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A-C Minibikes A Part Of His Collection

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

As Allis-Chalmers collectors and restorers, brothers Gary and Paul Roidt had been looking for an A-C minibike for something unique to work on. They aren't easy to find, so when one turned up on an online auction in nearby south-central Wisconsin, Paul decided to check it out.

Paul was going to pass on it because it had obviously been in a fire and needed a lot of work. But Gary talked to a friend who said that because it had some parts that are expensive to replace - belt guard, tailpipe and tailpipe heat shield - it was worth bidding on. They purchased it for a fair price and took it to their shop to assess the damage. There was a lot.

"It must have laid on its side after the fire. The engine shroud rotted away, and the front forks were really rusty," Roidt says.

But there was also good news.

"The fire must have happened early. The internals of the engine looked like new. By looking on the outside you wouldn't know; it was a pleasant surprise," he adds.

The minibikes were built by Gilson Brothers Co. in Plymouth, Wis., in the early 70's, when the minibike market was booming. Gilson labeled some of the bikes for A-C and Montgomery Ward. The Roidts' 5-hp. minibike had suspension and a lot of



Roidt brothers did much of the restoration on the minibikes themselves.

chrome. The brothers hired others to do the chrome and brake work but did the rest of the restoration themselves, including zinc plating, sandblasting and painting, between December 2021 and July 2022.

The finished minibike was a hit at the Gathering of the Orange in Baraboo, Wis.

"It's just a neat piece of history and cool to have the opportunity to have one and fix it up," Roidt says, adding he enjoyed seeing his nephew ride it in the parade.

Other young relatives will have a chance to ride it as well, and the Roidts hope to take the minibike to more shows.

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Pygmy Rabbit Brought Back From Near Extinction

The Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit is considered to be the smallest rabbit breed in the world. These tiny bunnies are native to the Pacific Northwest and eat sagebrush year-round. At full size, they can reach 12 in. long and weigh up to 1 lb.

Unfortunately, the rabbit is also known for something else that's small - its population. Disease, wildfires, predation, and, most significantly, habitat loss have brought the species to the brink of extinction.

In 2002, just 16 pygmy rabbits remained in Washington state. The Oregon Zoo and its conservation partners worked to restore this tiny population through an intensive breeding program. This process involved cross-breeding the remaining rabbits with wild Idaho pygmy rabbits to strengthen their gene pool. By 2007, 20 captive-bred rabbits were released into central Washington. Unfortunately, none remained in the wild one year later due to predation.

The team tried again in 2011, releasing 50 rabbits outfitted with microchips or radio collars. They were placed in a wire mesh enclosure within a larger nature preserve. This resulted in a smoother adjustment period to the wild while encouraging breeding and protecting the rabbits from predators. The program was deemed successful when a Columbia Basin Pygmy managed to breed



Photo courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

As of 2021, these tiny rabbits have experienced a bit of a bounce back but are still found in only two small parts of the Columbia Basin, where they were reintroduced through conservation efforts.

and give birth within its natural range.

As of 2021, these tiny rabbits have experienced a bit of a bounce back but are still found in only two small parts of the Columbia Basin, where they were reintroduced through conservation efforts. (A third population was lost in 2020 in the Pearl Hill wildfire). But as long as these populations exist, hope remains that this North American native will someday rebound and make its way off the near-extinction list for good.

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Self-Taught Machinist Builds Brass Clock

Rich Dossdall is detail oriented to the nth degree, a dedicated self-taught woodworker and machinist who's produced thousands of intricate hand-made parts over 30 years. Those parts have been used for restoring tractors, building replica steam engines, and even making parts for brass clocks.

"By 10th grade, I was a fairly good woodworker and had made gun cabinets, roll-top desks, coffee tables, kitchen and bathroom cabinets, and more. In 11th grade, I started building grandfather clocks and did that as a hobby for about 10 years, and then repaired them for several years after that," Dossdall says. "Eventually, my clock suppliers went out of business, so I thought it would be fun to build a clock of my own design from scratch. Everyone told me I was crazy to try it, but that just inspired me to prove I could do it."

Dossdall's clock project evolved over several months. He used 1/4-in. brass for the side plates and fitted every shaft with a ball or needle bearing of his design. He cut all the gears himself and used his CNC machine to engrave the dial. For the escapement, he copied a design from an 1850's pocket watch and scaled it up to the size he needed. The pendulum is a huge 4-in. brass valve that's half the size of a loaf of bread. It's supported by an eye hook linked to a copper cable that operates the clock mechanism. The valve is filled with lead shot to achieve the exact weight needed for continuous operation.

The stand is equally impressive, made of 1-1/4 in. copper pipe configured into a sturdy box shape that's 2 ft. wide, 2 ft. deep, and 5 ft. tall.



Richard Dossdall built a magnificent brass clock and mounted it on a frame made of copper pipes.

Dossdall says he thought about mounting the mechanism in a wood case, but then the intricate handiwork on the clock would've been hidden.

Dossdall says he built the clock in 4 to 5 mos. and spent about \$400 on materials. It was an interesting project, but not one that he's replicated. He prefers building motorized equipment or refurbishing old farm tractors back to their original condition, especially if those projects involve making specialized replacement parts.

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He Converts Antique Gas Lanterns To Electric

Tim Swartz of Volga, S.D., has made a name for himself by restoring and retrofitting antique gas lanterns. His interest in the equipment started at an early age. "Growing up, my family vacationed at our cottage in Ontario, Canada," says Swartz. "We lit the cottage each night with Coleman lanterns, as there was no electricity. I remember falling asleep listening to the hiss of the burning lanterns."

Six years ago, Swartz was gifted a 1937 American Gas Machine lantern by his father-in-law, a tool that had accompanied the family through many camping trips in Northern Minnesota. "I was fascinated as I was unaware that companies other than Coleman made lanterns," he says. "Thus began my interest in gas lantern history."

Swartz learned most of what he knows today from the Coleman Collector's Forum website. "Without the knowledge and expertise of these gentlemen, I'd have never been able to return these old lanterns to operating condition," he says. To date, Swartz owns approximately thirty lanterns dating from 1916 thru 1970. Each operates as originally designed, using pressurized white gas.

Swartz also enjoys retrofitting gas lanterns to give them new life with electric power. This requires him to completely disassemble the lantern and de-rust any damaged steel parts in a mild solution of molasses and water. Brass components are cleaned and polished, and Swartz drills holes into the tank to feed wires throughout so he can reconfigure it to electric. He attaches E12 sockets for lightbulbs and powers them with a standard cord and plug.

"I prefer not to electrify lanterns older than 1965, and I prefer those made in the



Swartz enjoys retrofitting gas lanterns to give them new life with electric power.

1970's and early 80's," explains Swartz. "Coleman made millions of lanterns during this time, and they are not as collectible as earlier models."

Today, Swartz sells lanterns at local craft shows and takes custom orders. While he's partial to rebranding the lanterns as classic tractors with original colors and retro decals, he's open to special requests. Pricing is around \$175 per custom lantern.

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