Original or Reproduction?

The Rusty Acres Approach

By Dan Peterman

Whether it is someone involved in the tractor restoration business, or the hobbyist working their own project, we all run into problems with parts. This can include parts that are missing, sheet metal that is too damaged or rusted to bother with repairing, and parts or components that simply need to be replaced because they are broken or worn out.

We all have to shop around for the bits and pieces that can make our restorations complete. Original parts — generally referred to as "new-old-stock" (N.O.S.) — are usually the best, but they can empty the wallet or checkbook in short order. Happily, the continuing growth of the hobby has spawned the reproduction parts industry. Many collectors are no longer content to simply gather tractor after tractor and shove them here or there to take up all available space. Instead, they want to achieve peak pride of ownership by returning some of their tractors to the pristine condition in which they left the factory, or perhaps carefully maintain those that are still in superb original condition.

Regarding reproduction parts, be aware that there's a range in quality. Some are excellent, while others are just plain poor, and they run the full gamut between. Prices tend to follow the pattern, in that the better reproduction parts are usually more expensive.

There has been some fuss recently about the use of reproduction parts. Let's face the facts... there are simply not enough good original parts to go around. For years, tractors such as Crossover "GPs" have been waiting for a quality reproduction manifold to replace the original fragile factory casting. If Deere went back into production of the C1703R, would it then be okay to breathe life back into these tractors? And what about the spoke-flywheel "Ds"? Don't the owners have a right to return them to their original appearance, or must they use a later solid flywheel? Does the argument against reproduction parts hold more water if the owner of a Model "B", originally equipped with steel wheels but now with cutdowns, wants to go back to steel? What if the owner of a low-radiator "G" would like to return it to its original appearance? Such questions will be sorted out over time. The owners of originals will likely tend to be opposed to certain reproduction parts, while those without critical parts, such as the "GP" Series "P" owner with incorrect rear wheels, will happily pounce on the opportunity to get a pair of finely fabricated repros.

Fact is, everyone would like to go original all the way, but we all know that isn't possible. Not so many years ago, we had to make do with whatever was available. There were no reproduction parts, except for mostly incorrect mufflers, decals, and a few other replacement items from various chains specializing in ag supplies.

Today, things are quite different. New fenders, hoods, weights, and even wheels are available, along with 3-points, medallions, gauges, fuel caps, steering wheels, seats, etc. The availability of reproduction parts makes the restorer's life easier, *most* of the time...

I restored an unstyled "B" a few years ago. I needed a reproduction hood because it would have been less expensive and better than repairing the mess that was on the tractor. I ordered a hood from a well-known vendor that I had dealt with in the past, always with good results due to high quality. So, when the hood arrived, I felt no urgency to try in on for size. Instead, I prepped it for paint, primed it, painted it, and applied the decals. Then I attempted to install it, a simple task on an unstyled tractor, and struggled to get it over the exhaust. Even after making some major adjustments, it fit like a saddle on a sow. It was simply shaped incorrectly, and bent almost an inch short on both sides. So, a word of advice. Make *sure* the part fits before you throw additional labor and expense at them. Needless to say, I wasn't about to pass any of those losses along to the customer, and just had to take a deep breath and move on from there.

What had happened? I learned that my formerly excellent supplier was "farming out" some of his work to another supplier in the name of economy. Some bargain there!

I prefer to use original parts wherever possible and practical, but nice original sheet metal is getting to be very scarce. Be prepared to pay plenty for the remains of a quickly diminishing supply, if you insist on going original.

Some restorers want a tractor decked out and loaded up with all the options they can get their hands on, which usually means buying a bunch of repro goodies such as fenders, weights, and 3-points, even if the tractor never had them in the first place. Loaded tractors are, to me, pretty neat *if* they came from the factory or out of the dealerships that way, but how many really did? There's a vintage car dealership not all that far from me that specializes in cars from the '50s. Almost all of them go out the door with those ugly fender skirts and stupid Continental kits (spare tire mounted behind the trunk in a can on an extended bumper). People I've talked to that were car-savvy in the 1950s tell me that the skirts and Continental kits were rarely seen then, which hardly matches up to them being on almost every '58 Impala that's ever rolled out of that particular dealership. I'll have mine without the cream and sugar, please.

I've noticed one interesting effect. Reproduction parts may be driving up the cost/value of originals. Maybe that's due to the fact that some reproduction stuff sticks out like a sore thumb. On the other hand, some items are as accurate as all get out.

A good place to start looking for parts is John Deere. They still have many items available for two-cylinder and New Generation Tractors, especially those critical to keeping the tractor functional. Price has sometimes been an issue here, but I can imagine that low-quantity through a huge corporation results in overheads that might not be present in a back alley shop. On the other hand, if we collectors continue to collectively voice our needs and concerns, Deere is likely to stand with us through many more years of bugging them about our tiny corner of their universe. If we turn away from them, they'll have no need or reason to continue supplying that little pin or new clutch disks.

I wish you well on all your repair and restoration projects. Winter is a good time to retreat to the shop, as the weather provides the excuse for why you don't have to go on a family picnic or over to the soccer field. It's been busy here. I just finished a "40" V, and am in progress on a styled "LI", a "620", and one each yellow "420" U and "430" U. I just started on a "320" U for Two-Cylinder XVI, which will be featuring a full lineup of the "20" Series for its 50th Anniversary. Meanwhile, I'll find some other subject on which to cast my opinions for the next issue.

John Deere Tractor
Field Service Bulletins

In 1949, the general-purpose Model "A" Tractors were modified to the extent that John Deere provided them with a series of new order code numbers. The basic modifications of the "A" are summarized in Field Service Bulletin 165-S, including the advise to utilize the *Model "B" Service Manual* for service information. Actually, this was the only complete service manual provided by John Deere for the "Lettered" Series Tractors, which has been a source of frustration for tractor owners for well over half a century.

Bulletin 165-S also spotlights the Hobbs Engine Hour Meters and Pressure Switches, which is timely as the Hobbs Meters are also mentioned in "Commentary" and in Gary Uken's article. These meters, when functioning properly, are a very interesting addition to tractors. Some collector restorers, believing that the meters were an unauthorized aftermarket modification, have unfortunately removed them and filled the hole. As the bulletin states, most of them were actually installed at the factory.

Of special interest are the aids for cold-weather operation. The special "hot" gasoline manifold has been the source of questions from owners of the relatively few tractors that have had them installed, and Bulletin 165-S should help to make clear the reason for the manifold. The advantage of hotter spark plugs in certain conditions is also described, and it is sometimes better for owners of tractors that are used infrequently to use hotter-than-normal spark plugs.

Somewhat more obscure is the now very rare Adeco Nozzle Tester, which was approved by John Deere for testing Model "R" Tractor injector nozzles, and many years ago were in dealership service departments wherever the "R" was popular.

Bulleting 165-S concludes with the mention of the gasoline conversion sets, or kits, that were available for styled (ramp-type cylinder head — pre-gasoline era) Model "A" and "B" Tractors. This should explain why some earlier styled "As" and "Bs" so equipped are regarded to be absolutely acceptable in regard to authenticity, and, in fact, are quite desirable insofar as the curiosity factory is concerned, since they are fairly scarce.