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**Wooden A joins a large stable of A-C tractors which Croll has amassed in the nine years since he retired.**



## Rare Wooden Tractor Looks Like A Real A-C

"I have more than 100 tractors in my collection and all of them run and drive just fine except one," says E.J. Croll with a grin, knowing the people he mentions that to will wonder why one doesn't work. He's quick to tell them, "That one's my wooden A, a 2,500 lb. replica of the real Allis-Chalmers A models built from 1936 to 1942."

The life-size A, named Woody, was built by Bill Sontag of Mantua, Ohio. It was featured in a 2009 issue of FARM SHOW (Vol. 33, No. 3).

Croll has always been on the lookout for unusual A-C models and says he spotted the wooden A at a tractor show several years ago. He asked if it was for sale, which it wasn't, but a few years later, Sontag's family called and said it was available.

"That's when things got really interesting," Croll says. "They were hauling it home from a show behind a pickup when the trailer it was on came loose and landed in the ditch. The wooden tractor was badly damaged." Croll says. "The fenders were broken, parts

were falling off, and it almost looked like kindling."

He was able to buy it and, about two years later, hired Doug Laborie of Portage, Ohio, to rebuild it.

Croll says, "Laborie wasn't a tractor guy, but he knew woodwork, so he took the entire tractor apart, repaired it all and put it back together."

Croll now has his wooden A parked in a shed next to the actual A tractor that Sontag used as a template for making parts.

Sontag used about 1,000 board feet of treated tongue and groove 1 by 6 lumber to build the tractor. Its steering wheel is made of oak, the sparkplug wires and pipelines were made from grapevines, and basket-weaving cane was used for the magneto wires. The tractor has a metal rear axle that supports the weight of the body. It connects to a small transport frame powered by a golf cart motor, allowing him to move it easily.

The A joins a large stable of A-C tractors which Croll has amassed in the nine years since he retired. Included in that collection is a 6-12 built in 1916 with a single wheel trailing behind. Croll also has two 6-16s built a few years later with double wheels trailing behind.

"They're the real antiques, and I've got many others, including letter and number models and a few prototypes."

Croll says he's got a small fortune tied up in the wooden tractor, but "it's the only one on the planet, so I guess that's how I justify it."

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**Crosley Farm-O-Road could be equipped with a hydraulic drawbar, a canvas cover, and metal skis under the front wheels, allowing it to plow snow.**



## Car Company Launched A 4-WD UTV In 1950

In today's age of UTV performance, tech, comfort and high cost, it's difficult to comprehend that in 1950, an all-purpose UTV with 4-WD cost just \$795.

A tiny 26.5-hp cast iron overhead cam engine powered the Crosley Farm-O-Road model FOR-1. Shifting was through a Warner 3-speed T-92 transmission. It weighed just 1,100 lbs., had a 63-in. wheelbase, and a small cargo box. The FOR-2 model, which added a hydraulic drawbar and optional front or rear PTO, sold for \$939.

Both models were all-purpose utility vehicles that could pull trailers or wagons, mow grass and pull a small plow, harrow, cultivator, hay rake or seeder. FOR-2, with its hydraulic drawbar and PTO options, could easily operate a mounted sickle bar mower, a post hole digger or spring blocks.

The FORs didn't actually have 4-WD as we know it today. Power went only to the rear axle. However, owners mounted 5.00-12 Goodyear Sure Grip agricultural duals on the rear wheels and called their rigs 4-WD. It was a practical idea for tough conditions and was good for conversation.

Farm-O-Road vehicles were the product of inventive genius Powel Crosley Jr. and the Crosley Motor Company. Although now

a footnote in automotive and manufacturing history, Crosley was a true entrepreneur and skilled inventor in the early 1900s.

He'd made a fortune in the early 1920s by inventing and selling thousands of home radios for about \$20. A few years later, he invented the Shelvador, a high-quality, low-cost refrigerator with patented shelving. That venture led him into gas and electric ranges, washers and electric ironers. Funds from those inventions gained him entrance into farming, broadcasting and major league baseball as owner of the Cincinnati Reds in 1934. For years, the team played in Crosley Field, named after him.

Even with all his success, one of his biggest dreams was to build an economical vehicle. He tried in 1917 and failed. Nearly 20 years later, with profits made in other businesses, he built a working prototype of a small car. More than 300 of his appliance dealers signed up to sell it.

The car had an 80-in. wheelbase, almost 15 in. shorter than a VW Beetle. It weighed just 925 lbs., was powered by a 12-hp Waukesha air-cooled twin-cylinder engine and sold for just \$250. About 2,000 units were sold in its debut year.

Variations of the original were added in

1940 and 1941. One was the Woody Wagon, with a small cargo box. Others included Parkway and Panel delivery vehicles, a station wagon and a Convertible Coupe. With the U.S. entry into WWII, Crosley turned its auto plants to producing proximity fuses for wartime use. They would detonate an anti-aircraft shell close enough to an enemy plane to destroy it.

After the war, Crosley was slow to return to automobile production. Its 1947 model cars had a new 44-cu. in. displacement COBRA engine that weighed just 133 lbs. and produced 26 hp. The engine had been used to power refrigeration units and portable generators during the war, but engineers warned that it had design flaws for use in a car. The company produced 19,000 units in 1947 and 29,000 units in 1948, regardless. Engine problems began surfacing in 1949, and by 1950, buyers had many other choices from the "Big 3" automakers.

In the spring of 1952, with clouds building over his auto business, Crosley sold out to General Tire, which quit producing autos at his plants and retrofitted them for tire production. Crosley cars were soon relegated to low-cost auto resellers, and many were just abandoned.

Those that did survive were scooped up by hobbyists, who grew into a tightly knit owners' group known today as the Crosley Collectors Club. More than 800 CCC members worldwide still keep their tiny cars in top condition. They show them at local events and to other owners at the national Crosley show. The 2025 event is July 7-12 at the Fulton County Fairgrounds in Wauseon, Ohio. Attendees can register in one of 15 different stock, non-stock and additional show classes, including those for best Crosley picture, best non-automotive product, most original car and highly modified Rat Rods. Other awards are given for the longest distance driven or trailered, as well as a Hard Luck award.

Show director Jim Ballman says the event typically draws 400 or more entries, and the show goes on rain or shine.

"It's always tremendous fun and camaraderie for Crosley owners, who share a special bond."

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