Made-It-Myself 'Generic Deere' Lawn Tractor

By Lydia Noyes, Contributing Editor

Dennis Frisbey, of Rocheport, Mo., gave a second life to an aging tractor. "That little green tractor is about 37 years old," he says. "Under the green paint is an old red MTD with an 11-hp Briggs & Stratton engine that I bought in 1988."

Though the original model served Frisbey well for 15 years, he eventually found himself struggling in the search for parts. "I couldn't find a manufacturer's replacement spring for the belt-tensioner," he said. "Thankfully, a slightly different spring got me through the season." Next, he needed to replace the rusty mowing deck and torn seat. Frisbey found a yellow tractor seat in a hardware store's discount bin, and a local engine shop sold him a "nearly new" mowing deck complete with spindles and pulleys.

But as often happens, a few repairs inspired more. "Whenever I walked past my old, reliable mower, that updated yellow seat and engine overhaul kit cried out from the dust for a complete makeover," he says. "I told my wife I wasn't going to buy a new mower, but I was willing to sell all the other ones to use the money for a restoration project during the winter months. If we only got two years out of the machine, it would be worth the money."

Frisbey first cut every bracket off the old deck and welded them onto the newer one. He then put the rebuild kit into the engine and was encouraged to hear it run smoothly. A new battery, along with new front tires and belts, improved the machine further. "While the engine was out, I planned to simply clean the old frame and put it back together," he says. "But with the extra time before summer, I took out nearly every nut and bolt in preparation for a total makeover."

The aesthetics were equally important. "Being an auto body repair technician and professional painter, I had no trouble getting a close match to the legendary green-and-yellow colors," Frisbey says. A snowblade completed the project. "The bracket was already in place, and the old blade had some wear. A little welding and a coat of bright yellow paint made it good as new."

The "Generic Deere" was initially used by Frisbey's grandkids for rides. Now grown, they consider it too slow. "And do they want to use it to mow the grass? Not really!" laughs Frisbey.

It's been 20 years since that initial restoration, and he's kept up with improvements, including new belts, another battery, and welding fixes for the old bracket and frame. "I wore out my first set of tire chains several winters ago," he says. "It may look weathered and worn, but our 'Generic Deere' is still running and pushing snow in 2025. They don't build them like this anymore… but I did!"

Frisbey converted his old MTD lawn tractor into a "Generic Deere" model.

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Farmall H Re-Repower

Chris Floerkey repowered his Farmall H with a Predator 212cc engine (Vol. 46, No. 5), but it didn't give him the power he needed to Bush Hog his pasture. His first thought was to gang three of the little Predators to drive the H. Partway through the conversion, he switched gears and engines, all of which he shares on his Keyfarm YouTube channel.

"I repowered my old Chevy truck with a DuroMax 440, but I was going to have to modify the hood," explains Floerkey. "I decided to use it on the H instead."

Floerkey wasn't sure the 18-hp DuroMax would have the power for his Bush Hog, but thought it was worth the try. When he first repowered the H with the Predator, he fabricated a jackshaft between the engine and the manual transmission.

He broke the H's clutch plate down to the eye to connect the two, trimming off all but the inner eye with its splines. In one of his YouTube videos, he explains two ways to match the eye with a coupler for the jackshaft.

"The clutch plate eye conversion can let you connect almost any manual transmission to any motor," says Floerkey. "I've used it for almost all of my repowers."

With the jackshaft already in place, all he had to do was get the gear ratio needed. He replaced the 80-tooth sprocket used with the Predator with a 36-tooth sprocket. He mounted a 14-tooth clutch on the DuroMax driveshaft, giving him a 2.57:1 gear ratio.

"The OEM H engine turned 1,650 rpm to produce 540 at the pto," notes Floerkey. "With this gear ratio, I had 1,400 rpm going into the tractor, which was less, but it gave me a little more torque. You can't add horsepower to an engine but can gain torque with the gears."

Floerkey's original repower had been simple to the extreme, with a rope for throttle control. He upgraded his throttle on the DuroMax with a cable. He fabricated a bracket to hold the cable housing in place just ahead of the H's original throttle lever.

"I planned to connect the cable to the old lever, but discovered it was just about impenetrable when I tried to drill a hole in it," says Floerkey. "Instead, I drilled a hole in a 3/8-in. bolt and slipped the cable through it and secured it in place. I used two large washers on the bolt to fix it to the lever. Eventually, I plan to weld the bolt to the lever, but this works for now."

Floerkey took the tractor to the field for the big test with the Bush Hog. "It didn't cut like it would with a 35-hp tractor, but it did pretty well for only 18 hp," he says. "I made three rounds, and the clutch didn't overheat. I think it'll be fine for clipping trails through the woods and lighter grass and weeds."

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Chaff Lines Can Help Control Weeds

Herbicide-resistant weeds are still a problem, reducing yield and producing seed for future problem years. Mechanical weed seed control (Vol. 37, No. 6) at the combine can help, but the hammermill add-ons are expensive. A simpler option is chaff lining at harvest. It uses a baffle or chute to concentrate chaff and weed seed from 100% of the field in narrow windrows.

"I've been working with several colleagues across the U.S. looking at chaff lining, as well as the use of seed mills," says Jason Norsworthy, University of Arkansas weed scientist and editor of Weed Technology.

One of those colleagues, Iowa State University weed science professor Prashant Jha, found that 95% of weed seeds can be concentrated in a chaff line at soybean harvest.

While some seed viability is reduced by the natural mulching effect of the chaff line, seed that does germinate usually does so later, making herbicide applications more effective.

Another researcher working with the concept is Vipan Kumar, a professor of weed science at Kansas State University. He noted that wheat and sorghum chaff lining was shown to significantly reduce kochia and downy brome emergence.

"The mulching effect of chaff lining on weed seed banks further depends on the type of crop being used and the target weed species," Kumar noted.

Norsworthy and others have also explored burning the chaff lines. This practice was once common in Australia but has declined with the adoption of mechanical weed seed destructors. Burning has been considered by weed scientists as far north as Alberta. However, the brief window between harvest and the onset of snow is a problem. Windy days close the window even sooner.

Breanne Tidemann, Agriculture Canada weed scientist, Lacombe, Alta., explains that too much wind or wind blowing in the direction of the windrow can negate the effect. If the fire moves too rapidly or isn't hot enough, the non-seed residue may burn, leaving the seed to germinate in the spring.

"Burning is a highly effective option in Arkansas, but it hasn't been adopted to much extent," says Norsworthy.

He notes that there's been increased criticism of those who burn stubble, as it creates issues with smoke and carbon dioxide release.

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Norsworthy's team tested weed seeds by burning them in a kiln to determine the temperature and duration needed. They discovered that seed size made a difference. Smaller seeds like Palmer amaranth required less heat than larger, hard-coated seeds like pitted morningglory. In a soybean residue burning experiment, all tested weed seeds were killed except for pitted morningglory. However, while the pitted morningglory remained intact, it was nonviable.

"When you look at weed management in general, it's all really centered around soil seed bank management," said Norsworthy. "If we can drive those soil seedbanks down, it's going to benefit us in terms of the future populations or densities we have in those fields, as well as lessening the risk of herbicide resistance evolution and spread."

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