



Ford Model B's most significant contribution to agriculture may be its faulty engineering. Complaints about it led to what became the Nebraska Tractor Test in 1920.

Rare Vintage Ford Tractor

The Rosetown Antique Power Club has one of the rarest of rare tractors. No authenticating documentation or even a serial number exists. However, it appears to be a 1916 Ford Model B, one of only 30 ever built.

The very unique tractor features two large (54-in.) drive wheels at the front end and a steerable 28-in. dia. wheel below the operator's seat. The design and components perfectly match the drawing in the patent

application for the Ford Model B.

According to a company brochure, specifications for the tractor include a 16-hp, 2-cyl., 4-cycle gas engine and an air-cooled radiator. The 3,880-lb. tractor had a top speed of 3 mph under load. It was 11 ft. long with an outside wheelbase of 6 1/2 ft.

The Ford Model B tractors were manufactured in Minneapolis, Minn., with a price tag of \$350. How one ended up in southwestern Saskatchewan is a mystery. It was originally donated to a threshermen's club in a neighboring town. When that club dissolved, several members joined the Rosetown club. They brought the Ford with them.

One member described the tractor as being in running shape when it arrived.

"It didn't run very well, but we discovered it just needed a spark plug," he recalled.

In an article in the May/June 2025 issue of Vintage Tractor Digest, members recalled that the magneto had been replaced, and the fenders were not thought to be original. They replaced the water hopper with one built to specifications and cleaned the fuel tank. One last change was to add rubber tread to the

wheels to make the tractor more drivable for parades and shows.

The rare tractor is known more for what it wasn't than what it was. It wasn't a successful tractor design, nor did Henry Ford build it. It may have been introduced to capitalize on Ford's reputation or, more likely, to force him to buy the company so he could claim the name for his own tractor brand. Instead, he introduced his tractors as Fordsons.

The Ford Model B's most significant contribution to agriculture may be its faulty engineering. Complaints about it led to what became the Nebraska Tractor Test in 1920.

The Rosetown Ford Model B is one of a handful that survived, and according to a club member, may be the only one still operating. One other was mentioned nearly three years ago in a FARM SHOW article (Vol. 46, No. 6). It's on display in Boise, Idaho, as part of the J.R. Simplot collection. Another is on display at a Nebraska museum, and one is known to be in the U.K.

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Although it looks like a wagon, this is actually an Eldridge motorized vehicle, built in 1903, now fully restored and displayed at the Iowa 80 Trucking Museum in Walcott, Iowa.

When Is A Truck Not Really A Truck?

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

The answer to the question is that a truck isn't really a truck when it's actually a motorized Eldridge wagon built in 1903. However, the state of Iowa titled it as a truck because a serial number had been stamped into its frame. It also has a small engine, transmission and steering system. The restored vehicle is now on display at the Iowa 80 Trucking Museum, alongside more than 100 other vintage trucks.

Truck collectors observing the Eldridge

sometimes view it as more of a wagon than a truck. That's understandable, considering it has large wooden-spoked wheels for better ground clearance, a wooden cargo box, and a wooden bench for the driver and passenger. Fitted with a wagon pole and doubletrees, a team of horses could easily draw it. The Eldridge, however, has an engine and many unique features beneath and above that wooden exterior.

It was built by the Eldridge Welding

and Machine Company of Des Moines, Iowa. George Eldridge and his inventive employees configured this first-of-a-kind self-powered vehicle to move supplies and equipment between the factory's buildings. They installed a small engine, drive system and steering mechanism underneath a horse-drawn wagon, well before Henry Ford built his first Model T in 1908. Iowa 80 Museum Curator Dave Meier says the vehicle might be the first motorized truck ever built in the U.S. It's also the oldest truck in the easily accessible museum on I-80, west of the Quad Cities at Walcott, Iowa.

A small 2-cyl., 8-hp engine powers the Eldridge, with a friction drive mechanism to power the wheels. The engine turns a flywheel, which rubs against a perpendicular wheel. This transfers power to a shaft and sprocket. Large roller chains thread over cogs on the inside of the rear wheels. Three speeds are possible depending on where the two friction wheels engage. Shifting is controlled by a lever that extends up to the driver. Another lever operates a brake.

A small measure of load cushioning is supplied by leaf springs attached to the chassis under the cargo box. An 8-leaf transverse spring is under the rear of the cargo box.

Eldridge possibly built two or three of the vehicles. According to the museum, it has the only one in existence. Credit for restoring and preserving it goes to several people.

Larry Crist says his father, Owen, who ran an auto body shop in Des Moines, bought the vehicle sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s. It had sat unused for decades

with broken wheels, rotted wood and an unresponsive engine. Crist spent several years trying to restore it. In the late 1960s, he moved it to a barn on his farm, where it sat on a dirt floor.

Twenty years later, it was moved to an auto body service shop under the guidance of Crist's sons, Larry and Bill. They, along with Wayne Allen, who soaked the engine for a year to free up the crankshaft and pistons, completed its restoration by 1986. Larry Crist stored it until selling it to the I-80 museum in 2020. Now, its museum-quality condition is maintained by Mark Catlett and Billy Moon, grandson of the museum's founders.

Visitors admire the vehicle's large spoked wooden wheels, crafted by Amish wheelwrights. They peer at pipes beneath the box and realize they're part of the engine's exhaust system. They examine the nearly vertical steering shaft and horizontal steering wheel, wondering how anyone could drive it. Then they realize the vehicle was built for work, not for fun. It hauled the company's goods from one building to another at no more than 10 mph, so steering wasn't a top priority.

Meier says the Eldridge was definitely built to meet a need, and he often wonders why the company didn't expand its use by adding a cab or enclosure to protect the driver and passenger from the elements.

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Plastic Tote Leaf Hauler

Mark Yax has the perfect dustpan-style leaf hauler. The modified plastic tote can be hooked to an ATV or garden tractor and pulled to a pile of leaves. Drop the lid and rake them in. Fold up the lid, pull it to the yard debris pile, and flip it over to dump out the leaves.

"The plastic side slides over the terrain without a problem," says Yax. "When the leaves start to fall, it's really handy."

Modifying the tote was simple. Yax notes that the top of the tote has heavy-duty plastic hooks designed to pull the tote out of its cage. He found them equally handy for securing a length of nylon rope for towing.

With the tote on its side, he cut away the original bottom, leaving part of each side still attached. This created a 4-ft. wide dustpan. He then reattached it to the new bottom.

"I used a piano hinge with bolts and wing nuts to connect the dustpan to the tote," says Yax. "I also used a ton of pop rivets and washers to reinforce the hinge."

Yax has found other uses for plastic totes around his place. He cut the bottoms off several that he uses as mini sheds.

"I set one over my excavator bucket and another one over my buzz saw," he says. "They keep the rain off and offer some protection. I painted the one over the buzz saw Army green to make it less conspicuous."

Yax gets some of his totes from friends, who use the cages for firewood. Others come from a local highway department that buys highway paint by the tote.

"They told me to take all I wanted," he says. "I think there are a lot of possible uses for them if people thought about it. I could



Leaf pan with hooks with nylon rope for towing.

see cutting them up for roofing to use over a small shed or outhouse. They would keep the weather out and let in light."

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Tote leaf pan is shown open for collecting leaves.

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