

Kerosene Annie Running After 100 Years

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

It's not often tractor enthusiasts get to restore a legend like Kerosene Annie (Vol. 18, No. 6). The 1910 Rumely prototype tractor wouldn't have fired up at the 2022 Western Minnesota Steam Threshers Reunion (WMSTR) without such an effort. It took hundreds of hours of work over a few weeks by a team of eight such enthusiasts from the U.S. and Canada.

"There's a good network of people out there who work on Rumelys," says Luke Steinberger, who, with the support of his wife, played host to the effort. "We opened up our house to team members from out of the area. We worked intensively for about a week and a half, putting in 300 man-hours in just 5 days."

The effort started when plans were made to feature Rumely tractors at the 2022 gathering. "We knew we had a chance of getting Kerosene Annie to the show, but we needed to get it operating," says Steinberger.

Kerosene Annie spent decades sitting behind the old Allis Chalmers factory in Milwaukee, Wis., before famed antique tractor collector Oscar Cook procured it. In 1998, Cook's collection was auctioned (Vol. 22, No. 5) and the forerunner of the Rumely family was purchased by J.R. Simplot for a planned museum. Eventually, it was put on display at Jack's Urban Meeting Place (J.U.M.P.) in Boise, Idaho (Vol. 46, No. 6).

"Oscar worked on it and had it running, but barely running, according to people who saw it," explains Steinberger. "Rob Beardon with Jack's Urban Meeting Place had already put about 1,000 hrs. into cleaning,



Model B Rumely (left) and Kerosene Annie (right).

painting, and getting it ready for display. He showed up at the farm and stayed for 4 weeks."

Beardon brought a new fuel tank and stack with him, while Steinberger supplied the shop and tools needed. Other team members included: Luke's son Eli, Clyde Hall and Lyle Stomp, Fillmore, Sask.; Kelly Tytlandsvik, Estevan, Sask.; and Dave Sundsahl and Stan Demeyere, Stephen, Minn.

"The biggest challenge was that the motor was very tight," says Steinberger. "We belted it up to another tractor to free it up, but it was still tight. There was a tight wrist pin on a piston."

The piston and rod were taken to Larson Welding & Machine in Fargo, N.D. The pin was pressed out, and the rod side was cleaned out to get the wrist pin to fit the way it should, with all labor donated by the shop.

Steinberger turned to Richard Kibble, Fort Shaw, Mont., for magneto repair. Kibble is in his upper 80's and has been doing magneto repair for decades.

"We reassembled the engine and replaced paper shim stock with brass and did a lot of work on the governor's springs so it would respond," recalls Steinberger. "We rebuilt the fuel pump, put in new plumbing, and put new woodwork on the platform."

Steinberger put the overhead gantry in his shop to good purpose handling heavy parts, including replacing the stack.

When all the work was done, and Kerosene Annie was running as it hadn't for more than 100 years, the move was made to the WMSTR gathering over this past Labor Day weekend.

"The time and effort of the volunteers and the contributions from so many to cover the

transportation costs were worth it," says Steinberger. "Kerosene Annie is a part of history. Having this tractor at the show was comparable to getting something out of the Smithsonian. It had run before, but never like this, pulling a 5-bottom plow and powering a sawmill while pulling 58 hp."

Another special guest at the WMSTR was one of the first production versions of Kerosene Annie. A Model B Rumely was loaned by the Divide County Historical Society, Crosby, N.D. It and other Rumelys will be the focus of their show this coming July 13-15.

The effort had special meaning to Steinberger. While he restores around three tractors a year in his shop, Rumelys are high on his list of favorites. He estimates he has restored about a dozen of them over the years and owns six. His connection to Rumelys goes back several generations.

"My great-grandparents farmed with Rumelys," he says. "One of mine is the same model they ran. That's what put the fire in my belly to help with this project."

The work done by the team will live on now that the famous tractor is back in Boise, Idaho. "Before the restoration, the tractor was on display in a glass box," says Steinberger. "We understand the box will now have a door, so Kerosene Annie can be taken out and used."

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Duane Helman restored this rare Fordson 9X experimental tractor, built in 1917, to its original "like new" condition.

again and asked if he still owned the tractor, he said yes, and I said well, you just sold it." They sealed the deal with a handshake, and he picked up the 9X, not knowing it was painted green and was missing its carburetor and manifold.

"Those parts were stolen while the tractor was at a show in the late 70's and Church didn't replace them," Helman says. "I had replacement parts to fit and put them on when I restored it."

The 9X is very unique with a solid frame where the engine, transmission, and rear housing are all one unit. It has a Holley single bowl carburetor along with a vaporizing manifold mixer that moves kerosene vapor into the 22-hp. engine. The engine is started with a hand crank located below the radiator. The ignition system was borrowed from the Model T cars that Ford built. A manual spark adjusting lever times the firing in relation to the piston position. If it's advanced too far the engine could kick the crank back and injure the person trying to start it. A retarded spark causes the engine to spit and sputter at higher

rpm's. "If everything is timed out just right, the engine fires right off," Helman says. Cooling is done with an oversized system that holds 11 gals. of liquid.

The drive system is a series of worm gears that delivers power from the engine to the 42-in. dia. rear wheels. Each wheel has 16 diagonal cleats. The 9X weighs 2,500 lbs. and could pull a 2-bottom plow and about 1,500 lbs. on the 3-hole drawbar that's integral to the rear gear housing.

After buying the tractor, Helman replaced the missing parts, sandblasted it, and painted it the correct color. He brought it to a show at Ford's Dearborn facility, and people admired the restoration. He says people told him it was parked very close to where it had sat in the weeds behind the Ford production plant for many years. "It's quite a piece of history. I've even got the auction bill from when it sold at the Greenfield auction," Helman says.

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Experimental Fordson Restored To "Like New" Condition

"As far as I know, I have the oldest Fordson experimental tractor built by Henry Ford that exists anywhere," says Duane Helman as he describes his flawless gray-bodied and red-wheeled gem. Nondescript without decals, it's identified only by the '9X' stamped into its engine block. "This tractor was one of about 50 'X series models' built by Henry Ford and his son Edsel in the summer of 1917. They were prototypes built to work out the bugs before manufacturing began on the 7,000 production model tractors that Ford and Son contracted for Britain and another 1,000 for Canada as they fought Germany in WWI. Those tractors eventually became known as Fordsons," Helman says.

"Back in the early 80's, I'd heard that a rusty old X9 had sold at a Greenfield Auction in Dearborn to a buyer named Cecil Church," Helman relates. "I didn't think much about that over the years and never saw the tractor at any shows. In the late 1990's, I was at a show in Waukeo, Iowa, and noticed a Fordson radiator for sale. When the seller found out I collected Fordsons, he asked if I'd ever heard of a 9X. I told him I'd read a magazine article about

one that was sold in the 1980's. Turns out the guy I was talking to was Cecil Church, the buyer. He still owned the tractor, and he was willing to sell it. The next morning, I saw him

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