

Power Chair Makes Great Parade Ride

Kenny Vandeventer has a front-seat view when he joins in local parades. At first glance, his vehicle appears to be just a seat.

"I saw something similar at a tractor show 4 years ago and told the owner what a great idea it was," says Vandeventer.

With that concept in mind, he returned home and looked over parts he had salvaged. The starting point was a Chevy Chevelle differential and rear end a friend had given him some 25 years ago. He also had a 16-hp., V-twin Vanguard engine and a 3-speed transmission to work with, as well as a battery, gas tank, pulleys, chains and sprockets.

For the frame, he had 2-in. sq. tubing left over from a trailer build for his riding mower (Vol. 45, No. 6).

His inspiration at the show had the differential going forward. This placed the drive sprocket and roller chain between the operator's legs. Vandeventer decided to flip the differential around.

"I welded the tubing to the rear end where the leaf springs once attached, giving it a 5-ft. long, 6-ft. wide frame with cross members," says Vandeventer. "I built mounts to fasten the engine and transmission to the frame, propped it up level and attached them."

A drive belt from a small pulley on the engine transfers power to a large pulley mounted to a clutch disk on the transmission,



Vandeventer built his parade chair using a Chevy differential, Vanguard engine, and a 3-speed transmission.

all to the rear of the axle. He used a jackshaft to transfer power from the transmission output ahead of the axle to the differential input behind the axle. The output from the transmission is a small sprocket with a larger sprocket on the differential.

"Doing it this way made it more compact, and the rotation was just right to run the differential backward," says Vandeventer. "The pulleys and sprocket ratios help gear the drive speed down."

He used expanded metal left over from

another trailer project (Vol. 46, No. 1) for footrests. He also added belly wheels front and back to keep the rider level while adjusting for uneven surfaces.

The dolly wheels are welded to 4 by 6-in. channel iron that is hinged to the frame. Vandeventer spring loaded them by attaching one end of a leaf spring to a cross member with the other end over the plate. A T-bolt threaded through a nut on the leaf spring applies tension to the dolly wheel plate.

Vandeventer can increase or decrease suspension by turning the T-bolt. When he loads the power chair on a trailer when going to a parade, he decreases tension on the front wheel, removes the leaf spring and flips the wheel up and out of the way. This allows him to drive the chair onto a trailer.

"I have steel rollers on the ends of tubing at all four corners of the chair," says Vandeventer. "They help get it up and onto the trailer when the belly wheel is out of the way."

The seat is hinged to the framework so he can flip it forward to work on the engine and drive. When in place, it sits on springs mounted to the frame to provide suspension.

Vandeventer used new master brake cylinders, wheel cylinders and brake lines. Each master cylinder is controlled by a push rod that is hooked to a lever in front of the operator.

"When I pull back on a lever, it applies pressure to the wheel cylinder and slows the



With the seat flipped up the mechanics are shown.

wheel down to turn gently or locks it to spin around like a zero-turn mower," explains Vandeventer. "A belt tightener on the drive belt in the rear is connected to a deadman foot pedal. If I take my foot off the pedal, the power chair stops. However, it's spring loaded, so I can push it all the way down, and it stays down without keeping tension on my foot."

To change gears, Vandeventer reaches behind the seat where a gear shift lever sticks up on the right-hand side. The ignition key and throttle are located under the seat.

While "Pappy's Power Chair" was complicated to make, Vandeventer says it was fun. The whole family enjoys it.

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Small Town Grocer Saved By A Vote

When the only grocery store in Erie, Kan., was going to close, the city bought it. One of only a few city-owned groceries, the Erie Market is holding its own.

"We have done well in sales with the economy the way it is," says Cindy Garland, store manager. "But the people who shop here don't care about the economy. They appreciate the convenience."

While the city council approved the purchase, it was first approved by the town's voters. When the owners of the store announced their plans to retire, the city sent out a letter with a single question to residents: Do you approve the City of Erie purchasing Stub's Market?

Residents responded in the positive. Of the 311 who sent back an answer, 213 (68.5%) said yes.

If the answer had been no, Erie's 1,047

residents would have been left with only the local Dollar General store, which carries no fresh produce. Their other option was to drive 13 miles one way or 18 another. Some residents don't have cars.

The city paid less than \$500,000 for the store and its contents and took ownership at the start of 2021. Luckily for them, Garland, who left the area to carve out a career in the restaurant business, was planning to retire to her hometown.

"I went from managing a \$4 million per year business with 100 employees to running the Erie Market," says Garland. "The biggest challenge is to increase volume while trying to lower prices. Keeping store shelves stocked has also been a challenge. The big stores get first dibs and better prices, and we get the leftovers."

The city council recognized they might

have to subsidize store operations if it lost money. Until the furnace and air conditioner failed, that wasn't necessary.

"The city is subsidizing us now, but we are confident we will see a big turn to the profit side next year," says Garland.

Residents rely on the store for groceries and also fresh lunches, like BBQ pork and tacos. The store also hosts a Champ's Chicken freshly fried chicken outlet.

Keeping the store open has had a positive impact on the town in other ways. Since the city committed to the purchase, a new daycare center opened, as well as a restaurant and coffee shop. The director of the city library was quoted in a recent story, "Once the ball started rolling, we started getting people saying, well, we could do this, and we can do this."

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Erie, Kan., purchased its only grocery store to keep it open for residents who would have to drive around 15 miles to another grocery store.

Giant Mower Becomes A Tourist Attraction



After a year and a half of work, Herb completed a giant 4,200-lb., 18-ft. tall and 11-ft. wide representation that currently sits in front of their Deep Creek Tool Museum.

Herbert and Linda Higginbottom of Enderby, British Columbia run a small museum on a non-existent advertising budget. To get the word out, they're always on the lookout for unusual items.

"One day, Linda told me everyone likes big things," Herb laughs. "She was pushing a manual lawn mower and asked me if I could build a really big one. So, without thinking, stupid me says 'yeah'. Then I was stuck trying to come up with something."

When he talked with some engineers about the idea, they asked for his blueprints, but Higginbottom didn't have any. He just measured the small mower and did some multiplying.

After a year and a half of work, Herb completed a giant 4,200-lb., 18-ft. tall and 11-ft. wide representation that currently sits in front of their Deep Creek Tool Museum.

Higginbottom sourced all the metal from scrap and salvage yards and made the entire mower from scratch. He built a set of 12-in. wide rollers to roll the steel for the wheels. The blades were scrap bars he cut into arcs and twisted into the reels and saddles using come-alongs and clamps to pull them into

position. The wheels needed to be 7 in. wide but he could only get 5-in. steel, so he bought extra 2-in. strapping to make them to scale.

"The handle is 2 by 12-in. wood and has spacers inside to hold it rigid, just like if you build a tank, you need baffles. I have similar baffles spaced every 4 ft. to keep it together."

Higginbottom says people come from all over the world to get their pictures taken with the giant mower.

"All the older folks can relate to it because they pushed one when they were kids. Some loved them and some hated them, but they all remember them," he says.

Higginbottom says he has no idea what it cost to build the giant mower as the material was from the salvage yard or what he already had lying around.

"We think it's the largest one out there," he says. "With the hundreds of people from around the world who've stopped in, nobody has ever seen another one like it."

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