



Bob Sherrard is no longer able to see, but he's still a pro at restoring antique tractors.

Blind Mechanic Restores Tractors By Touch

By Janis Schole, Contributing Editor

Eyesight isn't absolutely necessary when restoring antique tractors, says 75-year-old blind mechanic Bob Sherrard.

For most of his life he was able to see well enough to function normally, but a genetic condition caused the Winfield, Kansas, man's vision to deteriorate slowly but steadily, until he can now only sense the brightest of lights.

"My memory, sense of touch, and even my hearing compensate for my lack of eyesight," he says. "It takes me longer to do things, so I've had to learn patience, but it hasn't stopped me from restoring many tractors."

Sherrard has a system to make shop work easier. When he sets a tool or part aside for a moment, he must remember its location, so as not to trip over it later. He puts nuts, bolts, and small parts into cans, shallow cardboard boxes or his pockets as he removes them from a machine. His grandsons assist him by replacing his tools on the wall when he's finished using them, and thanks to white lines painted around each one above his work bench, they always go back to exactly the same spot.

The determined Sherrard isn't afraid to tackle detailed jobs, such as taking a carburetor apart. He says the hardest part of a tractor overhaul is actually replacing the gaskets.

"I know what needs to be done and how things are supposed to be," he points out. "I can hear whether an engine is running the way it should."

Admittedly, Sherrard can't do every single aspect of a restoration. He gets help from his son-in-law Alan Brennan, for such things as gaskets, reading manuals, electrical work, and transporting tractors.

He has restored a 1945 Deere model H, a 1936 International Harvester "F12", a 1928 Deere model D, a 1937 Deere model B, a 1950 MT with a single front tire and 3-pt. hitch, a 1950's era Deere R Diesel, and a Deere AR.

Sherrard has also overhauled a 1945 Allis-Chalmers "C", a 1951 Massey-Harris Pony,



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a 1953 "DC" Case, a 1945 Dodge half-ton pickup, a 1941 Chevy 2-door sedan, a 1948 Studebaker 2-ton truck, and a 1958 International half-ton pickup. Most of these are rebuilt to good running condition. The engines of the "F12" and "H" were overhauled by this phenomenal man without sight.

Sherrard's currently working on a 1947 Ford model "2N", and says he's looking for a Deere "L" to restore.

"Restoring tractors is something I really enjoy. I know in my head what they look like when they're finished, and that's good enough for me," he comments.

He says he's not going to stop until the sensitivity in his fingers is completely worn out, which he hopes isn't anytime soon.

Sherrard belongs to the Kansas and Oklahoma Steam and Gas Engine Club and participates in its annual show in Winfield.

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Sherrard keeps his shop tools on the wall of his shop. His grandsons assist him by replacing his tools on the wall when he's finished using them.

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Large pumpkins are turned into 1-person boats for racing at community events.

Regatta Adds Fun To Local Event

Growers of large pumpkins have figured out a way to use their 500-lb. "culls." They turn them into 1-person boats for racing.

The idea started in Windsor, Nova Scotia, birthplace of giant pumpkin growing, thanks to native Howard Dill's mammoth pumpkin breeding program in the 1970's. As the popularity of weigh-off competitions spread, Howard's son, Danny, joined forces with Windsor's town council to start something new. Windsor held its first pumpkin regatta in 1999. Since then, regattas have spread to other communities such as Elk Grove, Calif., Tualatin, Ore., and Cooperstown, N.Y.

"It's a lot of fun," says Randy Sundstrom, a member of the New York State Giant Pumpkin Growers Association (NYSGPGA) who has participated in the Cooperstown regatta. "It's good for the town. People stay overnight and pumpkin growers like to make a weekend out of it."

Former Cooperstown Chamber Director Polly Renckens organized the first regatta in 2004 to go along with the annual weigh-off, where pumpkin growers compete for money prizes and national honors with pumpkins weighing well over 1,000 lbs. The regatta is held the day after the more serious weigh-off competition.

The Chamber pays growers to bring smaller pumpkins (about 500 lbs. and 120-in. circumference) for the races, and growers also race for cash prizes. Additional races are held for sponsoring business owners and an open class for the public. Course lengths vary in each community. Cooperstown's is about 100 yards to a buoy and back, which takes about 20 minutes.

"If you have a round pumpkin, you're going over," Sundstrom says, adding that the flattest pumpkins make the best vessels.

A hole big enough for the racer to fit in is



The flattest pumpkins make the best boats because they're less likely to tip over.

cut on the side of the pumpkin. The stem or the blossom end becomes the front, depending on which has more of a point. The inside of the pumpkin is cleaned out leaving a 1 1/2 to 3-in. thick rind. Sundstrom notes that he leaves a ridge of pulp in the bottom to keep him from sliding around. Competitors generally weigh less than 200 lbs. - those heavier tend to sink.

Competitors get in their pumpkins on land. The pumpkins are on pallets, and a backhoe operator picks up the pallet and sets it in the water. Helpers in the water support the pumpkins until all the racers are in the water.

Racers wear life jackets and use kayak paddles. Though the water is not that deep, police and conservation department patrols are on hand in case there are accidents.

"Racing is almost as crazy as growing the giant pumpkin itself," Sundstrom says, noting that Cooperstown's regatta draws 5,000 spectators.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Cooperstown Chamber of Commerce, 31 Chestnut St., Cooperstown, N.Y. 13326 (ph 607 547-9983; www.cooperstownchamber.org) or the New York State Giant Pumpkin Growers Association, www.nysgpga.com).