

It's Not New Anymore The Rusty Acres Approach

by Dan Peterson

It's time to discuss the meaning of "old tractors," and things that can go wrong even if it has supposedly been repaired. Let's examine the statement, "The engine has been overhauled, gaskets replaced, and seals renewed." The buyer may not even want more details than that. He may prefer to believe the best. After all, it was a long drive to get there, trailer in tow, and the cash is burning a hole in his pocket. He wants to go home happy, with a tractor snugly chained to the trailer deck. The psychology of it all, his frame of mind, is kind of like getting a physical. "Doc, don't tell me anything bad. Gloss the results over lightly, and let me outta here!"

The buyer knows better. He should be asking questions and expecting detailed answers. Questions like, "When was the engine overhauled, and to what extent? Were the rings replaced? The bearings? What was the condition of the cylinder bores, and what was done to get them right? Was the block bored or sleeved? In what condition were the pistons? Tell me about the gaskets that were replaced."

The same kind of questions can be asked for every major component. This line of questioning might upset some sellers, but not those with intimate firsthand knowledge of the tractor. Honesty becomes a major factor here. The buyer should expect the seller to do a better job in reviewing the details of the product than might be expected from a used car salesman that probably has little or no firsthand knowledge of any car on the lot. Even so, there can be unforeseen problems. Here's a good example... A power steering unit for a Dubuque tractor was purchased at a very high price. It was supposed to be in good operating condition, and all it needed was "cleaning up, painting, and installation". The seller wasn't truthful. The power steering pump leaked and developed no pressure. It couldn't have worked when it was removed from the previous tractor. It needed to be rebuilt, which would have been expected had the seller been honest, but that wouldn't have brought him top dollar. Unless you actually see something working, or know by experience that

the seller's word is good, be advised that things may not be as described.

And then there was the tractor I was asked to restore, with the owner passing along the word that the engine had already been overhauled. Wrong! All the previous owner did or had done was to fix some leaky gaskets and seals. The engine had clearly not been "overhauled" in the normal sense of the word. In fact, when started it chugged white smoke and rained black splatter all over the tractor. Time to start the search for a cracked head or bad head gasket.

As it ended up, the person that sold the tractor had bought it with the claim that the engine had been overhauled. Without checking further, he sold it to the current owner. A mess passed along, because honest word and proof were not part of the deal earlier. Let's look at a few classic "seller statements..."

"The tractor is stuck, but just from lack of use. It was running fine when we brought it inside." Maybe. Was it "running fine" when it was first parked outside? And how long did it have to set there, and did you then push it inside? The buyer has no clue, and it's probably better to ignore the seller. You have no idea of the actual condition of the engine or transmission. If it's only "stuck a little" like the owner says, have him get it running so you can do a decent job of evaluation.

It reminds me of the time I bought a "730" at an auction. It had five broken gears in the transmission. Auction tractors can be that way... Paint blown on to make them look a little better (to the beginner's eye only, as experienced buyers dislike this tactic very much and will likely not bid as high), and other tricks to make them seem better than they are. You can usually hear the engine run, but likely won't have the privilege of taking a "test-and-evaluation" drive. An auction rarely has a seller or representative that can testify about a tractor. You buy "as is," possibly being driven past the point of common sense by another bidder or two who also want the tractor. And are you being honest with yourself? Have you looked closely for leaks at gasket and seal locations? Do you suppose a specific leak is being caused by a worn out shaft or faulty installation, or is it just from lack of use? Have you asked if you can operate the tractor? Wouldn't that be a revolution if buyers at auctions began to demand more from the auctioneer? "Hey, we ain't biddin' a nickel until we know more about this tractor!"

Another classic claim... "The seals were replaced, but a few of them are leaking now from lack of use." Really? Seals "drying out" from lack of use is certainly possible, but were these seals installed properly? Is the shaft worn out? Was it the *correct* seal? Seals are important to keep lubricants where they're supposed to be, and they don't last forever. They also don't dry up overnight. Ask the needed questions to make an intelligent decision. Either way, just remember that a leaking seal *is* a leaking seal. Just because it was replaced does not and should not be regarded as an asset if it's leaking again now. You need to regard it as a deficit that may extend beyond just the cost of seal replacement. There's at least an even chance that the seal is leaking for some reason other than simply being dried out from lack of use.

Just one more classic question before I close... "How do I stop this fuel from leaking and ruining the paint job?" In most instances, the right thing to do is replace the fuel filter (sediment bowl) assembly. New ones are available at a reasonable price, but some of the new assemblies I've run into don't shut off the fuel completely, while others just plain leak out of every place possible — and fill the bowl *and* the carburetor. There's no clear answer here, other than to monitor the performance of the assembly carefully and nip any problems in the bud.

I've discovered that gasoline containing ethanol can make the rubber gasket under the sediment bowl swell up, as well as the O-ring seal behind the shutoff. A cork gasket under the sediment bowl has helped in some instances. Not using ethanol in older machinery is another consideration.

Be aware that when hauling a tractor, the fuel in the tank will slosh around enough to loosen particles of residue. Those particles will end up in the fuel system, and are often the cause of the float needle sticking or not seating properly. If the fuel shutoff isn't shutting off completely, a sticking float needle becomes even a bigger problem because the continuing flow of fuel can also fill the crankcase in some instances. Sometimes, lightly tapping on the side of the carburetor bowl will encourage light particles to go through the system. Lightly tapping with the plastic handle of a screwdriver does not mean that hammering with a crescent wrench is okay.

Old tractors are old tractors. They aren't show

cars with 100-point restorations, and I don't believe that tractor collectors want them to go that direction. My dad and I used to be into show cars, and it was "everything by the book." With that kind of program and judging, the buyer has clear documentation of the car being sold. With tractors, the buyer has to rely to some degree on the honesty of the seller. These machines now have an average age of over a half century. If collectors and restorers work together for the betterment of this hobby, it will continue to be a great pleasure that does not need a detailed book of rules to follow. The basic guideline set forth by the Two-Cylinder Club to "faithfully restore tractors to a reasonable and practical level of originality and authenticity" is right on target. It's a goal that can be achieved by a very broad audience of participants, as is proven every summer at the Club's annual event.

Recognizing that these machines are at least 30-years old to qualify as "vintage," and that they were built to work darn hard, I believe that members of the organization have achieved remarkable results. Just thinking about it, I can hardly wait until Two-Cylinder XVI. Hope to see you there! ☺

The number of casual "Letters" received at the Two-Cylinder Club office has taken a back seat to the heavy amount of mail and email that is now being directed to "Commentary." With that, we encourage readers to write even if they don't have a specific comment or question. Send a photo, old or current, and let us know what's going on in your John Deere-related life. You'd be surprised how much others will enjoy reading or seeing what you have to say or send.

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