

Rare Collection Of Antique Garden Tractors

By Bill Gergen, Senior Editor

We were impressed by the quality of a collection of rare antique garden tractors at the recent Pioneer Power antique tractor show near LeSeuer, Minn.

Ron Gittins of Buffalo, Minn., showed 8 garden tractors made in the 1940's and 50's, most of them restored and in great condition. He hauls them to about 10 shows each year.

"I like garden tractors from the 1940's and 50's because in those days the manufacturers weren't afraid to put out something unusual," says Gittins. "I collect only the rarest and most unusual models I can find. At shows, most people tell me they've never seen, or even heard of, most of the ones in my collection."

The unique tractor collection is well cared for, as Gittins keeps them all locked up in a 28-ft. enclosed trailer until the show season. As a result, the tractors look like they just came off the dealer's show floor.

Here's a rundown on each one.



1955 Sears Craftsman 3-wheeler. Powered by a Craftsman 2 hp, 2-stroke Power Products engine, this tractor was originally designed to pull a reel mower. It weighs only 110 lbs. "This tractor doesn't have a reverse gear, but it's so light that you can push it backward with your feet as you're sitting down," says Gittins. "The operator uses a clutch lever connected to a belt tensioner to go forward. Brakes were optional. To stop, you put your feet down on the ground just like Fred Flintstone."



1955 David Bradley Tri-Trac. Unlike most 3-wheelers, the David Bradley Tri-Trac rides on 2 wide front wheels and a single rear wheel. It was designed to pull a 1-bottom moldboard plow. Power is supplied by a Wisconsin AKND 6hp engine. "This tractor wasn't particularly popular in its day," says Gittins. "The company built 3,000 AKND's, and it took 7 years to sell them all."



"The 3 wheels and long wheelbase made it tippy when turning, so the company tried to compensate by installing front wheel weights. The tractor didn't come with a differential. Instead, it has a forward and reverse variable speed transmission that works like a snowmobile clutch. Levers at the base of the steering column are used to control the clutch and throttle. Other levers are used to lift the plow and to adjust plow depth."



1960 Wheelhorse Suburban 550. The Suburban 550 was powered by a 5 hp Tecumseh engine and equipped with a 32-in. mower deck. Gittins's model still has the original tires. "The engine is located under the seat, and as a result it can get a little warm on your private parts," says Gittins.



1953 Bantam 14 3-wheeler. The small Bantam 14 is powered by a 5 hp engine and belt-driven transmission and has a hand-operated clutch. "The cast iron steering wheel was unique to the Bantam," says Gittins.



1958 Lawn Boy Loafers.

The Loafers was Lawn Boy's version of a riding mower and came with 2 engines. One engine drives a 2-wheeled dolly that pins onto the back side of a 22-in. deck, and the other powers the deck blades. A lever is used to adjust ground speed. "The deck doesn't have a throttle and always runs at 2,000 rpm's," says Gittins.

"The Loafers is real lightweight, which makes it easy to pick up. Both the dolly and deck ride on semi pneumatic wheels, at a time when most other tractors rode on pneumatic wheels. By replacing the deck with a pair of wheels, the operator could quickly convert the machine into a 4-wheeled tractor."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ron Gittins, 3205 Darrow Ave. S.E., Buffalo, Minn. 55313 (ph 763 972-2076).



1942 Steel-Wheeled Speedex B. Gittins's Speedex B is powered by a Briggs & Stratton Z 6 hp engine and has a cylinder-shaped gas tank mounted high off to one side. The engine belt-drives a Model A transmission and a narrowed-up model T rear end. The driver uses a long lever on one side to steer. "You pull the lever to turn left and push it to turn right," says Gittins. "To go forward you push the clutch in with your foot, which takes some getting used to. The tractor has individual pedal brakes, and there's a lever on back to lift attachments."

1954 Copar Panzer A 3-wheeler. The frame on the Panzer A is made from 2 long steel pipes. The tractor rides on big 7 by 16 lugged rear wheels and a smaller single front wheel. It's powered by a Briggs & Stratton 6 or 8 hp engine and came with a narrowed-up Chrysler car rear end and a belt-driven, 3-speed transmission with 3 different size pulleys. "To go faster or slower you just changed the belts," says Gittins.



More Rare Garden Tractors

By Cindy Ladage

Many of Dennis Merlau's garden tractors aren't often seen, and he says that's because, "I've always been different. I enjoy small engines and like small, unique tractors that everyone can relate to."

He owns an array of tractors, including the little Farm-Ette built by the Tom Moore Tractor Co. that operated out of Mantua, Ohio. "I bought the tractor about 13 years ago. It was made in 1954 and was their first model," says Merlau. "It came equipped with a 34-in. deck, and you could get plows and other items for it. It had a good engine and transmission. The company also built other mowers such as walk-behinds."

Merlau says that in the 1940's and 1950's companies like Wheelhorse, Bohlens and others were racing to create a riding mower. As with many industries, the lawn and garden tractor industry was innovative and came up with some creative options. Some of the first riding mowers were made from kits. "In the 1930's and 1940's Gemco came out with a kit that converted a reel mower to a riding mower. They're neat because they're just gone."

One of Merlau's more innovative tractors is the Snappin' Turtle mower made from 1949 to 1950 in East Point, Ga., by the Southern Saw Works Co. The actual turtle arms and legs and the head



Merlau owns a variety of rare and unusual garden tractors and riding mowers that he takes to shows.

appear on this little mower. "You put the starter rope around the head, then pull to engage it," says Merlau.

Reprinted courtesy of Lawn & Garden Tractor Magazine (www.lagtmag.com)