

Business Booms For Tractor Restorer

Lee Sackett may be the biggest tractor restoration specialist in the country. With more than 100 tractors finished and still to come, he has worked on tractors and equipment from Florida to California and many places in between. Today he and his nine-man crew continue to build up the business.

A mechanical engineer by training, Sackett was laid off shortly after 9/11. He decided to try to make some extra money restoring an old tractor. He took it to a show to sell it and ended up with orders to restore several other tractors. Soon he had a waiting list, and seven years later his business has grown dramatically.

At first he and his wife did it all. As the business expanded, he began hiring employees. He now operates out of two locations with three trained body and paint technicians, a manager who also handles parts, and five mechanics, three with diesel engine training and one a certified CNC machinist.

"The employees we've added are tremendous resources for the business, and with each one our expertise and quality have gone up a notch," says Sackett. "There's a small group of restorers in the country who work at a very high level of quality, and I think we can say we're in that group."

One sign of this quality level is a Gray brand tractor now starting restoration. Sackett just watched the same model, a Gray 22-40 Canadian Special, sell for just under \$100,000 at an Illinois auction.

Like all of the tractors his group works on, the Gray will follow a strict restoration program. The first step is to assess the tractor and develop a restoration cost estimate. A company spreadsheet compares previous restoration costs to come up with likely costs, barring surprises encountered during restoration.

They first make any needed mechanical repairs, replacing gaskets, wiring, radiator hoses, etc. "We usually recommend refurbishing or replacing the radiator, water pump, light bulbs, carburetor, ignition points, battery and spark plugs," says Sackett.

Disassembly follows mechanical repairs. Anything that cannot be repainted in place or that blocks another part from painting is removed.

Large parts are sand blasted with a "pressure type" sand blaster. The abrasive crystals used cut through grease, grime, old paint and rust to expose pure bare metal. Critical components are protected with specially fabricated metal plates bolted in place and sealed with silicone before blasting.

Bodywork removes dents and dings using modern and classic techniques. Sheet metal is made to look like new with fabricated steel patches where rust has eaten away the metal.

Sheet metal and parts requiring an extremely smooth finish get an etching primer followed by a high-build, sandable primer. Sanding of imperfections is followed by sealer and then paint.

"When it comes to the final paint job, we prefer single stage automotive paint such as Martin Senour or PPG brand," explains Sackett. "Some customers prefer the implement brand paint, but generally it is more difficult to get a perfect finish. The paint we use has a hardener added to it that gives it a better shine and more durable coat."

Once the paint has dried and the tractor reassembled, decals are applied. Bolt heads and other items are "touched up" by hand.

The restored tractor should look better than it did when it came off the assembly line," says Sackett. "The modern chemicals and processes we use will help to keep it that way."

Sackett says he isn't too concerned about talk of recession. He left for a week's vacation and came home to a mailbox and voice mail loaded with messages asking about restoration. He says there always seems to be someone with a tractor to restore.

One big change that Sackett noticed recently is a growing interest in antique implements. "We restored a Deere B with a Deere 101 corn picker," he says. "Having an implement with a tractor sets



With a nine-man crew, Sackett Tractor Restoration is one of the biggest tractor restoration specialists in the U.S. Photo shows restored "B" from photo below.



"The restored tractor should look better than it did when it came off the assembly line," says Sackett.

it apart from other restorations. Even if you don't have an implement, make a display that tells the tractor's story with pictures of before and after. That makes people stand around longer than if it were just another John Deere B."

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"Slider" Keeps Tape Measure Moving

Anyone who works a lot with a tape measure will be interested in this new "Slider" that allows the free end of the tape to slide smoothly over rough surfaces such as grass, carpet, roofing, decking, etc.

The 3-in. long Slider is made from plastic and is curved at one end. The end of the tape measure blade simply slips into a slot on the Slider.

"It turns a 2-person job into a 1-person job, using half the effort. It's perfect for plumbers, roofers, carpenters, landscaping, carpet layers, concrete workers, and so forth," says inventor Dennis Dodge.

"The Slider adds exactly 3 in. to the measurement. It's small enough to fit easily in your tool belt or pocket. And it makes a great stocking stuffer for Christmas."

Two Sliders sell for \$5 plus \$1 S&H; or you can buy five sliders for \$10 plus \$1.50 S&H.

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"Slider" allows free end of tape to slide smoothly over rough surfaces such as roofing.



End of tape measure blade slips into a slot on the 3-in. Slider

253 266-1380; DodgeandSons@yahoo.com; www.the-slider.com.



Adding tubing and an in-line filter can keep older tractor's fuel line from plugging up.

"Gas Feed And Filter" Keeps Fuel Flowing

Terry Young had a problem with loose rust settling at the bottom of the gas tank on his International Harvester 706 tractor, causing the fuel line to plug up. The Coffeen, Ill., farmer found a simple way to solve the problem.

He added a short upright length of 3/8-in. dia. tubing inside the tank to raise the level of the gas intake about 1 in. above the bottom. That way, rust or other debris

stays at the bottom of the tank. He also replaced the original sediment bulb with an in-line filter that's easy to replace.

C. F. Marley, Nokomis, Ill., used the same idea on his IH tractor (pictured) but added a brass shut-off valve that makes filter replacement easy.

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