

Homemade Tractor Comes Full Circle

Robert Pomnitz wrote to FARM SHOW in the fall of 2023 to describe the journey of a homemade tractor he built more than 50 years ago in 1972. He built the tractor from spare parts, ran it for a few years, sold it, and reacquired it 35 years later.

To build it, Pomnitz says he sourced an Austin A55 motor and Austin A40 gearbox for power and the drive train. "I drove a 1950's FJ Holden vehicle and had quite a few spare parts back then," Pomnitz says, "so I used the differential and front hubs from my extra supply." He sourced the 4-in. by 2-in. channel iron for the chassis from extra steel used in shed trusses.

Pomnitz says he used his engineering background to build other components. He made a shaft and extra bearing to fit a 3/4-in. pitch chain, then produced sprockets to accommodate a four-to-one reduction to the front of the Holden differential. Materials for the center pivot front axle came from his dad's wrecked pto header. He shortened the axles of the vehicle so it would fit inside a 4-ft. by 7-ft. trailer, then he installed 5.25-in. by 10-in. front tires and 8.25-in. by 15-in. rears.

Pomnitz says the tractor ran well, and to give it work, he built a 5-ft. wide cultivator. A few years later, a farmer he worked for gave him a complete hydraulic system from a Massey windrower, which he used to build a front-end loader.

"I wanted to form an FEL bucket, but nobody on the peninsula could roll a piece of 1/8-in. plate steel 4 ft. long," Pomnitz says. "I made a roller myself from my dad's old GL200 header axles."

Pomnitz sold the tractor more than 35 years ago, but that's not the end of the story. "I got to thinking about it last year and decided to



Pomnitz built this tractor in 1972, sold it 35 years ago, and has since bought it back and restored it.

look up the guy who bought it," Pomnitz says. "He'd sold it about 20 years ago, so I looked that fellow up and found the tractor sitting outside in the weather."

The tractor had a new clutch and a new differential, but the rest was all original. "The gearbox had probably seen better days, and the engine was locked up, so I decided to buy it and restore it," Pomnitz says. After a brief rehabilitation, the tractor is now cleaning driveways and yards and cultivating, and he's entered it in local small tractor-pulling events.

"It looks and runs better than it did when I built it 50 years ago," Pomnitz says, "and I intend to keep it in good condition and not sell it again."

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Norris DB thresher before restoration.

Rare English Tractor Restored

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Yorkshire-born and raised Malcolm Norris has a rare tractor, and he knows it. Reportedly, less than 200 David Brown VTK 143, 4-cylinder, industrial tractors were built. They feature a rear-mounted winch and a front-mounted pulley. A shaft from the winch runs alongside the frame to power the large pulley between the hood and the left front fender.

The heavy-duty tractors, which were built in Yorkshire in the late 1940's, were popular as a power source for threshing machines, thanks to their pulley. They earned the nickname Thresherman tractors.

Norris' father, Geoff, worked on the

tractors as a mechanic before buying one built in 1946 for his sawmill business. Norris shared the detailed story of his dad's use of the tractor, as well as his own restoration of it decades later, in an issue of Farm Collector magazine.

The tractor was an all-around power source for his dad, whether in the sawmill, winching logs out of timber, or towing equipment out of bogs. When he retired in 1986, the tractor was left in a corner of the yard. After his father died, Norris decided to try to get it running, something he did over more than 6 years.

Unable to start it, he removed the engine, took it apart, rebuilt it, and sandblasted

He Mulches And Loads Leaves Together

Dan Sanders loads his leaves while he mulches them. A simple addition to the mouth and exhaust of the mulcher does the trick.

"We've got four old maple trees on our property, and they produce a lot of leaves," says Sanders. "Last year, a friend of mine gave me a leaf mulcher, which works great. However, it came with a small bag that was a hassle to unhook and empty."

Sanders took care of the problem by turning the mulcher into a self-feeder and chopped leaf loader. He removed the old leaf snorkel and fabricated a larger mouth using galvanized sheet metal. He left a flange on one end that fit the old mouth. For a final touch, he epoxied an old saw guard to the edge of the new scoop to prevent cutting himself on the sharp metal.

"It's amazing how fast it pulls the leaves in," says Sanders. "I just rake them up to the mouth, and it sucks them in."

Sanders eliminated the time-consuming leaf bag at the mulcher as well. In its place, he fabricated an adapter that went from the oval bag throat to an 8 ft. length of 7-in. round duct pipe. Once he bolted the two together, he had a leaf thrower. All he needed was a catcher for the other end.

"I have an old pickup with a rack on it that I covered with a tarp," says Sanders. "I cut a hole in the rack's rear gate for the pipe, and the leaves blow right in."

Sanders says the mulcher has so much blowing power that he can only run it at an idle. "If I throttle it up, it will blow the tarp off," he says.

The mulched leaves find a ready home



Sanders turned a leaf mulcher into a self-feeder and chopped leaf loader.

among local garden club members, adds Sanders. "I delivered two loads this fall and charged them \$20 to cover gas," he says. "The mulcher and pipe have been a godsend for me. My wife started inviting her friends to a leaf-raking party. They think that's fun, so now all I have to do is push the leaves toward the mulcher's mouth until the pickup box is full."

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the rest of the tractor. Where he could, he restored, rather than replaced, as he had to do with the fenders.

"It has been surprising how many parts were salvageable," says Norris. "Just by cleaning parts and spending a bit of time on them, I've been able to save a lot of the original tractor."

While headlamps were restorable, rear light brackets were not. Norris had exact copies made, even though they differed from standard David Brown light brackets. Norris chose to restore the tractor as his father had used it.

Throughout the process, Norris felt his dad's presence. "My father's words would enter my mind several times a day," he says, "as if he was commenting on the job, saying things like, 'That needs a spring washer on it' and 'You'd better put a spot of grease on that so the next man can get it off' and questions like, 'Why have you left that bolt on so long?' or 'Can you do that a better

way?' All of which made me feel like he was there with me."

In the end, Norris had a tractor that looked almost new and handles like it. He reports the two low gears were suitable for towing, while the top gear has a maximum speed of 12 mph.

"It really is lovely to drive," he says.

There are a few things that were left untouched, such as the steering wheel, which is a direct connection to his father's hands. A bent piece of steel at the base of the winch was also left untouched, and there are grooves in the side rollers.

As he relates in the article, "...these things are part of the tractor's character and story, and I knew the man who made those marks."

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Malcolm Norris on his father's tractor, now restored.