

Restored Steam Roller Makes A Big Impression



British-designed Kelly Springfield (right) is shown alongside a U.S.-designed Case roller at the Mt. Pleasant Thresher's Reunion.

The 1905 Kelly Springfield steam roller that makes keepsake posters at the Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, Old Threshers Reunion spent nearly 50 years hard packing roadbeds and paving streets in Boulder, Colo. Dave Gross bought the engine for \$200 in 1955 when he was just 17 years old, then put it in storage on a family friend's farm for the next 50 years.

Gross found number 907 on one of his excursions in and around Colorado's Front Range while enjoying his hobby of photographing old locomotives and steam engines. It was in tough shape, but it was a 12-ton relic he had to own. More than 65 years have gone by since Gross spent most of his hard-earned savings on the purchase, and he

hasn't regretted it once. For nearly 20 years, he's been passing his love of steam power on to his grandson, Russell Heerd.

Heerd says, "I grew up listening to grandpa's stories, and when he retired and wanted to fix up old 907, he decided to have the work done in Mt. Pleasant, where I lived, because we're home to the long-running Midwest Old Threshers Reunion and Steam Show." Gross shipped 907 to Huff's Iron Works, just outside Mt. Pleasant, in the winter of 2007.

Over the next 2 years, they cleaned and sandblasted it, fabricated a new steam down, and replaced boiler tubes and the front flue sheet. The Babot bearings were repoured, and a new front roller steering bracket was cast. The lengthy project was capped off with new paint and detailing. Gross and Heerd were frequent observers of the restoration, and when it was complete in 2010, the steamer moved to the Mt. Pleasant show site.

For 7 years, Gross and Heerd cleaned, prepped, and drove it during the annual Thresher's show. They'd even give visitors instructions on how the rig operates during "steam school." In 2017, the printer demonstration began, and they've been doing it

ever since. While Gross drives it, Heerd fires and throttles the engine. He says, "It's a balancing act of firing just right so the engine sits there warm enough to move a few feet forward and back to make the posters."

Heerd says, "There's a fine line between an engine that won't run and one that will. Luckily, the restoration in 2010 was very thorough, and hopefully, in the future, new machined parts and repaired gears will give the 907 a very long life." He adds, "People take plenty of pictures. The engine is unique because the Kelly Company had a British engineer, so that's where it gets a look completely different than, for example, a Case roller, which was designed by U.S. engineers."

Heerd has carried his enjoyment of steam vehicles into a job as a locomotive engineer and special events coordinator for the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, which operates a passenger train powered by a steam locomotive.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Russell Heerd, Durango, Colo. (rheerd@durangotrain.com).



Dave Gross and Russell Heerd carefully drive a 117-year-old steam engine roller over a large piece of etched linoleum to produce beautiful posters at the Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, Old Threshers Reunion.

Steam Engine Rolls Out Printed Images

One of only four 1905 Kelly Springfield steam engines known to exist anywhere in the U.S. may be the only steam engine producing printed images. It's a "believe-it-or-not" demonstration that takes place 4 days every year over the Labor Day weekend at the Midwest Old Threshers Reunion in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. The giant steamer's owner, Dave Gross, and his grandson, Russell Heerd, use the rig to "roll over" a large image etched on linoleum and, in the process, transfer that image to paper.

"The process sounds bizarre to anyone who hasn't heard of old-time printing presses powered by small steam engines," says Tom Wenstrand, who's lived in the area for many years and attended several demonstrations. "The 12-ton roller is just a much larger version of the little presses in the show's Printer's Hall." While show volunteers produce three daily versions of "The Thresher's Bee" paper with small steam-powered presses, others work on a much larger project for the huge steam engine.

Six months before the show, volunteer artists start their work, using hand tools to carefully etch an image in a large piece of linoleum that sometimes measures 3 ft. by 4 ft. The process is extremely difficult because the entire image, including the lettering, must be done in reverse. One volunteer laughingly

says their 6-mo. process can be done by a smartphone "selfie" in seconds. The artists produce several images a year. Each one is etched to a precise depth on linoleum to hold just the right amount of ink.

The big steam engine is stored at the show, and Gross or Heerd drives it to the demonstration site where its 4-ft. wide front wheel is scraped and wiped clean of any

debris. A large board placed in front of the wheel is swept clean, layers of paper are put on, and the inked linoleum is laid on top. The drivers slowly inch the 12-ton steam engine roller over the linoleum, then back it off. Volunteers lift the linoleum off the paper as wide-eyed show visitors see the image revealed. Heerd says they roll 20 to 25 prints a day over the 4-day show.

Wenstrand says a person must see the demonstration to believe it produces such amazing prints done by outstanding artists.

After drying, the prints are on display and can be purchased by visitors for \$50 to \$100 each, with proceeds going back to the Printer's Hall. Most posters are signed by the artists and pre-sold before they're printed.

Heerd says that everyone who sees the demonstration leaves with several cellphone pictures and an amazing memory.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Old Threshers Reunion, 405 E. Threshers Rd., Mt. Pleasant, Iowa 52641 (ph 319-385-8937; www.oldthreshers.com).



The 907 produces ink prints made by volunteer artists.

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