

He Puts Pickup Cabs, Spreader Boxes On Schoolbus Frames

Chicken litter trucks don't have to be fancy. In fact, the cheaper they are, the better. That's why when Roy Patton went looking for a low cost chassis to replace a worn out truck, he turned to a used school bus. The first one worked out so well, he has since bought several more.

"I pay \$560 to \$1,000 for old buses," he recalls. "The first one I bought was a 1989 Chevy."

Patton could have jury-rigged a cab, but he wanted a truck that looked like a truck. He had noticed that pickup cab firewalls were similar in shape to bus firewalls of the same make. Fender and body shapes were also similar, so he decided to merge the two.

"I paid \$50 for one old pickup and have had several others given to me," he says.

On his first bus, Patton went to work with a torch. When he finished, about all he had

left was the firewall. He had cut it away just below the seam where the windshield wiper was attached. He also cut the bus body floorboard about a foot from the firewall and across the transmission cover. The bus firewall contained all the wiring, airlines, clutch pedal and shift selector. Once he had the bus body unbolted from the front, he just rolled it off.

"I discovered that I needed to take the steering column out or it would get bent when rolling the body off," says Patton, who warns that each bus is different. "While the clutch was no problem on the first bus, it should have been disconnected when the second body stripped."

Once the old body was gone, Patton mounted a new 18-ft. litter bed with drag chair on back. The new bed is designed for complete clean out. On an 85-passenger bus,



Patton mounts pickup cabs on school bus frames because he wants his home-built trucks to "look like trucks."

he found he needed to cut about 4 ft. off the frame to accommodate the litter bed.

His next step was to cut away the pickup cab from its firewall and lift it free of its chassis. Using a winch truck with ropes through the open windows of the pickup cab, he set it down about 3/4 in. back from the bus firewall.

He then used steel strap to weld all the way around the firewall to attach the pickup cab.

"The toughest part is lining them up," says Patton. "I have registered them and insured them as trucks, and they carry about 5 tons of dry litter. If you have a welder, a winch, truck and someone to help, it doesn't take a lot of money."

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50-Ft. Self-Propelled Swather

"I saved a lot of money and it's bigger than any other self-propelled swather on the market," says Wilfred Moellenbeck, St. Gregor, Sask., who built his own self-propelled 50-ft. hydrostatic swather for about \$20,000 (Canadian).

Moellenbeck farms 2,000 acres and also operates a custom fabricating shop. "The biggest commercial self-propelled swather today is only 36 ft., and it sells for about \$100,000," he says.

His swather is powered by a Caterpillar 3145 diesel engine with 145 hp. The engine drives four Sundstrand hydraulic pumps. The axles are out of a combine, as are the wheels and hydrostatic motors. He used channel iron and steel tubing to build the frame. The header is built in three pieces and hydraulically folds up for transport. He built his own reel and cab.

"We use it to harvest wheat, canola, barley, canary, and oats. Everyone said we were crazy when we started building it," says Moellenbeck, who built the swather in 1987 and has used it every year since. "Many of them said there was no way the swath produced by a 50-ft. machine would ever dry out. But we found the swath's width isn't a problem, because just as much grain gets exposed to the sun as in a smaller swath. We plan to switch to direct seeding, and there's a concern that a wide swath will produce too much straw and chaff in the row. But we think that by harrowing after harvest, we can spread everything out. Also, I plan to cut higher at the ends of the swather which will reduce the amount of straw."

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Moellenbeck says his swather is 14 ft. wider than the largest commercial swather. It's powered by a Caterpillar 3145 diesel and folds up for transport (below).



Steering Stabilizer For Dodge Pickups

"Anyone with a late model Dodge pickup will love it," say Marvin Windecker and Darin Tessier, Solid Steel Industries, Weyburn, Sask., about their patent pending "steering stabilizer" kit designed for Dodge 1500, 2500, and 3500 2 and 4-WD model pickups made from 1994 to 2002.

The kit is designed to provide additional support of the steering sector shaft and eliminate sector shaft play in the steering box. It also helps keep the pickup frame from flexing at the steering box mounting point.

The stabilizer uses existing mounting holes. It adds an outboard support bearing to the sector shaft. This additional bearing is attached to the lower end of the sector shaft by way of a replacement nut which has an integral shaft extension. The bearing supplied is a regreasable high quality unit available at most ag outlets. Nearly all the sector shaft load is carried by this outboard bearing, thus relieving the steering box of much wear and tear.

Installation takes about a half hour and requires no drilling or welding.

"It solves the problem of too much play in the steering sector shaft," says Windecker. "The driver often has to move the steering wheel two or three inches before he'll get any response. The wander problem often becomes apparent after replacing OEM tires. Also, trailer towing, campers, heavy loads, snowplows, larger tires, and a heavy diesel engine all seem to be factors. Many customers report warranty battles over this problem. Some customers tell us they've had to replace three steering boxes within 20,000 miles, and they

still have the same problem. A new steering box sells for \$300 to \$400 so it gets expensive to keep replacing them.

"We originally developed the kit as a way to get more life out of an old, worn steering box. However, we soon found that most of our customers owned fairly new pickups with relatively few miles on them. They're looking for that little extra to help their newer pickup steer the way they expect it to. Most of our customers report a much improved road feel and virtual elimination of wander. Others install the unit as a way to protect a new steering box."

The kit can be used on pickups equipped with snowplows, front receiver hitches, or tow hooks (engine pre-lubers or bypass filters mounted on the pickup's front cross member may have to be relocated).

According to Tessier, Dodge pickups made since 1994 use crossover steering and a track bar to locate the axle. "Models made before 1994 have a completely different steering box and a different steering system so steering wander wasn't a problem."

The company plans to soon offer kits for 2003 and 2004 Dodge 2500 and 3500 models.

The steering stabilizer sells for \$149 (U.S.) plus S&H. It comes with a money-back guarantee.

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