# Allis Chalmers "Dragster" Turns Heads

You've never seen a tractor like this Allis Chalmers "dragster" built by Eric Del Ponte, West Bend, Wis. He built it by modifying a 1939 Allis Chalmers B, lowering the axles and adding big rear wheels and tires off a semi truck and drag racing tires to the front wheels. Oversize headlights and orange LED lights under the hood and rear end make the tractor glow bright orange at night.

"I built it mostly for looks but it works unbelievably well," says Del Ponte. "I tried to keep the tractor profile nice and low. Parts from Steiner Tractor helped to freshen up the tractor's original 20 hp, 4-cyl. engine, transmission, and gear-driven final drives."

The tractor is painted dull orange instead of Allis Chalmers orange. "I wanted the tractor to have its own identity," says Del Ponte. "To create the look, my brother Kyle applied a base coat of metallic orange tangerine paint and then 3 clear coats of matte clear. We painted the wheel hubs a dull metallic gray and applied the same matte clear on top."

He displayed the dragster for the first time at the recent SEMA auto parts show in Las Vegas. "It might be the first farm tractor ever to be shown there," says Del Ponte. "I built it last year after PAC Racing Springs of Detroit, Mich., saw a photo on my brother's Facebook page (The Redline Projects) of the tractor still in the beginning stages of construction. They contacted me last January and asked if I would display the finished tractor at their show booth.

To get the body down low, Del Ponte flipped the tractor's front axle and rear end upside down. He also rebuilt the front axle's suspension system, adding radius rods found on old 1930's hot rods to give the front end a fancier look.

He welded shut the exhaust, intake, oil fill, and temperature gauge holes in the hood to make it look nice and smooth. He also removed the tractor's stock cast iron exhaust manifold and used 1-in. dia. exhaust tubing to make the custom headers.

Del Ponte built a new steering column with custom support brackets. "With all the modifications there wasn't a lot of room to get on and off the tractor, so I made the steering wheel removable," he says. "By pushing on a small metal sleeve, I can disengage the entire steering wheel and remove it."

The original steering gearbox was worn out and a new aftermarket one wasn't available, so Del Ponte replaced it with a steering box designed for a Chevy Corvair and modified it to fit.

He totally rebuilt the area around the seat, providing a mounting point for the seat brackets, a receiver hitch, and a new place for the battery. Diamond plate steel was fitted and welded together to make the floorboards.

The seat mounts on a pair of metal rails and can be moved forward or backward – just like a car seat - by pushing down on a handle attached to a rectangular metal box located in front of the seat. "The box contains toggle switches and wiring for the gauges. I also added a cup holder in the center of the box," says Del Ponte.

The tractor's charging system was converted to 12 volts and the battery was relocated under the seat. A pair of small levers next to the seat serves as the choke and throttle. "The original throttle and choke levers were located on the steering column and added clutter, so my dad and I re-engineered them," says Del Ponte. "I also installed new electric Auto Meter gauges to monitor the oil pressure, temperature, and battery voltage at the base of the custom made steering column."


**Eric Del Ponte built this Allis Chalmers "dragster" by modifying a 1939 Allis Chalmers B, lowering the axles and adding big rear wheels and tires off a semi truck.**

The tractor's oversize headlights, along with many other parts, were bought from Speedway Motors (ph 800 979-0122; www.speedwaymotors.com). He mounted a K&N air filter directly onto the carburetor. The wire harness, choke, and throttle cables run along both sides of the chassis.

The tractor's 335/65 rear semi tires are mounted on 22 1/2-in. rims from Wold Wheel of St. Ansgar, Iowa (ph 800 443-9653 or 515 736-2205). "I had Shawn of Seylang Welding & Machining fabricate new center hubs to copy the 8-lug bolt pattern found on Ford F-250 3/4-ton pickups," says Del Ponte. "I wanted to use wide agricultural tires but couldn't find anything that would work, because as ag tires get wider they also get taller. So to get the desired height and width we were after, we went with semi tires."

The stock front wheels are fitted with 26/4.5-15 Mickey Thompson drag slick tires from Summit Racing Equipment and have a smooth tread pattern.

Del Ponte welded new material onto the tractor's original fenders to make them one-of-a-kind. "One of the biggest challenges was trying to get the fenders on both sides to look identical," he says.

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# Rural Craftsman Makes Amazingly Detailed Clocks

About 50 years ago Lars Romo's parents took him to the Bily Clock Museum in Spillville, Iowa, to view the amazingly detailed clocks made famous by the Bily brothers. "I was impressed by the intricate detail and told my parents that someday I wanted to build clocks just like those," Romo says. A half century later, Romo has realized his wish by hand-crafting 16 intricate Bily clocks, an Italian chandelier and numerous other elaborate woodworking projects.

Unlike most craftsmen who purchase wood for their projects, Romo cuts his own lumber. "I saw my own logs with a Woodmizer so I can examine the grain, control the board thickness and manage the curing process," Romo says. Twenty years ago a woodworking neighbor showed him how to prevent warping and cracking by dipping boards in a mixture of anti-freeze and water before curing. "I've never had a board crack or warp when I do that," Romo says.

For his clock-making Romo uses only quarter-sawed black cherry. Boards are first cut 1/2 in. thick, then to 3/8 in, 1/4 in. and even 1/8 in. for the smallest pieces. He traces complex scroll patterns on boards that range from just a few inches long up to about 18 in. Some pieces have multiple angles that require miniature compound cuts where there's really no room for error.

His replica Amiens, Tower and Apostle clocks each have about 600 pieces that required several thousand cuts. That time consuming task included drilling about 4,000 1/16-in. holes, inserting the scroll saw blade in each one, then making the minute radius cuts. Each clock takes about a year to complete. "Sometimes I'll drill 80 to 90 holes in a 2 by 6-in. piece and more than 200 holes in a 6 by 18-in. piece," Romo says.

One of his favorite projects was the Apostle clock, which has several 6-sided towers ranging from 1 to 4 in. tall. Each tower has six individual pieces that fit perfectly together in the round base and angle up to join in a pointed steeple. The 3-ft. tall clock is configured around a 12-in. wide altar that Romo built from a sketch he made based on the altar at Urland Church, near his farm.

Romo has built 16 complex clocks in 20 years of woodworking and worn out three different scroll saws in the process. "Originally I was going to build a clock for each of my four kids and then quit," Romo says, "then I came up with an idea to reduce the amount of 'designer firewood' I was generating." Romo modified his saw to accept a dremel tool that prevents the blade from chattering or deflecting to the side and ruining a complex pattern. With that improvement he was able to cut more efficiently with less waste, so he kept on building.

Romo's clocks line the living room walls of his farmhouse and he doesn't intend to sell them. He's happy to show them to visitors and has entered a few in woodworking contests. He won $600 in a contest sponsored by Woodmizer, the company that built his sawmill. A few years later he entered his Normandy clock and won $1,000. A Wisconsin collector offered him $4,000 for the Normandy, but Romo turned him down. "That one is special, and it's going to one of my kids someday," he says.

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**Most of Lars Romo's handmade clocks are patterned after models made famous by the Bily Brothers of Spillville, Iowa.**

**Clocks such as the one shown at left, each required several thousand cuts. Wooden fire engine clock, at right, has elaborate scroll designs in its perfectly round wooden wheels.**