

Garden Tractor Repower Experts

By Bill Gergen, Senior Editor

If your garden tractor's engine is worn out, you'll be interested in the repower kits available from T.H.E. Company, a Deere garden tractor dealer and fabricator based in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

"Our conversion kits with new engines are just as easy to install as original engines, but the cost is similar to a rebuilt one and a lot cheaper than a new engine from the manufacturer, if a new engine is even available," says Paul Maedl. "We've shipped all over the continental U.S. and Canada, and even overseas to Germany. We also repower skid loaders and even Argo 6 by 6 amphibious UTV's. We use only Honda engines because we think they're the best on the market."

All kits come complete with engine, muffler, engine mounting plate, driveshaft adapter, throttle and choke controls, and all hardware needed for installation. The replacement engines are pre-wired to match the existing OEM wire harnesses.

"These kits are popular with folks who

like their old Deere riding mower and want to keep using it. However, the engine is worn out and has lost power. By installing the kit you get to keep the high quality tractor that you already have," says Maedl.

He says the kit for Deere 318 garden tractors is one of their best sellers. "The 318 is powered by an Onan engine, but Onan is no longer in business. Our kits for Deere 420 and F-series garden tractors are also popular. The 425 kit is brand new, with over a year of research and development dedicated to making the kit better and easier to install."

T.H.E. is also a dealer for Briggs & Stratton and Kohler engines, but they use only Honda engines in their repower kits. "Honda engines are top-of-the-line and come with a 3-year warranty," says Maedl. "Most of our repower kits use the Honda GX630 engine, but we also offer the Honda GX660 and GX690 engines."

He says when you're done installing the kit your tractor will look just like the original. "For example, the engine side panels will fit like before so you can't tell the tractor was repowered. The mufflers are designed to use existing holes on the tractor so you don't have to cut the tractor's frame or tin work."

T.H.E. can customize each kit according to the customer's needs, says Maedl. "We have a full fabrication department so we can custom build mounting plates for just about any application."

He says they also offer great customer service. "If you experience a problem 6 months or a year later we'll take care of it."

Cost varies depending on the tractor model and engine used. A conversion kit for Deere 318 and 420 garden tractors sells for



\$1,895. A kit for a Deere 425 sells for \$2,095, compared to more than \$2,800 for the OEM Deere engine. All kits include free shipping in the continental U.S.

"If you mention FARM SHOW we'll give you \$100 off the new 425R repower," says Maedl.

"We send a DVD showing how to remove the old engine and install the new one. We also provide full written instructions and photos," he notes.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, T.H.E. Company, 1300 W. Washington St., Mt. Pleasant, Iowa 52641 (ph 319 385-3114;



"Our garden tractor repower conversion kits are easy to install," says Paul Maedl, T.H.E. Company. All kits come complete with engine, muffler, engine mounting plate, driveshaft adapter, throttle and choke controls.

Vol. 38, No. 2, 2014

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FARM SHOW (ISSN #01634518) is published 7 times per year (bimonthly plus one special "Best of FARM SHOW" issue published in December) for \$25.95 per year (\$29.95 in Canada) by Farm Show Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 1029, 20088 Kenwood Trail, Lakeville, Minn. 55044. Periodicals postage paid at Lakeville, Minn., and Madelia, Minn. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to FARM SHOW, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 952 469-5572; fax 952 469-5575; email: circulation@farmshow.com; website: www.farmshow.com). Single copy price is \$5.95 (\$7.50 in Canada). Publication No. 469490.

In Canada:
Publications Mail Agreement No. 40032660,
Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses To:
Dycom Mail Svcs, 495 Berry St., Winnipeg, MB
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March-April, 2014

Restored Caboose Has Its Own Track, Building

We've heard about folks restoring old train cabooses, but Jerry Mennenga has taken it another step by building a track for his caboose. About 45 ft. of the 110-ft. long track is inside a 24 by 64-ft. building Mennenga built to house the caboose. On nice evenings or when he entertains, he rolls the caboose outside from the caboose's cupola to enjoy the view and wildlife on his rural Iowa property.

The train enthusiast purchased the caboose in 1978 and stayed in it when he and his wife volunteered at a Midwest railroad museum. Moving it to their Iowa property in 2009 took some heavy equipment. After removing the cupola, the body of the 42,000-lb. caboose was lifted off its trucks onto a low-bed trailer. The cupola and trucks were placed on another flatbed and transported to Iowa, where the track was waiting.

Mennenga, a retired industrial arts teacher, had leveled a spot and spread ballast stone for drainage. He purchased rail, ties and spikes that area rail lines no longer used, and laid the track with the help of friends.

Once the caboose was unloaded and reassembled on the track, Mennenga and his friends constructed the building and started restoration.

"The building's end doors that allow the caboose to be moved in or out were modeled after the doors of a 1906 Chicago and Northwestern Railroad roundhouse in Wisconsin," Mennenga says. "It took a block and tackle, two hydraulic jacks and 8 people to hang each of the 300-lb. doors. This allowed the caboose to spend its first winter under cover in 85 years."

The "Cotton Belt Route" caboose was built in 1925 in Pine Bluff, Ark., and spent its first 20 years on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway. Later it was used in upper Michigan from 1945 until 1963.

By the time Mennenga set it on his



Jerry Mennenga restored this old caboose and also built a track for it. About 45 ft. of the 110-ft. long track is inside a 24 by 64-ft. building he built to house the caboose.

property, the exterior needed a lot of work. He spent 30 to 40 hrs. removing rust and paint from the iron parts by needle-scaling, using a pneumatic hammer. He installed new vertical tongue and groove siding, insulated, built new windows and replaced roof walk boards. He finished the exterior by brushing on three coats of red paint.

"The interior is approximately 90 percent original," Mennenga says. "Some upgrades (such as a dining nook) were made for modern convenience. Now that the restoration is completed, the building protects the caboose from sun and weather damage - helping to maintain its 'better than new' appearance."

The 36 by 9-ft. caboose has four bunks, a stove, lockers, storage space and a ladder going to the cupola where benches for four people provide an elevated view.

"Now that I'm finished working on it, we can go out and enjoy it," Mennenga says. "We



He purchased rail, ties and spikes that area rail lines no longer used, and then laid the track with the help of friends.

can gaze out, watch the wildlife and imagine being on a train."