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Collector Restored Rare A-C Tractors

E.J. Croll says that locating a very old and very specific 100-year-old motor cultivator tractor for his Allis-Chalmers collection was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. After years of searching, he finally bought

one at a Nebraska estate auction. Much to his surprise, another 6-12 showed up a few months later, and he bought that one, too. The tractors are two of only 1,500 6-12 models that A-C built between 1918 and 1926. Croll

says he bought them even though they were in tough condition.

The price of a new 2,500-lb. 6-12 was around \$800 in the early 1900s. That was a lot of money at the time, but the 6-hp tractor could pull small horse-drawn implements, including a plow, disk, hay mower or rake. It also produced 12 hp on its belt pulley and didn't need to be fed, harnessed or worked with a set of reins.

The tractor's tiny Le Roi engine was mounted above a transmission that sat between two large steel wheels. A 6-in. tubular trailing arm extended toward the back. There, the operator sat on a ventilated steel seat mounted above a small frame supported by one or two steel wheels. The tractor articulated just behind the engine and turned as the operator rotated the steering wheel. The rear wheels could be removed when the tractor was hitched to an implement that had an operator seat.

Croll shipped his first 6-12 to Wendell Kelch in Ohio for restoration. He says Kelch's 50 years of experience restoring

vintage tractors was exactly the expertise he wanted for his rare and special A-C.

"My 6-12 was completely rusted and frozen in the center so it wouldn't articulate," Croll says. "It had a hole in the bell housing because it'd been modified with an electric starter. I wanted it restored to original condition, so the starter had to be removed and the hole repaired. They were able to do that."

The carburetor, radiator, clutch and other components had to be repaired or replaced. After the rust was removed, the tractor was primed, painted a deep green color and detailed with gold striping on the hood. A stylized graphic symbol was added to the tubular frame. The original brass Le Roi engine plate is also mounted on the tractor.

Croll was extremely pleased with the restoration and says the tractor runs and drives well. Now he's working on restoring the second tractor to equally pristine condition.

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Two Farmall Ms painted in colors representing Michigan State and the University of Michigan parked next to each other in the staging area of the 2024 Mackinac Bridge Antique Tractor Crossing.

Farmall Ms Painted In University Colors

There's a sea of brand colors when nearly 1,500 tractors participate in the annual Mackinac Bridge Antique Tractor Crossing every September. Two of the most unique entries in 2024 were Farmall Ms, painted in the school colors of Michigan State

University and the University of Michigan.

Jerry Bement of Dowagiac, Mich., has driven his 1950 M sporting the green and white colors of the Michigan State Spartans since 2014. Paul and Jo Burchardt of New Salem, Mich., drove their 1941 M painted in

maize and deep blue, colors of the Michigan Wolverines. Both of the owners profess allegiance to their respective universities.

A plaque on the side of Bement's Farmall lists MSU as a Bement family tradition. Jerry's father Ben graduated from MSU in 1937, Jerry in 1973 and 1980, his sister Natalie in 1979 and 1984, and his son Jess in 2005. Jerry and Jess put their MSU agronomic degrees to good use on their southern Michigan farm. Natalie used her agronomy degree working in the MSU Extension Department.

Jerry says he painted his Farmall in MSU colors in 2013 as a tribute to his father, who dearly loved MSU, although he never participated in the Mackinac parade. He farmed with an M as his largest tractor until 1957, then acquired a 400. Jerry and his son still farm with red tractors and machinery.

Bement has driven in 14 of the 16 parades since the event began. He says the experience and atmosphere of driving an open station tractor across the 5-mile long bridge is amazing, something that people who drive a car or truck never get to feel.

Seeing Bement's MSU Farmall in the staging area for the parade was the impetus for Jo Burchardt to ask her husband, Paul, to find a similar M and paint it in Wolverine colors.

She says, "Paul thought I was crazy, but we found an M, and when we went to pick it up, the owner had an MSU flag in his shed. I told Paul not to say a word about what we had planned."

Paul Burchardt and a friend painted the body of the M Michigan blue with a bright maize flare on top of the radiator cowl. The wheel rims, seat and decals are also maize. A large sign on the seat back reads "Go Wolverines." An authentic circular University of Michigan maize logo, featuring the distinctive block letter M, identifies the tractor model.

Before the 2024 parade, they parked close to Bement's MSU tractor in the staging area, where both owners fielded plenty of questions and comments. Jo Burchardt is quick to tell people that their tractor and driving it in the parade are all for fun. She says it's a lot like opening deer season, where once you've got the bug, it's in your blood forever.

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Ron Brown and granddaughter on Nancy's Gibson.

One Gibson In His Collection Is Special

It took Ron Brown 47 years from the time he saw his first Gibson tractor until he bought one in 2016...and it was the very same one he had first seen.

"I started dating my late wife Nancy in 1969, and her dad had a Gibson," recalls Brown. "I was into drag racing and thought it would make a good rig with the frame extended out and a big motor on it."

Luckily for Brown, his soon-to-be father-in-law refused to sell it. Later, he sold it to someone else. Fast forward to 2016, and Brown located the guy who bought it.

"In 45 minutes, I paid for it, loaded it on my trailer and brought it home," says Brown. "I restored it, and Nancy recognized it right away. Her dad was in the nursing home, and when she mentioned it to him, he told every

little detail about it, although he no longer recognized her."

Brown named the tractor Nancy's Gibson. In early 2017, he and Nancy took it to a parade. While loading it for the trip home, she noted that the tire treads were dirty.

After she died that summer, Brown was determined to keep Nancy's Gibson clean, so he bought one he could get dirty. Soon he added another...and another.

"I now own 30 of them, with 12 in running condition," he says. "They're all model As and model Ds. The bigger Gibsons are nice, but I like to stay with the smaller ones."

Many in the collection are in running order, and Brown plans to restore one for each of his grandkids. Meanwhile, he's still in the market.

While Nancy's Gibson remains his favorite, the Kansas one is also a special memory.

"The owner was a very nice man, but he was in a wheelchair and couldn't help load the tractor," relates Brown. "The Gibson was in the corner of a 30 by 40 shed packed full of stuff. I had to go to a store to buy come-alongs just to get stuff out of the way. It was still worth it."

Brown is also in the market for attachments. His father-in-law used the Gibson to put in a large garden, and Brown does the same. He has a plow, disc, cultivator, snowplow and dirt blades, as well as a side-mount sickle bar mower he needs to rebuild.

"I'd like to have an attachment for each of my tractors," he says.

As he restores the tractors and equipment, he keeps a suggestion from Nancy to heart.

"When I restored her dad's, she told me to

make sure the tractor would be child resistant because kids will want to have their picture taken on it," says Brown. "She was right. If I take it to a show or parade, there will be 50 kids sitting on it or leaning on it, waiting to have their picture taken with it."

Brown built a 40 by 60-ft. building to store and restore his Gibsons and uses a 30 by 40-ft. building to warehouse his parts. With those two filling up, he's already planning a third.

He fires up his Gibsons for shows and parades and just to drive down streets in the neighborhood.

"I don't drink or chase women, so I needed a habit," he says with a laugh. "I collect Gibsons. They're addictive."

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