WD pickup equipped with a 5.9-liter Cummins diesel engine and manual 6-speed transmission. I like it so much that I wouldn't trade it even for a new pickup of any brand. I bought it with 64,000 miles, and now it has about 172,000 miles but still runs and drives great. I really like the Cummins engine. It starts right up even in the coldest weather, and still uses less than a quart of oil per every 6,000 miles. It gets about 17 mpg around our farm and up to 22 mpg on the highway with plenty of power. Repairs have been limited to some U-joints and rear axle seals and a set of brakes. My goal is for this pickup to reach 450,000 miles. I love diesel engines and use them everywhere I can."

"My 1994 **GM** 3/4-ton pickup equipped with a 6.5-liter diesel engine and automatic transmission was a worst buy. In 10 1/2 years and 194,000 miles, it went through three transmissions and one set of engine heads, had numerous oil leaks, and many other problems. It went through at least three fuel injection pumps, which cost \$2,000 apiece to replace. The gauges quit working, the air conditioning failed, and there were overheating problems. Altogether I spent about \$18,000 on repairs. Then the engine oil cooler line blew out due to a poorly designed snap-in coupler, which wore out and destroyed the engine."