

Collector Tracks Down Old Farm-Built 4-WDs

Jesse Henderson says, "While I was growing up on a North Dakota farm west of Fargo, I was always intrigued by big tractors. I saw several built by Roger Erickson of Tower City, which inspired me to design my own imaginary tractors. My crude drawings used channel iron, excavator wheels, and a car engine for power. My dad saw one of those drawings and said a farmer he knew had built two tractors, almost like what I was drawing. With wide-eyed excitement, I said, 'Let's go find 'em.'"

Although they didn't locate the tractors, they did learn that the builder had sold them and moved to Florida in 1968.

"For the next 25 years, I tried but didn't find those tractors," Henderson says. "So I basically gave up. By sheer luck, I did find them in 2018, abandoned and neglected, but the owner wouldn't part with them."

While that door closed, others opened, and his quest for big farm-built tractors continued. Over the past 25 years, Henderson has located more than 200 farmer-built "no-brand-name" tractors. Some were in junkyards, others in overgrown shelter belts or abandoned farmyards. When he and his wife started a Facebook page to document farm-built tractors, tips for many he'd never heard of began streaming in. Now he has more than 100,000 subscribers to the site, which FARM SHOW wrote about in 2023 (Vol. 47, No. 3).

Henderson owns eight farm-built tractors and says the backstories of two farmer-built "Kingsley" tractors are especially interesting.

He says, "In the early 2000s, while driving a North Dakota country road, I noticed a big green 4-WD tractor in a farmyard. I knew it wasn't a Steiger or any other brand I was familiar with, but I didn't have time to stop and ask about it. I never forgot that tractor or the farm. Sixteen years later, I went there, inquired about the tractor, and met Ron Kingsley, the farm owner. He said his brother, LeeRoy, had built the tractor in 1968, and Ron still owned it. I was totally amazed.

"He showed me the tractor and I learned it had an 8V71 Detroit Diesel engine. Ron used the tractor for primary tillage for years and replaced the engine in 2004. It had been parked for 14 years. Its planetary axles were taken from a pair of Euclid 14-TDT dirt scrapers. It had dual 24.5 x 32 tires all around and was painted Euclid Green. LeeRoy had named it Kingsley 2."

Henderson says he asked Ron whether there was a Kingsley 1, and indeed there was.

In 1962, LeeRoy built a tractor using Farmall F-30 axles and a Detroit Diesel 4-71 engine coupled to an Adams road grader transmission. The transfer case was custom-built by Douglass and Maurice Steiger from parts of a Cat D8. He built the frame from 3/8-in. steel plate, made the fenders from 3/16-in. steel, and built the wheel centers from 1/2-in.

steel welded to 34-in. dia. rims.

LeeRoy used the 8-ton tractor until 1970, then sold it. Ron's son, Kevin, found it years later but wasn't able to buy it from the owner and reunite it with Kingsley 2. Henderson asked Ron if he could buy the tractor if he found it, and Ron said, "Go right ahead." So the tractor's trail continued.

Henderson contacted people in the area around Maddock, N.D., and eventually located Kingsley 1.

"The owner had parked it nearly 40 years earlier, and to my amazement, was willing to sell it," Henderson says. "After digging it out of a junkyard, I brought it home and put on three used tires to replace those that were missing. The 4-71 engine wouldn't turn over, so I rebuilt the blower and freed up the injectors. The engine fired up and was extremely noisy. I pulled the oil pan and found that the crankshaft and block were both ruined."

Henderson installed a different 4-71 engine and got it running in time to drive in the homemade tractor parade at the 2018 Steam Threshers Reunion in Rollag, Minn. He also contacted Ron Kingsley and asked him to bring Kingsley 2 to the event.



Henderson dug up the rusted skeleton of Kingsley 1, a 4-WD tractor built by LeeRoy Kingsley in 1962, from a scrap pile and hauled it to his North Dakota farm.

"After 48 years, both Kingsley tractors were once again side by side, so it was an emotional time," Henderson says. "Though I don't farm, I still drive the Kingsley occasionally. I've also acquired other farmer-built tractors, but those are another story."

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Pierce shown with his 1917 Wisconsin Tractor 16-32.

107-Year-Old Tractor Is A Parade Favorite

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

Ralph Pierce and his son, Nathan, are proud owners of a 1917 Wisconsin Tractor 16-32 that Ralph's dad bought for just \$350. Ralph says his dad, Jim, often talked about his fond memories of driving a smooth-running Wisconsin at his uncle's farm near Baraboo, Wis., in the 1930s.

"He wanted a Wisconsin of his own for a long time, and eventually he was able to buy a 16-32 (16 hp drawbar/32 hp belt) in 1967. Almost six decades later, my son Nathan and I keep that tractor in top, parade-worthy condition."

Ralph says that when his dad bought the tractor from a collector, it was nearly 50 years old.

"It ran fairly well, but it needed cleaning, and the hood was badly damaged. He had a friend in the furnace business build a new hood, and another friend painted the tractor. They tuned up the magneto, repaired the radiator, and put rubber tread pods on the iron wheels. It was and still is a real nice parade tractor. It's been at the Badger Steam and Gas Engine Show in Baraboo, Wis., every summer since 1970, and oftentimes at other area shows."

Pierce had it repainted in 2001 and relates

that "because of the tractor's age, the radiator had been leaking, so I had it rebuilt by a company in Cincinnati. Much to my amazement, that repair cost more than \$4,000, but it sure looks nice now. We also rebuilt the magneto

and the rear wooden platform, but otherwise it's original. We store it inside, and it starts just fine every spring. I crank the engine over several times each winter to make sure it stays lubricated."

The Wisconsin is one of about 500 tractors built by the McFarlane and Westmart Tractor Co. in Sauk City, Wis. Although Earl McFarlane's tractor venture lasted only a scant eight years, the company achieved long-term success with tillage equipment. The McFarlane Company still exists in 2026 as a successful "short line" business. Three of Earl's grandsons are active in the company, which has diversified and expanded over the years. Pierce says the company owns one of the 15 or 16 Wisconsin tractors still in existence, and he knows where many of the others are, too.

"Three or four are around this area, and one in Northern Wisconsin has two brass serial plates, one with a U.S. serial number and the other with a Canadian number. Others are in Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois. A few years ago, we had 9 of them at the Baraboo Show," says Pierce.

"Wisconsin tractors had outstanding power and were known for having a closed gearcase,



a rarity among tractors in the early 1900s. Ours has a Climax 4-cyl. engine, and others had Beaver or Waukesha engines. If you put it against another tractor built in 1919, it was ahead of its time."

Pierce has collected memorabilia and information on Wisconsin tractors over the years.

"The company built five different models. Ours is the 16-32 standard, and others had different features such as larger wheels, a bigger engine, different radiators, a preheater on the exhaust manifold, and different air cleaners. Wisconsin was definitely a custom tractor company."

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