

# LOVE IT *and* LEAVE IT

## The Rusty Acres Approach

by Dan Peterman

From time to time, you run across that one very special tractor that we would all like to have... A fine original that has never been messed with. These are most often the one-owner or one-family tractor that was shedded every night, maintenance was performed regularly, and in the early years was even polished from time to time. So here's the tractor; in tip-top condition without ever having been painted or modified. What should be done with it now?

Upon closer inspection, you find a few areas that really could use some paint. Especially in those pockets that held dirt and attracted moisture. The high-pressure wash job revealed some rust. But, if you just paint those areas, they'll stick out like a sore thumb. (Who came up with that saying, anyway?) Maybe you should just give up and restore the whole thing. But before you do, I'm going to tell you three interesting stories. Then, at the end, you can decide what you're going to do with that exceptionally nice original tractor.

Over a decade ago, an owner brought a tractor to my dad and me for an appearance-only restoration. We didn't want to argue with him about what to do, but it was obvious that this tractor was simply too nice to restore. The paint was entirely original and all of the decals were still just fine. It ran like a Swiss watch, had no significant oil leaks, and the wiring showed no damage. The cushion seat showed only a hint of compression, and the tires even had some "nubbins" remaining. So, what had this 40-year-old been used for? Well, when new it had a front-mounted blade installed so the original owner could clean snow off his two-car driveway. That's all it did for its entire life. It sat in one stall of the garage facing out, and he'd just go back and forth with it to push snow. Full left and right turns were unnecessary, which led to the only mechanical problem. The lube in the steering housing had hardened up, allowing only slight left or right steering, just as it had always done.

Estimated hours on the tractor? Less than 100. Our opinion? The tractor should have been left as it was, except for getting the steering loosened up. The owner's opinion? He wanted it to look brand new, so we gave it a factory-fresh paint job. Now he had a tractor that looked just like so many other restored tractors; but with this one, all of that wonderfully authentic and visual history had been covered by new paint.

On to a second story... About six years ago, my

brother purchased a low-seat "60" Standard. In exceptional original condition, this 1200-hour tractor was undisturbed insofar as tires, paint, wiring harness, hoses, belts, seats, and lights were concerned. Besides all of this, it ran like a top. It only had a few bad things going that needed repair. The question was whether or not to fix them and leave the appearance as it was, or to have a super-easy restoration job and get busy on that. We decided on something in-between.

One of the problems was a huge crack in the intake side of the manifold; another was paint peeling off the grille screen; the third was fluid in the rear tires that had started to leak around both valve stems, discoloring the paint on the rims. Here's what we did...

Since the tractor was much too nice to repaint, it got a well-deserved rub-down with rubbing compound to remove paint oxide. The manifold was replaced. The grille was removed and computer color-matched for its original somewhat faded color, and then painted. A flattening agent was added to the paint to make it slightly dull-looking like the rest of the paint. When re-installed, you'd have to know that this was done to detect the difference.

The rear rims were taken off, fluid was drained, and tires were carefully dismantled (because of their age, we didn't want to tear them). The rims were then sandblasted, the faded front rims were color-matched, the flattening agent was added to the paint, and the rear rims were painted. They were a virtual match with the front rims, and looked like they had originally without the discoloration problem.

You don't want shiny, freshly painted parts on an original. We knew that after rubbing out the oxidation on the sheet metal — to get to the actual but faded remaining base paint — the oxidation would return at a faster rate within a few months. So, to preserve that original look, the entire tractor was clear-coated. A flattening agent was put into the clear coat as well, to retain the dull look. To this day the tractor retains its original appearance, nicely preserved by the clear coat.

Despite my profession of being a tractor restorer, I believe that exceptional originals are just as nice as a correctly restored tractor, they offer a glimpse into authenticity that cannot be duplicated by a restored tractor, and they are just as much or more valuable. The collecting world recognizes this with coins and guns, and I think greater numbers of tractor collectors are beginning to realize it as well. If a tractor is beyond the exceptional original stage, then it's time to consider restoration. But, let's not get too hasty by tearing into the prime remaining examples.

My final story concerns the first experience that my dad and I had with an exceptional original. It was a very late, styled, electric-start Model "D". This was the most original tractor we had ever seen, but nonetheless it had some strikes against it. On the

other hand, it only had *about two hours of running time*. Here's what happened...

The tractor was originally ordered by a John Deere dealer for a customer in North or South Dakota (I don't remember which). Harvest time came, and the tractor hadn't yet arrived at the dealership. The farmer cancelled his order, and bought another tractor of a different brand. It was too late for the dealer to cancel the order, so the late-arriving "D" was displayed on the showroom floor for a few months. No one bought it, so the tractor was moved to a Quonset building at the back of the property, and it sat there for almost 20 years! Eventually its existence was discovered by a customer, who happily bought the tractor and took it home. There it sat for another ten years, until it was brought to us to get it running and "freshened up."

The biggest problem was the result of 30 years of visiting birds. We carefully washed off the droppings with cold water, and were surprised at the durability of the paint. This was followed by hand polishing with rubbing compound. We removed the fuel tank for cleaning and sealing, rebuilt the carburetor, and got it running. Have you ever heard a brand-new "D" run? Wow!

The magneto still produced a beautiful spark. Obviously, fluids were replaced ahead of time, and then drained and replaced again after running it for awhile. The original big black lights worked, and the generator charged just like it was supposed to. If you've ever seen the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, this was about like the scene where the missing aircraft that disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle were discovered and fired up for the first time after about three decades.

This "D" was truly exceptional. Half of one of the "John Deere" decals on the side of the hood was missing, so a set of new-old-stock decals was found and put on. These were the original type that you soak in water and transfer on at just the right moment. After that, the tractor was clear-coated using just a touch of the flattening agent, and it had a glow that was truly unique. After all, looking at this wonderful machine sitting there running was like being allowed to step back 30 years in time. It's a moment I'll never forget.

Think through it. I don't recommend restoring tractors that are exceptionally fine original examples, but the final decision is up to the owner. If the otherwise excellent tractor has a few problems, perhaps they can be handled as described in this article. I know that the Two-Cylinder Club encourages the preservation of fine, unaltered originals, and several outstanding examples are seen at every Expo. Incidentally, that's where I'll be from June 19th through the 21st, and I hope to see you there! ☺

---

*Right Column: Look closely — the John Deere "4x9" advertising literature is mixed in with identically sized railroad time tables, which have also become a highly sought-after current-day collectible.*

# The "4x9s"

*Economical Gold* by Jack Cherry



Within the Deere & Company advertising department, the 4x9-inch advertising literature was known as "The Railroad Folders." That's because they roughly resembled the railroad timetables that were in depots during the era of railroad passenger travel, and were even displayed in racks not entirely unlike some of the racks that were in John Deere dealer showrooms decades ago.

For the most part, the 4x9s (which typically measure 3 7/8"x9" when folded, 7 1/4"x9" when unfolded into the reading position) featured implements (attachments), but that wasn't always true. Deere's first production tractor, the John Deere All-Wheel-Drive (the Dain), was first presented on a folder; as was the first general-purpose tractor from Waterloo, the Model "C". The Industrial "D" literature preceded that in 1926, and Waterloo Boy Tractor folders by John Deere date back to 1919, ironically the same year the All-Wheel-Drive literature was printed and the tractor was discontinued.

As time passed, it was determined that tractor literature, as well as advertising for other major machinery such as combines, would best be presented in unfolded booklets so the entire front could display an image of the product. Accordingly, literature display racks were designed so they could accept an assortment of both sizes.

Today, the 4x9s are easily the best values in vintage John Deere sales literature. Even though they almost exclusively feature implements and products other than tractors, many of them include tractors on their pages. And, even for those that don't, the information they contain can't help but round out the knowledge of the reader. While tractors are the primary focus of most of the members in this organization, and most implements went to the scrap dealer long ago, the 4x9s still provide a colorful link to the past. Often available for \$20<sup>00</sup> or less, depending on the subject matter and number of pages, they are still a bargain. That won't continue to be true for much longer, as increasing numbers of people are discovering the pleasure of vintage "paper"; yet another John Deere collectible that tends to outpace the stock market.