

Editor and Publisher

Scott Geyer (scott@farmshow.com)

Managing Editor

Mark Newhall (mark@farmshow.com)

Contributing Editors

Jim Ruen (edgecom@acegroup.cc)

Dee Goerge (dee_goerge@yahoo.com)

Lorn Manthey (redoakridge@mac.com)

Lydia Noyes (lprunner58@gmail.com)

Bruce Derksen (dbksen39@live.ca)

Chad Smith (chad.farmshowmagazine@gmail.com)

Circulation (circulation@farmshow.com)

Mary Lunde, Maddie Kammerer,

Jenn Wetschka

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Finnbogason built a generator from John Deere garden tractors.

“Lil Gen Deere” Made From Ten Different Tractors

By Bruce Derksen, Contributing Editor

Intending to get an old 1969 John Deere 140 garden tractor running, Al Finnbogason bought a 16-hp. Kohler engine and generator out of a Winnebago hoping to split them.

“After thinking about it for a while, I decided to keep them together and try to make a mobile powerhouse,” says Finnbogason. “I’ve always been a Deere guy, so I measured, figured, and accumulated the needed parts and pieces from over 10 tractors to make

it fit together. It’s all accessible. I kept it as much JD as possible, except the motor and generator from the Winnebago.”

He added 3/8-in. steel to his tractor to give it an extra foot in the front section and match the look of the John Deere 4020.

“Trying to get the front end the perfect length, figuring out how it would look most like the 4020 was the trickiest part. I needed to make everything fit and be accessible to

utilize the generator power,” Finnbogason says.

To improve the 4020’s look, he installed side grilles that pop on and off. He also combined pieces of three different hoods to make the extended one he needed.

“The hood took forever,” he says. “Finding complete and good condition hoods was rare. So, when I finally found some, I bit the bullet, hacked everything up, and tried to make three into one. I screwed up the first time, but with a little more patience I got it to turn out darn good.”

The ‘69 still has the hydro disengage that works well with the added generator. When the brake is applied, the tractor locks down, plus the generator doesn’t spin the whole time.

“If I need power at the house, I just drive up and plug in what I want to it,” he says.

He also installed a sleeve hitch on the rear to grab on to trailing equipment. In the future, he’d like to add a front-mounted electric mower that he could hook on to and plug into the generator. He’d also like to change out the small fuel tank with something larger to cut back on refueling stops.

“It was such an oddball to build, everyone that sees it gives it a second look. Now, I use it to push the little bit of snow we get out of the driveway with a small blade. Plus, I wanted a little Deere for my 5-year-old grandson to drive. He loves it.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Al Finnbogason, 79 Lynnwood, Campbell River, B.C., Canada V9H 1G9 (ph 778-552-4569; norseman3@yahoo.com).



CFIS Museum features diesel pumps, injectors, turbos, test stands and more.

All Things Diesel Museum

Erik and Amy Schroeter grew up visiting diesel-related museums with their father Arnold, founder of Central Fuel Injection Services Company (CFIS). For the past 20 years, they haven’t had to go far. Arnold started the Schroeter Diesel Technology Museum in Estherville, Iowa, in 2000. Erik and Amy now run it in addition to CFIS.

The museum includes more than 1,000 tools, equipment, fuel injection parts, diesel pumps, nozzles, test stands, turbo cutaways, memorabilia and reference materials.

“During summers, we would go looking for diesel stuff, and he knew people who had it,” says Erik Schroeter. “He was a former president of the Association of Diesel Specialists (ADS), the trade association for diesel injection. They had a large museum in Kansas City they planned to close. We talked about it and said we would take it in. Then we heard from a museum in Windsor, Conn., and another in Wisconsin.”

Combined with old parts, tools and more their father had kept, the collection kept

growing. Soon they were getting donations from others in the industry.

“I love going through it,” says Schroeter, a history major in college. “We have prototypes and cutaways used in training from the 1950’s and 1960’s and into the 70’s. As models were phased out and mothballed, they were donated to the museums and then to us.”

Schroeter admits that the museum contains lots of oddball stuff, like an injector from a kamikaze plane that crashed into a U.S. Navy ship in the South Pacific.

“Someone on that ship found that part and saved it,” says Schroeter. “I don’t know why, but I’m glad they did.

“We have even older things, like the injector pump from the first diesel truck that ran in the U.S.,” he adds. “The man who ran the museum in Connecticut drove that truck when he was young. Bosch borrowed it for their 150th anniversary.”

Exhibits range from large to small, from train locomotive governors and injectors to a prototype 3-cyl. diesel outboard motor from

Johnson Outboards. It’s about the size of a pop can.

“They considered introducing it in the 1960’s,” says Schroeter. “We have injectors off of cargo ships and tanks, as well as gas injection pumps, including an original Messerschmidt injection pump.”

Schroeter explains that the Germans were outmaneuvering the allies early on. Ally plane engines were carbureted, and the Germans had injection pumps.

Other defense industry exhibits include a Cummins pump with a Westinghouse electric motor governor generator used to launch missiles. A non-diesel-related item on display is an International Harvester M1 Garand rifle.

“In the 1950’s, the War Department was looking for more places to make rifles in case the factories on the East Coast were wiped out with nuclear bombs,” says Schroeter. “International Harvester bought a plant in Indiana and made a couple hundred thousand M1s there.”

Another unique collection at the museum involves Russian knockoffs of Detroit injectors. “During the Cold War, they were trying to steal everything they could,” says Schroeter.

The museum continues to grow. “We are always looking for more,” says Schroeter. “We love the history of diesels, love looking at them, and we love to share the knowledge.”

The museum is only 20 miles south of I-90 and east of Spirit Lake, Iowa. Schroeter says it’s popular with customers who stop in to pick up a diesel pump from CFIS.

“School groups visit, and we are always open by appointment,” says Schroeter. “If people make an appointment, I can walk them through it. If not, they are welcome to visit and walk through on their own.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Schroeter Diesel Technology Museum, 2403 Murray Rd., Estherville, Iowa 51334 (ph 712-362-4200; www.dieselfuelinjectionmuseum.com).