

FORD & FORDSON

Tractor Collection: Issue 3

FORDSON MODELS F & N



★ BUYING ★ OWNING ★ RUNNING ★ RESTORING



UNUSUAL IMPLEMENTS



SHOW-STOPPERS



PRESERVED WORKERS

STILL AVAILABLE

FORD&FORDSON

Tractor Collection: Issue 1

FORDSON DEXTA

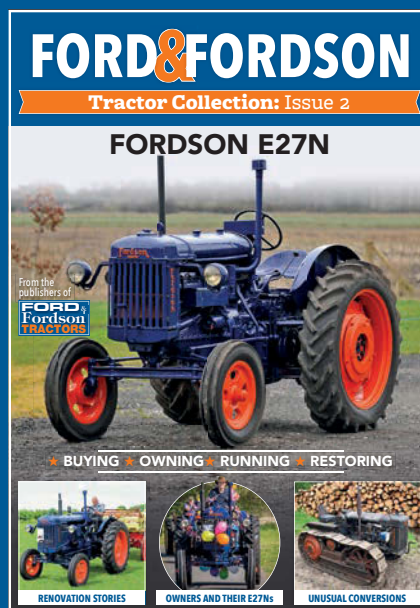
Edited by Chris Graham, editor of *Ford & Fordson Magazine*, this edition spotlights the Fordson Dexta; one of the most desirable, affordable and popular vintage tractors from the late 1950s and early '60s. The Dexta's appealing combination of straightforward design, reliable engineering and classic, visual appeal mean that it's become a firm favourite with enthusiasts around the world. This bookazine celebrates all aspects of the wonderful Dexta, and its 100, all-colour pages are packed with information about buying, owning, running and restoring these iconic machines.



Tractor Collection: Issue 2

FORDSON E27N

Edited by Chris Graham, the editor of *Ford & Fordson Tractors* magazine, this second volume in the new Tractor Collection series from Kelsey Publishing, spotlights the fabulous Fordson E27N. This tractor, launched just after the Second World War as something of a 'stepping stone' model between the pre-war



Standard N and the early '50s New Major E1A, is a much worthier and more capable machine than its 'stopgap' reputation would suggest. This new, all-colour, 100-page bookazine is dedicated to – and celebrates – all aspects of the E27N; a tractor which turned out to be far more successful than anyone at the time probably expected.

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Both the Fordson Model F and N are tractors from a truly bygone age. They are machines that were designed and built at a time when life was lived at a pace that matched the agricultural seasons. And yet they were also at the forefront of farm technology; truly 'cutting edge', as far as the early-adopters were concerned.

They were simple yet innovative tractors that made a big difference throughout a momentous, 28-year period. The F arrived first, during the dark days of World War One, at a time when Britain was struggling with serious food, man and horse shortages. It was Henry Ford's contribution towards boosting agricultural production.

But the F was also instrumental in ushering-in a new era of farming

mechanisation and, for that alone, its notable place in history is assured. However, the Fordson Model N, which arrived as the F's successor in 1929, took that process to a whole new level. And, by a strange twist of fate, it was the second, successive Fordson tractor to come to Great Britain's wartime aid, as it worked the land in ever greater numbers during the tough years of World War Two.

What I hope you gather from reading the content gathered in this edition, is that there's real privilege attached to owning either one of these very significant tractors. Given that they can still be perfectly capable of returning a decent day's

work in the field, it's easy to overlook their incredible age; even the youngest Model N will now be 76 years old. Seek out a Model F, and that'll be at least 93!

Sure, such elderly machines can be more finicky to own than a tractor from the 1950s or '60s, and sometimes awkward to start, too. But you've got to expect a dose of recalcitrance at their age! However, the still remarkable affordability of these models, coupled with the pleasure and satisfaction that comes from owning a genuine icon, surely outweighs the odd, practical niggle. So press on, dear reader, become inspired by what follows, then go out and save one of these exquisite pieces of agricultural history for yourself, while you still can.

Chris Graham, Editor



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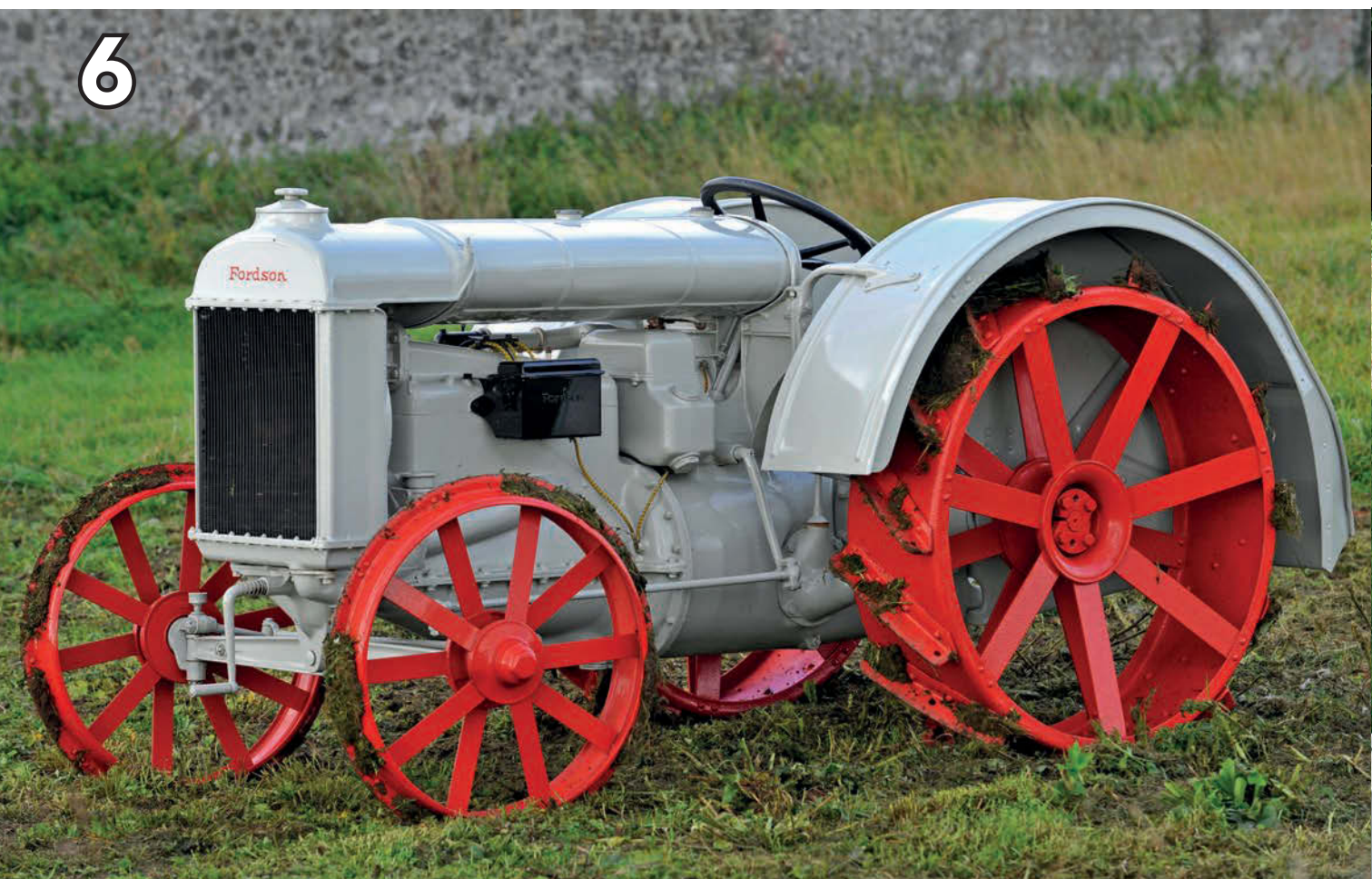
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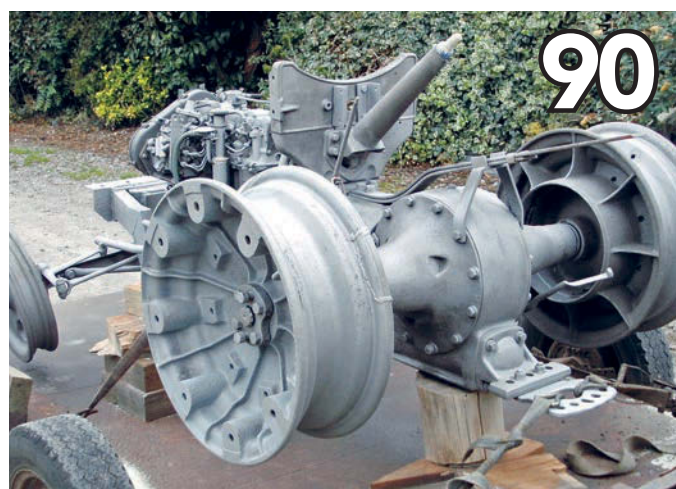
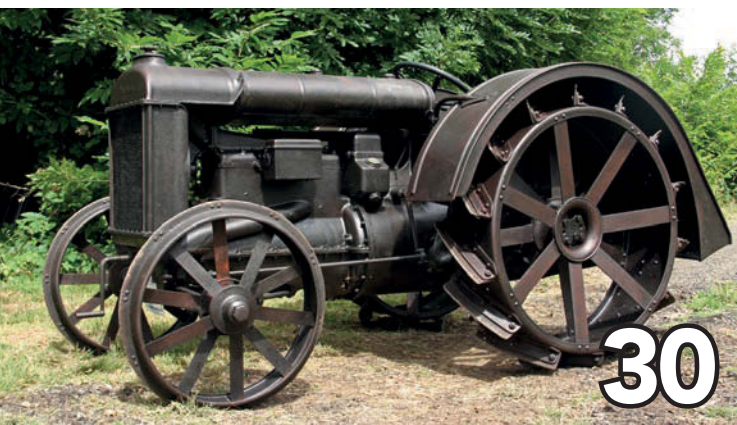
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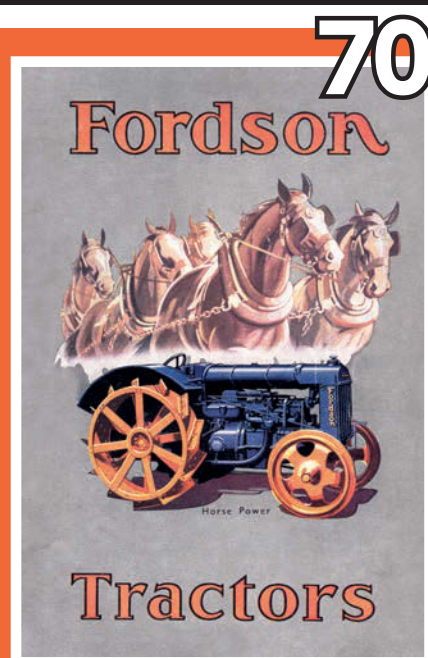
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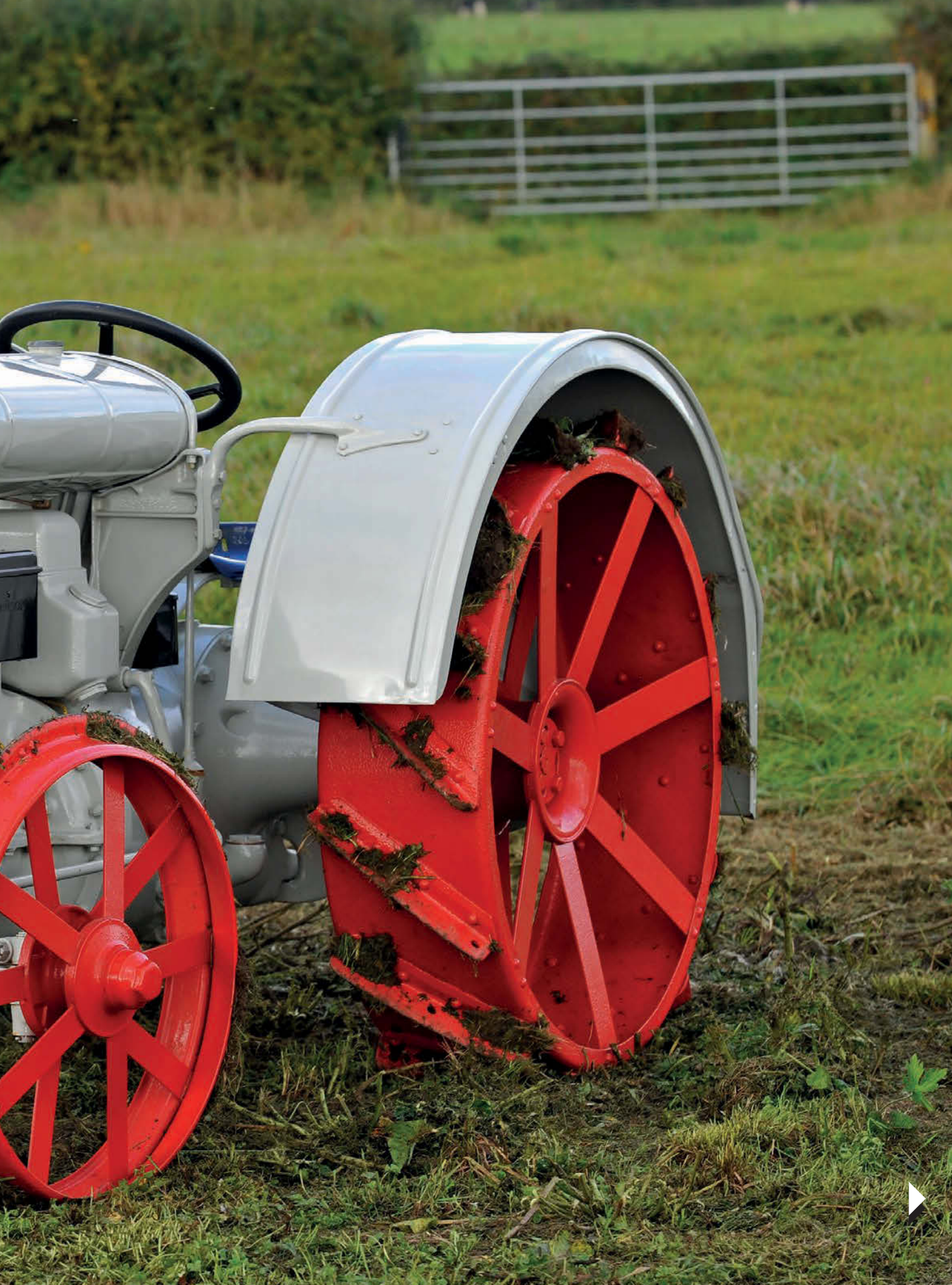
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BUYING GUIDE

A MASS-PRODUCED MARVEL!





BUYING GUIDE

Chris Graham digs into the Fordson Model F's background, to discover more about buying and owning this very significant tractor

The Fordson Model F is a momentous machine in many respects. For a start, it was the first tractor to be mass-produced, and then sold at an affordable price to farmers around the world. But, perhaps more fundamentally, it also triggered an agricultural revolution. The Model F – and the huge numbers in which it was made – was instrumental in the introduction of a new era in farming; the mechanised age.

Henry Ford had a long-held ambition to ease the lot of the over-worked farm labourer. His success with the Model T – which brought the reality of owning a motor car to the masses – allowed him to experiment with successive, Model T-based vehicles, in a bid to create a machine that could be used on the land, for agricultural purposes. He wanted to see combustion engine-



ABOVE: Being a relative lightweight, the Model F suffered with a nasty tendency to rear up if an implement being towed hit an obstacle. This sometimes caused the tractor to flip, injuring or killing the driver. Ford's solution was to beef-up and extend the rear mudguards much lower so that, should the front start to lift, the bottoms of the mudguards would impact the ground and halt the rise.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Iron wheels were fitted as standard throughout the Model F's 11-year production run. However, it was possible to order an Industrial version that featured solid, rubber tyres.

LEFT: Nick Byrne aboard his 1927 Model F.





powered machines replace horses on farms and, eventually, that's exactly what happened.

Core business

However, with the core of Ford's business then being the production of road cars and light commercials, Henry was encouraged to set up a subsidiary operation to further his tractor-making ambitions. He did this with his son, Edsel, and called it Henry Ford & Son Inc. (can you see where the 'Fordson' name came from?). The new operation had its first, serious tractor prototypes ready in 1916.

Of course, at this time on the other side of the Atlantic, World War One was raging in Europe, and Great

Britain was facing ever-growing food shortages due to its dependence on imports. In 1917, the British government devised a plan to boost home production by ploughing-up great swathes of the nation's pastureland, and turning it over to crop and vegetable production.

However, the war effort meant that the number of both farm labourers and horses left on the home front was worryingly low. In short, the nation's agricultural workforce was seriously depleted, which posed a major problem.

Useful contacts

Fortunately, Percival Perry, who was both the chief executive of Ford in Great Britain, and involved with the government's drive to bolster home-grown food production, was ideally placed to advise on the problem. He knew of Henry Ford's tractor production ambitions, and suggested to the government that these machines could provide the answer to both the labour and horsepower shortage.

The idea met with approval, a couple of the prototype tractors

“ Henry Ford had a long-held ambition to ease the lot of the over-worked farm labourer ”



“Would-be buyers should go into Model F ownership with their eyes wide open, and expecting things to be a bit of a mechanical jumble”

were shipped to Great Britain for trials and everyone was very impressed. The machines were found to be effective, easy to operate and reliable, so negotiations began. Henry Ford offered his full co-operation, and made his factory in Cork, southern Ireland, available for tractor production. He also sent his production guru, Charles Sorensen, to run the facility, under the control of the British government's Ministry of Munitions (MoM).

Then, following a change in wartime production priorities, the British government asked Henry Ford if he could produce a batch of 6,000 'MoM' tractors at his plant in Dearborn, in

Michigan, and then ship them across the Atlantic. He agreed, Sorensen returned to the USA to oversee things there and production began. But, unfortunately, initial progress was slower than expected.

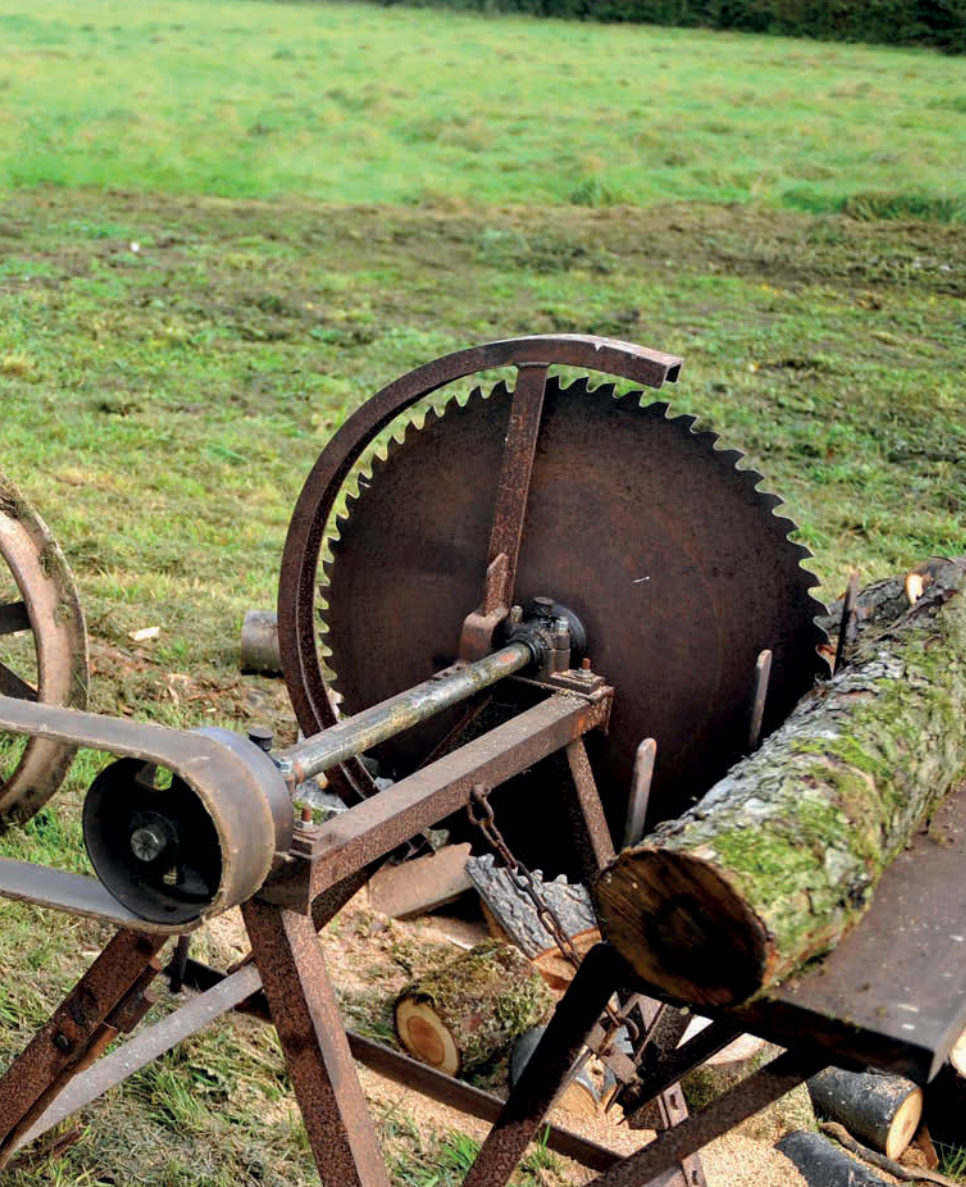
A slow start

By the end of 1917, only 254 tractors had been built, although production really ramped-up the following year, which ended with just over 34,000 having been made. The order of 6,000 for Great Britain was completed by April, 1918, and it was at some point during this period that the 'Model F' name became established, simply because 'F' was

the vehicle's factory designation at the Dearborn plant.

Rather ironically, World War One ended later that same year, so the rush to get the new machinery into service came a little bit too late. Nevertheless, a legend had been born, and the agricultural world would never be the same again. Ford's Cork plant produced the first of the Irish Model Fs in July 1919, but that arrangement didn't last for much more than two years.

Market changes and political problems led to the closure of the Irish factory in 1922, with just over 7,500 tractors having left the site. After that, all Model F production



LEFT: The Model F remains perfectly usable for a bit of ploughing, cultivation work or log-cutting. This 1926 example, despite its 'working clothes' appearance, has been completely rebuilt.

mechanical friction was considered sufficient to stop the tractor when the clutch pedal was depressed.

By cleverly bolting the engine block, transmission and rear axle directly together to provide an inherently strong structure, there was no requirement for a heavy chassis frame, which saved money and simplified the manufacturing process.

The Model F ran on fabricated steel, spoked and cleated rear wheels, initially with 12 spokes, then 14. The front wheels were fabricated from steel, to a 10-spoke design.

Buying one

To get some practical, experienced-based insight into buying and owning a Model F, I took a trip to Somerset to consult Fordson enthusiast, Nick Bryne. He owns a couple of late Fs, one of which has been restored to a high standard and the other which, although completely rebuilt, lives on in its unpainted, 'working clothes'.

Chatting with Nick, it quickly became apparent that buying a Model F is about taking an opportunity when one presents itself; getting a tractor and then moving forwards from there. It's not a process over which you can afford to be too picky, unless you have lots of money to throw at the job.

"Probably the biggest problem when buying is knowing what you're actually getting," he explained. "With all these machines now being well over 90 years old, every one will

was switched to Ford's impressive Rouge River factory, located in another part of Dearborn. This facility was to become the largest, integrated factory in the world in 1928 which, coincidentally, was the year that Model F production ended, with some three-quarters of a million examples of this game-changing tractor having rolled from the production line.

Model F overview

The early Model F was powered by a Hercules, 4.1-litre, four-cylinder engine, producing 20hp. This was changed, in 1920, to a very similar, Ford-produced version, with the same power output. Both were designed to be started on petrol, then switched over to cheaper kerosene once the engine had warmed.

Intake air was initially cleaned by a water bath before entering the Holley carburettor, but a switch to a more effective oil cleaner followed. The ignition system was similar to that used on the Model T car, with flywheel-mounted magneto and trembler coils.

The engine was linked to the rear axle by a three-speed transmission (with one reverse gear), delivering a top speed of just over 6mph. There were no brakes, as internal,

WHAT TO PAY?

Prices really are all over the place for the Fordson Model F, with early, USA-built examples available for under £1,000. The Irish-built machines command slightly higher prices than equivalent American-made versions, with the entry level for one of these being about £2,000. Mid-range Fs can cost anything between £3,000 and £6,000 while, at the top of the tree, you should expect to pay £9,000 to £12,000 for a smart, fully-operational example.

BUYING GUIDE



LEFT: From 1920 onwards, a Ford-made four-cylinder engine replaced the original Hercules unit. Both produced 20hp. The black box on the side of the engine contains the four trembler coils.

BELOW: The extended, anti-tipping mudguards on the Model F incorporate a pair of handy tool boxes, one on each side. This 1926 machine has the normal, squared-off ends, which could inhibit turning when towing.

have had so much done to it over the years, as things got broken or became worn out, that finding a complete, all-original machine is, in most cases, the stuff of dreams.

"Things like fuel tanks, manifolds, wheels and even cylinder heads may all have been changed, together with countless other mechanical parts, as the tractor was serviced, repaired and restored by successive owners. So recognising what's original and what's not can be quite a challenge. This is why I say that, given that genuine originality is a pipedream with the Model F, most



buyers will be better off buying a machine, accepting that lots will be wrong about it, then deciding what to do with it from then on."

Of course, it's not as if would-be buyers will be spoilt for choice, anyway. Classified sections are hardly groaning at the seams with Model Fs, but there's usually a handful for sale at any one time. Nick says that quite a few machines are still trickling in from America, but adds that very few of these are great examples.

"Imported Fs can be found with a weird assortment of non-original parts fitted, including things like chain-driven magnetos and exhaust manifolds cobbled together from bits of old water pipe. Such changes would have been made out of necessity back in the day, when it was essential that farmers kept their tractors running and productive."

Mechanical matters

The mechanical side of the Model F is relatively straightforward but, in terms of DIY friendliness, everything depends on your own ability and workshop experience. There are specialists around who can help, of course, but there's always a price to pay for that.

Nick says: "The engines are essentially tough and reliable units, but one must never forget their age. Things are bound to be worn, and the way everything's been serviced, maintained and/or repaired over the years, will be a big factor in determining how much time and money will need to be spent.

"There are plenty of people who are just happy to see such elderly

“It's incredible to be able to buy a working machine that, despite being nearly 100 years old, doesn't need to be molly-coddled”



Model F controls are rudimentary. There's a clutch/brake pedal on the right-hand side, a spindly gear stick on the left, an ignition advance/retard control on the bulkhead and a throttle lever immediately beneath the steering wheel.



There's something very special about a 90-year-old Model F in its working clothes. Lights were never available; Nick Byrne fitted this period unit simply because he fancied doing so!

BUYING GUIDE



Looking at a potential purchase today, it's perfectly possible to find that components such as the fuel tank, manifold and even the cylinder head – together with countless other mechanical parts – may have been changed as the tractor was serviced, repaired and restored by successive owners down the years.

machines running and working, and who are prepared to be rather more forgiving on the component accuracy front, as a result. As far as I'm concerned, though, accuracy is important, and I like to have my tractors as close to original as possible. As always, though, it's each to their own."

So, the bottom line appears to be that would-be buyers should go into Model F ownership with their eyes wide open, and expecting things to be a bit of a mechanical jumble. Everything is

“I never thought that I'd own a Model F; I'd written-off the idea thinking they were just too rare and difficult to sort out**”**

repairable, though, so there's nothing that with patience, tenacity and a bit of cash, can't be sorted out.

As far as the market's concerned, things are somewhat polarised concerning the Model F. Nick says: "I think that an increasing number of people simply look upon the Model F as a very old Fordson that's likely to cause them problems and be difficult to start. Consequently, lots are put off the idea of ownership. The metal, cleated wheels can be similarly off-putting and, inevitably, some regard these as nothing more than lawn-wreckers, that make the tractor harder to transport and show, and restrict its usability.

"On the plus side, these engines needn't be difficult to start if they're properly set-up, and the steel wheels aren't a problem if you take care, make allowances and have a bit of space to play with." There's no question that

the Model F is a machine of its time, and its time was a very, very long while ago. So, it's no good expecting one of these tractors to be as easy and predictable to live with as something from the 1970s or '80s.

However, if you approach ownership with an appreciation for the pivotal role the Model F played in agricultural development, its ground-breaking engineering and the sheer history that every survivor now carries with it, you won't be disappointed. I think that it's incredible to be able to buy a working machine that, despite being nearly 100 years old, doesn't need to be molly-coddled or wrapped in cotton wool like a precious museum piece. So, be in no doubt that these tough little survivors remain perfectly capable of getting out there and mixing it in the mud, and loving every minute of it!

Owner's view: Nick Bryne

"I never thought that I'd own a Model F; I'd written-off the idea thinking they were just too rare and difficult to sort out, due to their age. But then the import market started to pick up and I got a call from Martin Turner of Yeovil-based Cox & Turner Engineering.

"He knew that I was interested in the model, and said that he'd just got a 1927 restoration project in from America that he thought would suit me. It wasn't complete, or a runner, but I took it on, nevertheless. That was about 15 years ago.

"It was a long job getting it sorted and into the condition you see today. It took a lot of research and patience to locate the many missing parts. My 'working clothes' F is a 1926 model, which is fitted with the

FORDSON MODEL F SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	Hercules/Ford four-cylinder
Max power	20hp
Displacement	4,100cc (251.3cu in)
Bore/Stroke	4x5in (102x127mm)
Rated speed	1,000rpm
Transmission	3 fwd, 1 rev, constant mesh
Weight	1,324kg (2,920lb)
Produced	1917-1928

earlier, square-ended mudguards.

"Contrary to what many people believe, I often find the Model F easier to start than my Model Ns, but I think that's because the engines have been properly restored and set-up. Down-at-heel examples with dodgy ignition systems - worn-out trembler coils and

tired flywheel magnets - will inevitably be more of a struggle to get going!

"I have no plans to bring my unpainted F up to 'as new' condition as I like it just the way it is. I've taken both machines to shows in the past, and have won prizes with both, which was very satisfying." ■



This late, 1927 Model F features tapered rear wings, which were introduced to facilitate better turning when towing.

UNUSUAL ATTACHMENT

A RARE COMBINATION

Mary Butler reports on a first-class restoration that is certainly a rare sight to British eyes; a Fordson F fitted with an Athens Double Disc Plow





ABOVE: The twin-disc plough features 24-inch discs that can plough to a depth of 8-9 inches. However, the combined weight of the tractor and the attachment isn't sufficient to keep the plough at such a depth. In practice, 4-6 inches is more like the optimum working depth for this combination. The disc plough could never match the quality of a traditional, mould-board version. However, it was designed for a purpose, and did its job well.



LEFT: Alan Sale's 1924 Fordson Model F, that's fitted with a rare Athens Plow, certainly makes for an unusual sight here in the UK.

In America, restored and preserved Fordson Model Fs can often be found displayed with snowploughs fitted, a dozer blade, or even a front-mounted saw bench. Yet, here in England, very few Model Fs seem to exist with such attachments.

It was in 2006 that Alan Sale demonstrated his recently-acquired, unrestored Fordson Model F fitted with an Athens Plow. After his ploughing demonstration at Little Casterton that year, Alan decided that his very rare combination should undergo a full restoration.

Unusual feature

The 1924 Model F, apart from having the plough fitted, boasts another quite unusual feature, which

“It's very rare to see a tractor from this era that's fitted with full-length mudguards”

knowledgeable readers may already have spotted. It's very rare to see a tractor from this era that's fitted with full-length mudguards. Even though there's a toolbox built into the base of the mudguards, they are different to the tapered wings we're used to seeing on the Irish Longwing Fordson Standard.

Apart from the general engine overhaul, the actual tractor required very little work, except for the fitting of a replacement engine block. The plough was taken off, fully

UNUSUAL ATTACHMENT



ABOVE: When attached, the plough becomes 'as one' with the tractor. The set-up is compact and easily-controlled using a single lever on the right-hand side. This raises and lowers the plough in and out of work. It could be easily driven up close to fences and to the end of rows; the driver had an excellent view of the work in hand.

LEFT: The Athens Plow utilised a new principle in plough construction; namely that of having the weight of the tractor hold the implement in the ground, thus enabling the attachment to be made slightly lighter than a conventional, trailed plough. Weighing in at around a quarter-of-a-ton, the plough is mounted on a simple frame suspended below the tractor, and the discs are located directly in front of the right rear wheel, conveniently in plain view of the driver.

RIGHT: The Athens Plow Co was formed in 1921, and produced disc ploughs and other disc-type cultivation machinery for the new settlers who were reclaiming American prairie land at an alarming rate in the early part of the 20th century. The company, which is based in Athens, Tennessee, still produces disc cultivators today. For the Fordson Model F, two types of Athens plough were available; the twin- and single-disc. The single disc, which was fitted with a 28-inch disc, was a heavier plough, ideal for terracing work, reclamation and deep cultivation.

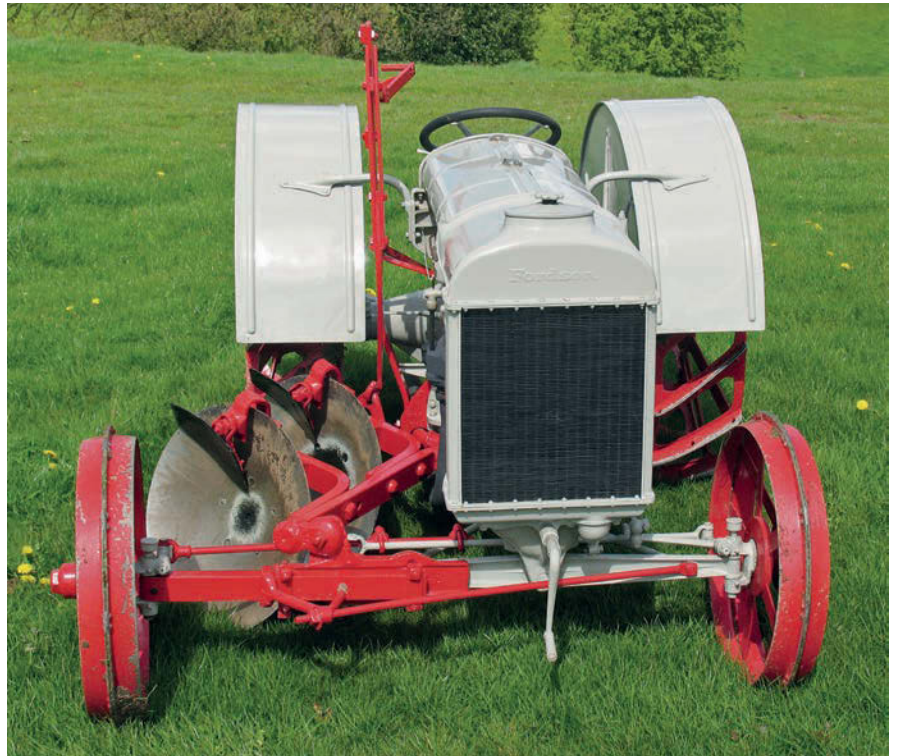


sand-blasted and then resprayed; basically, though, it was a very sound piece of equipment.

Alan says: "The tractor is very easy to drive. Even with the extended front axle, the turning circle is about the same as that achieved by a normal Model F. The operation of the plough is very simple, too; there are few adjustments to be made, and a single lever lifts it in and out of work."

An additional modification that Alan has noticed is that the rear wheels have cut-outs between the cleats. This prevents the tractor slewing sideways if the plough is in too deep, and the soil conditions are wet. Instead of a build-up of soil between the cleats, the cut-outs allow any soil and other material simply to drop away.

All-in-all, as Alan agrees, this is a very interesting Fordson Model F/ attachment combination, and is certainly something a little different. ■



The plough frame, constructed from high-carbon plough steel, was very solidly attached to the tractor, with the main beam stretching from the front axle to the rear drawbar. The special extension for the front axle of the tractor permitted carrying the right front wheel beyond the ploughing line. The front axle was extended by 19 inches, but the set-up could easily be returned to its conventional tractor setting in little over an hour.



The Athens Plow was designed as a fairly lightweight attachment for use on a lightweight tractor. Its intended purpose was for reclaiming prairie land, ploughing-out the rough turf and vegetation, and turning over the sod to expose the roots so that the hot sun could dry out and kill them. In 1921, ploughing this way sure beat using horses!

The birth of a legend!

Jonathan Whitlam celebrates the arrival of the Model F on British farms, and charts the way in which this tractor revolutionised world farming

In January 1917, two tractors were shipped to Britain from the US. They were different to any other tractor seen before, with four wheels, including two smaller ones at the front for steering. Their neat, integrated structure was completed by a front-mounted radiator of automotive style, a rear-mounted seat with steering column mounted slightly to the right of centre, and a fuel tank mounted over the top of the engine.

However, the groundbreaking feature about these tractors was their 'unit construction' build. The engine and transmission components formed the structure of the machine, instead of the large and heavy frames used previously, and to which the rest of the tractor was attached. Plus, these prototype tractors were built by no less than Henry Ford!

Famous Ford

Henry Ford needs no introduction. As the founder of the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, he was responsible for the huge growth in car ownership. This was largely thanks to his Model T car which, due to mass production techniques, was affordable to most people. Henry was from a farming background, and had been tinkering with tractor prototypes for as long as he'd been building cars - but, thus far, hadn't found a winning design.

Then, at the beginning of 1916, the first two prototype tractors of an all-new design appeared - called the X types - and the product of a design team headed by a talented engineer called Eugene Farkas. Over time, several further prototypes were built. These used a Hercules 20hp side-valve engine, with thermos-syphon cooling, coil magneto ignition and



“With several prototypes in the field during 1916, it was perhaps inevitable that at least one would make its way across the Atlantic”



a two-forward-and-one-reverse gearbox with a steel worm drive and phosphor-bronze crown-wheel.

With several prototypes in the field during 1916, it was perhaps inevitable that at least one would make its way across the Atlantic. It's believed that two made the trip in January 1917, reaching Britain as the First World War was still raging and

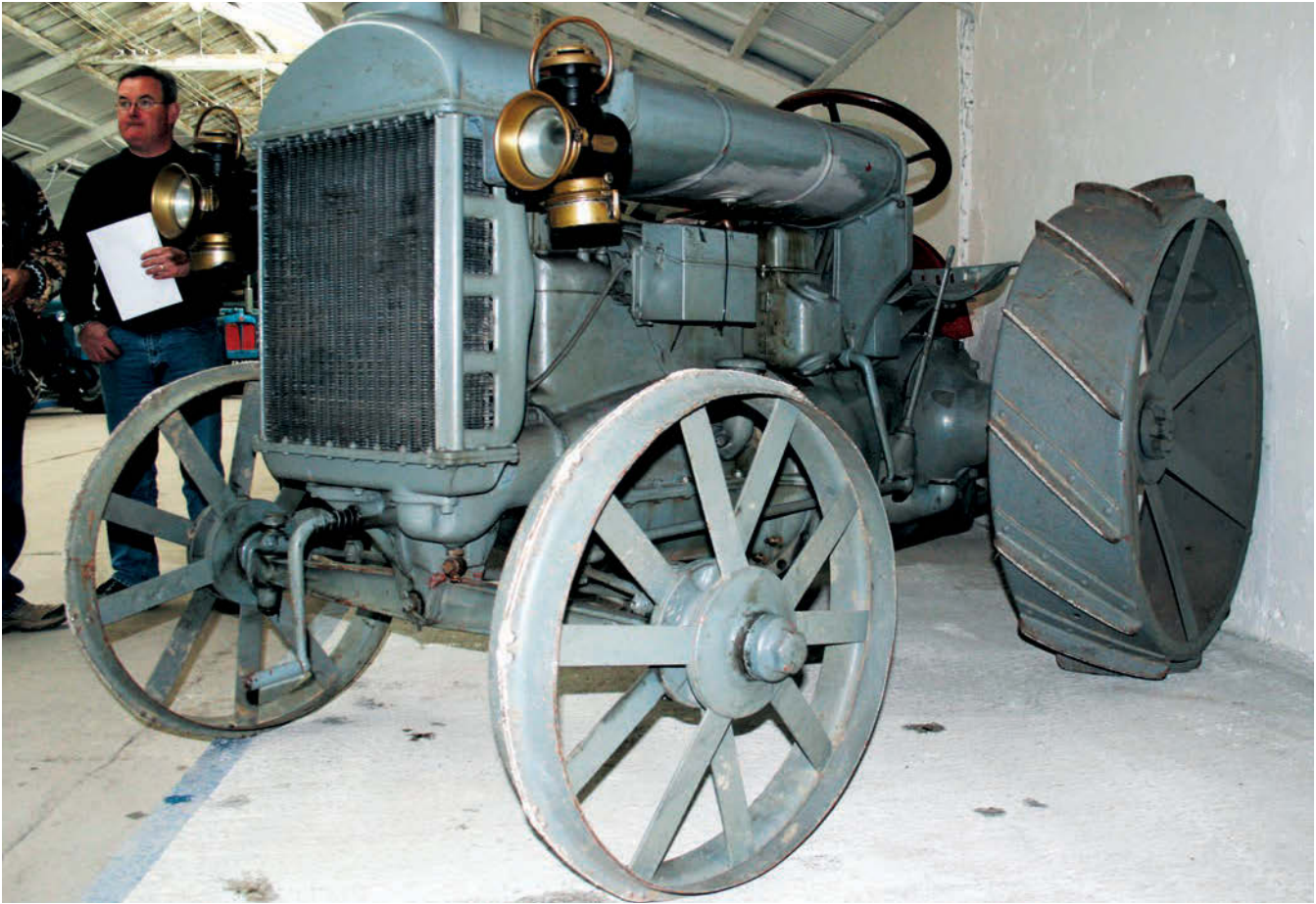
the country was in the middle of a food shortage caused by its heavy dependence on the ever-dwindling supply of imported goods, thanks to the German Navy.

Realistic testing

The Ford Motor Company in Great Britain had strong links with the government of the day, and

ABOVE: Nicely restored examples of the Fordson F look good on the rally field, especially when driven around like this one, photographed at the Woolpit Steam Rally.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT





the Ministry of Munitions (MoM) tested the prototypes in working conditions. Out of all the available tractors, these prototypes were the ones to save the day, thanks to their simple but reliable design. The problem now was how to manufacture the huge number needed in the shortest possible time.

Henry Ford proposed building the tractors in a new factory to be constructed at Cork, in Ireland. This was rejected by the government because as much factory capacity as possible was needed for the building of armaments, plus relations with Ireland were also tenuous. The answer was to build

the tractors in Dearborn in Michigan, then ship them across the Atlantic.

So important was it to get the new tractors working in British fields, that production began in October 1917 and the initial order from the British government was increased from 5,000 to 6,000 units. Remarkably, all were delivered by the middle of 1918, which illustrates just how well Ford had mastered the art of mass-production.

These tractors were based on the 'X types', with the Hercules engine starting on petrol before switching to paraffin, and an improved version of the original gearbox, this time giving three forward speeds and a single reverse. They were simply

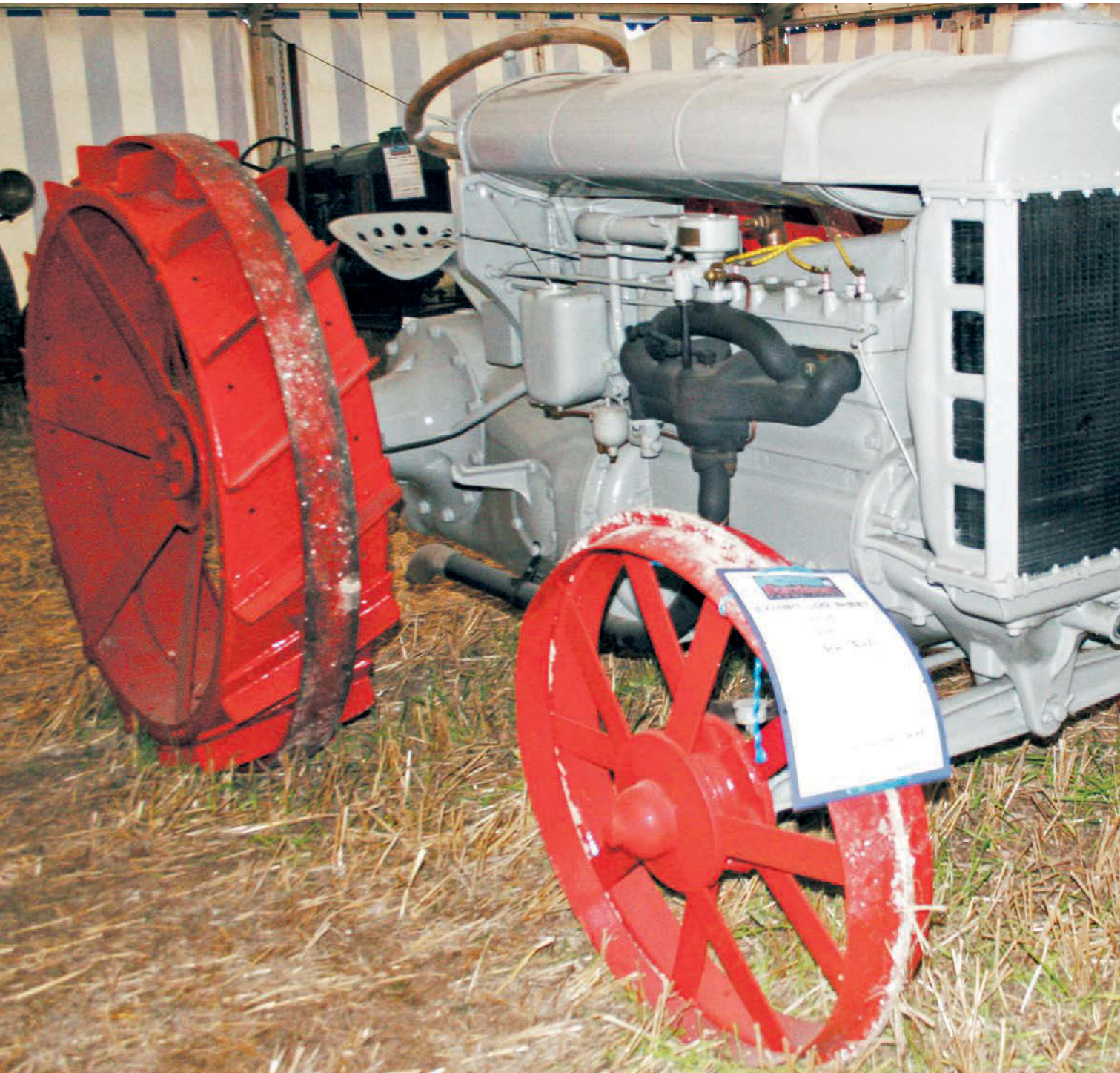
ABOVE: A rear view of the Fordson F, showing the single, rear mounting point used to attach trailed implements, as well as how the driver's seat was positioned over the rear. There were no luxuries like a footplate on this model!

ABOVE LEFT: Complete with intriguing front oil lamps, this is a Ministry of Munitions tractor – otherwise known by the abbreviation 'MoM'.

LEFT: The Model F replaced the original MoM in 1918, and was basically the same machine to begin with. However, various improvements were made during the subsequent production run.

“Apparently, he clashed with Farkas on several aspects of the design, most notably the unit construction method”

MODEL DEVELOPMENT



“Tractors were an unknown quantity for most British farmers, which was why the government decided to start by hiring them out, often with a knowledgeable operator”

known as the 'MoM' tractors, after the Ministry of Munitions that was responsible for placing the initial production order.

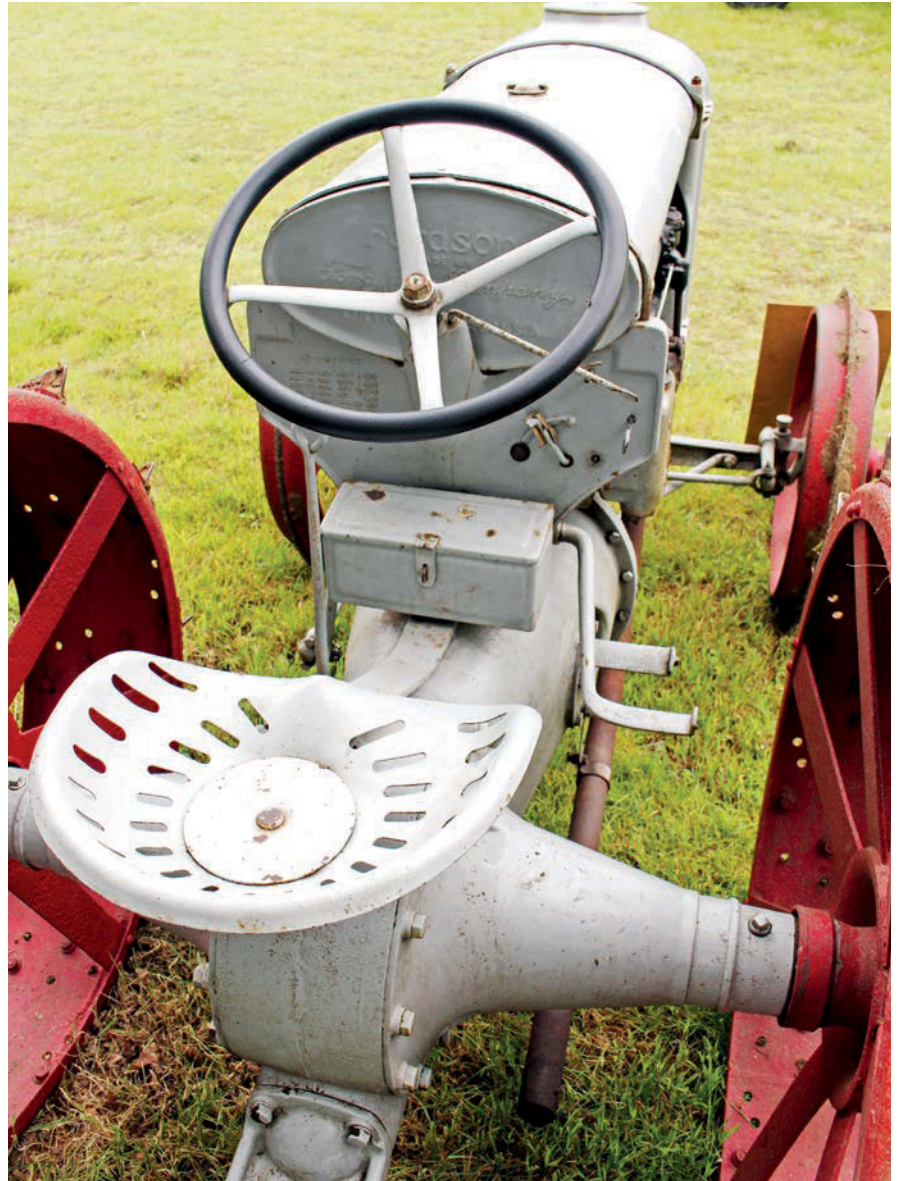
Production reservations

However, it's been suggested that Henry Ford wouldn't have put this design into production so quickly



LEFT: MoM tractors didn't feature the 'Fordson' name, as it hadn't been coined at the time that most of these machines were built in Dearborn, Michigan.

BELOW: Simplicity was a watchword with the Model F. Consequently, there were very few driving controls and an under-slung exhaust. Notice the toolbox fitted under the steering column.



given the choice. Apparently, he clashed with Farkas on several aspects of the design, most notably the unit construction method. However, although he might have had his doubts, he was still savvy enough to realise the benefits of the new design. Also, he couldn't fail to assist a country that direly needed

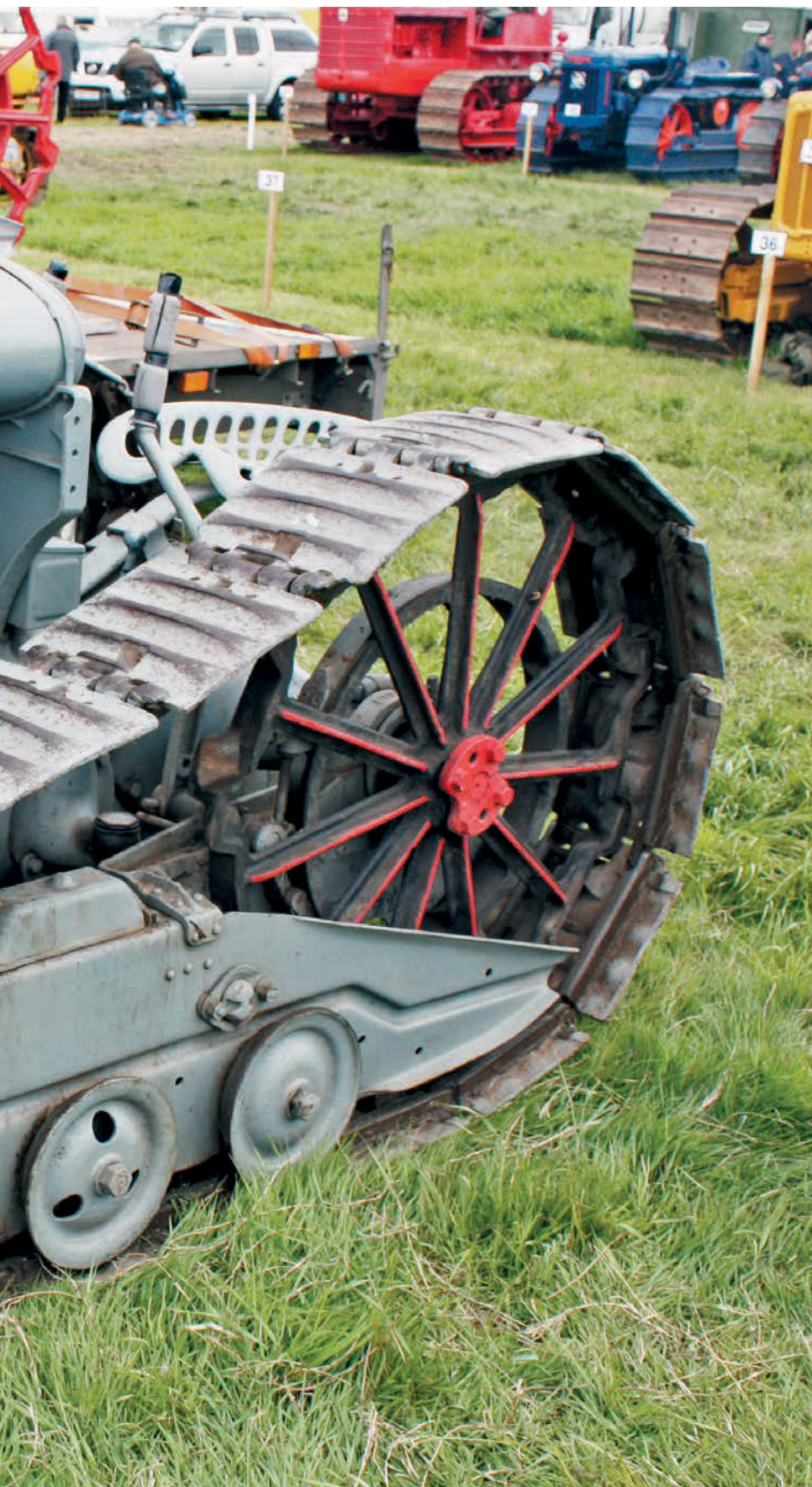
agricultural mechanisation.

With the first MoM tractors reaching Britain by the end of 1917, it's perhaps hard to imagine what farmers and farm workers must have thought of the new machines. British agriculture had been in a state of depression for decades; not only were fields lying uncultivated and

abandoned, so were whole farms. It was because agriculture had become so neglected that there was such an acute food shortage during the war, and mechanisation was seen as essential. This issue was aggravated by the terrible drain on people and horses, which were constantly being taken to France.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT





Horses were the main source of power on British farms, along with hand labour. However, horses were also needed to keep the war going, so the only way of filling the vacuum left by their loss was the tractor. Britain had its own fledgling tractor-building operations, of course, but they were small and based on designs that weren't really up to the job. American imports were another potential answer, but most of those tractors were relatively crude and certainly not suited to the conditions found on the average, British farm.

An unknown quantity

At that time, however, tractors were an unknown quantity for most British farmers, which was why the government decided to start by hiring them out, often with a knowledgeable operator. Due to limited numbers, it was vital to avoid the risk of the precious machines being ruined by bad maintenance. Often it was military personnel that came as drivers with the tractors when they went out to UK farms.

After the war ended in 1918, the tractors were sold off, with most them staying on farms and working for many years, although low knowledge levels concerning servicing, maintenance and mechanical repairs remained something of a problem.

By the spring of 1918, the Fordson Model F – as the tractor was then called – was finally made available to farmers in North America. Built alongside the MoM models for Britain initially, the Model F featured a few improvements over the original machine, although the Hercules engine was retained at first, before a very similar, Ford-built unit replaced it.

LEFT: The Model F was often used as a subject for conversion into something else, be it a row-crop tractor, or a crawler like this Trackson. ►

MODEL DEVELOPMENT



“The Model F was a huge success, and appealed to farmers on both sides of the Atlantic for all sorts of reasons”

All the tractors from the beginning had been built in the Ford factory at Dearborn, in Michigan, but this changed in 1921, when production began at the Rouge River plant, also in Michigan. Various tweaks would be made to the design over following years. Most notably, these included the fitting of long rear wings, designed to reduce the number of fatal accidents caused by the tractor rearing up

and toppling over backwards when the implement being towed hit a solid obstruction in the ground. Further improvements saw the engine redesigned with a higher compression head and better cooling, in 1927.

Worldwide success

The Model F was a huge success, and appealed to farmers on both sides of the Atlantic for all sorts of reasons. Part of this appeal was due to the tractor's simplicity, but the versatility of its design was a big factor, too. Henry Ford also kept reducing the list price, making it the cheapest form of power for agricultural use available on the market.

Conversions of the Model F were also common, especially in the US and here in Britain, with the likes of Muir-Hill using the F skid unit in railway shunter tractors, early forms of loading shovels and even as actual railway locomotives.

But it was on the farm that the Model F made its biggest impact; it was the first tractor to really appeal to smaller-scale

farmers in North America. It was a lightweight, affordable and reasonably simple machine that offered a viable and practical alternative to the traditionally much larger and more complicated offerings from other manufacturers.

The Model F grabbed American farmers' imaginations to such an extent that it nearly bankrupted other tractor manufacturers of the time, most having to take drastic measures to stay in business. The most famous being the large International Harvester company, which introduced the Farmall tractors as an answer to the threat posed by the Model F. How did this work? Well, the Farmall was ideal for row-crop work; an area in which the Model F was never as useful, due to its fixed design. The Farmall offered higher ground clearance and adjustable track width, plus alternative front axle layouts. The Farmall in fact saved the International Harvester firm.

Production record

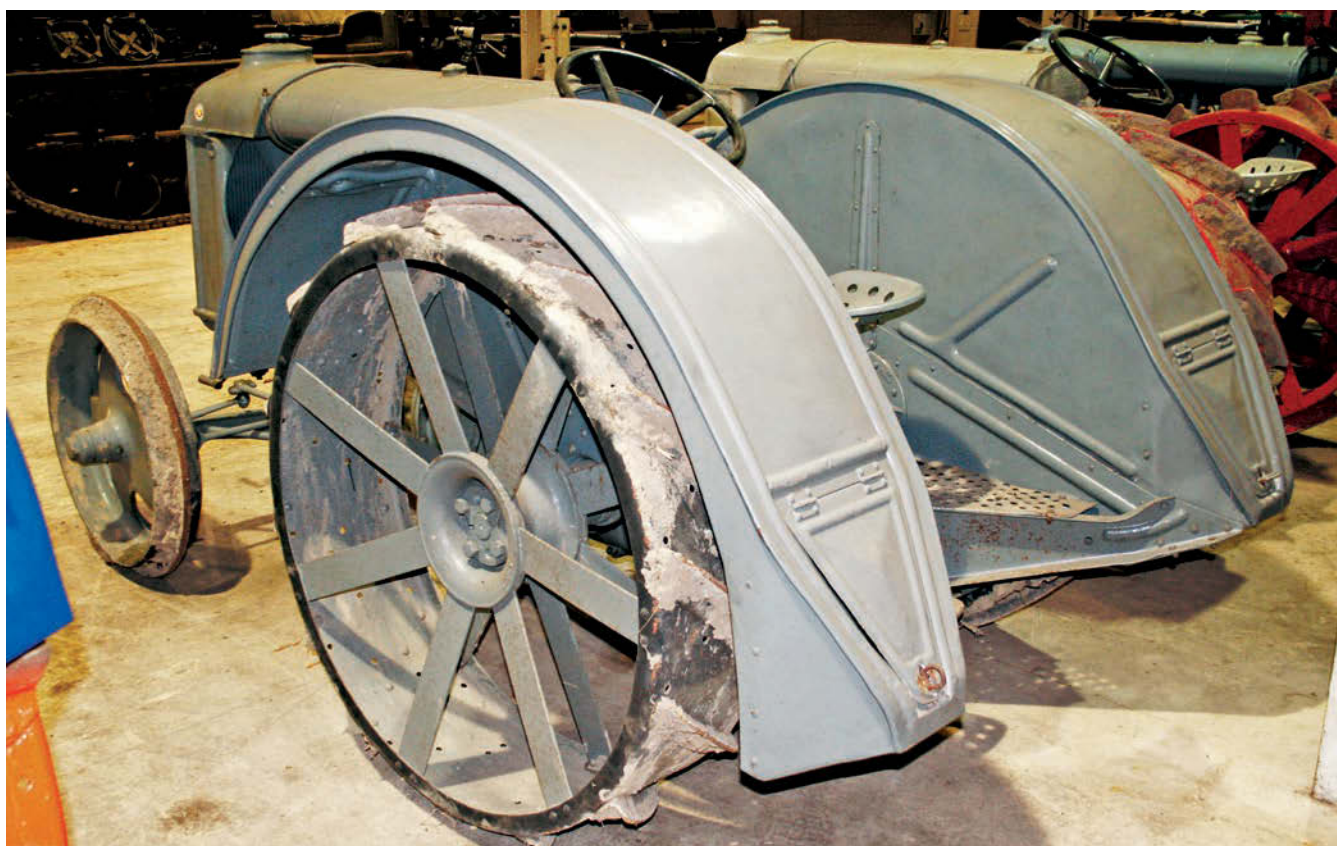
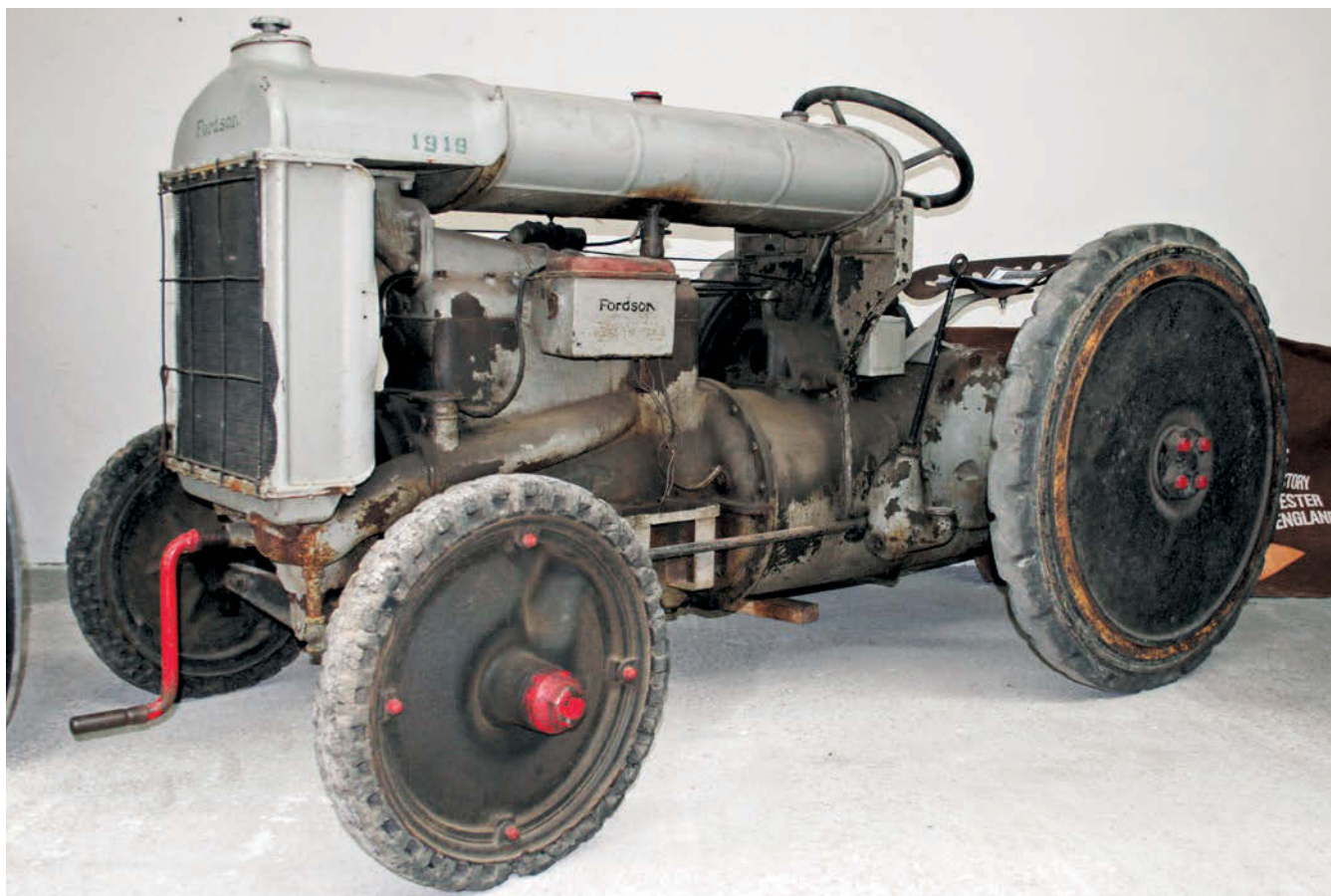
With sales increasing in the UK and Europe, manufacture of the Model F also began in Cork, Ireland, in 1919. However, a very grim agricultural depression caused this to be short-lived, and Ford stopped production completely in 1928 with over 744,000 Fordson tractors at work worldwide by that time.

The Fordson F ended its tenure in 1928 but, in 1929, its replacement was launched and, this time, all of them would be built in Cork. The new Model N was not a completely new model; it was still based heavily on the old Model F, but featured an upgraded engine producing an extra three horsepower, plus better cooling and starting systems. With its long rear wings, the Model N continued to look much like the Model F it had replaced, but world financial difficulties kept production figures much lower than had been hoped for. ■

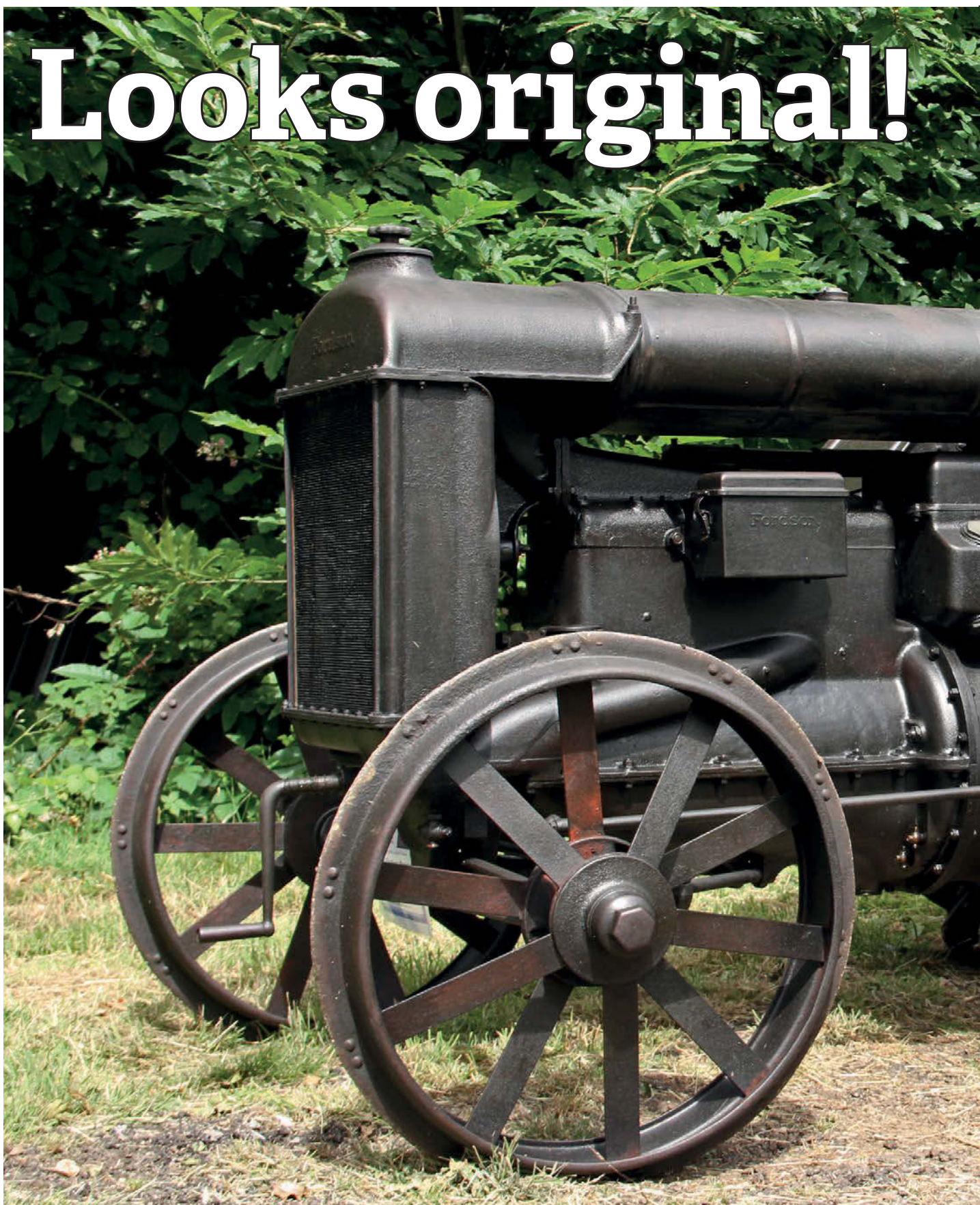
ABOVE: The sump of the engine block forms the 'chassis' of the tractor complete with the gearbox unit, all being enclosed and, therefore, not exposed to dust and dirt.

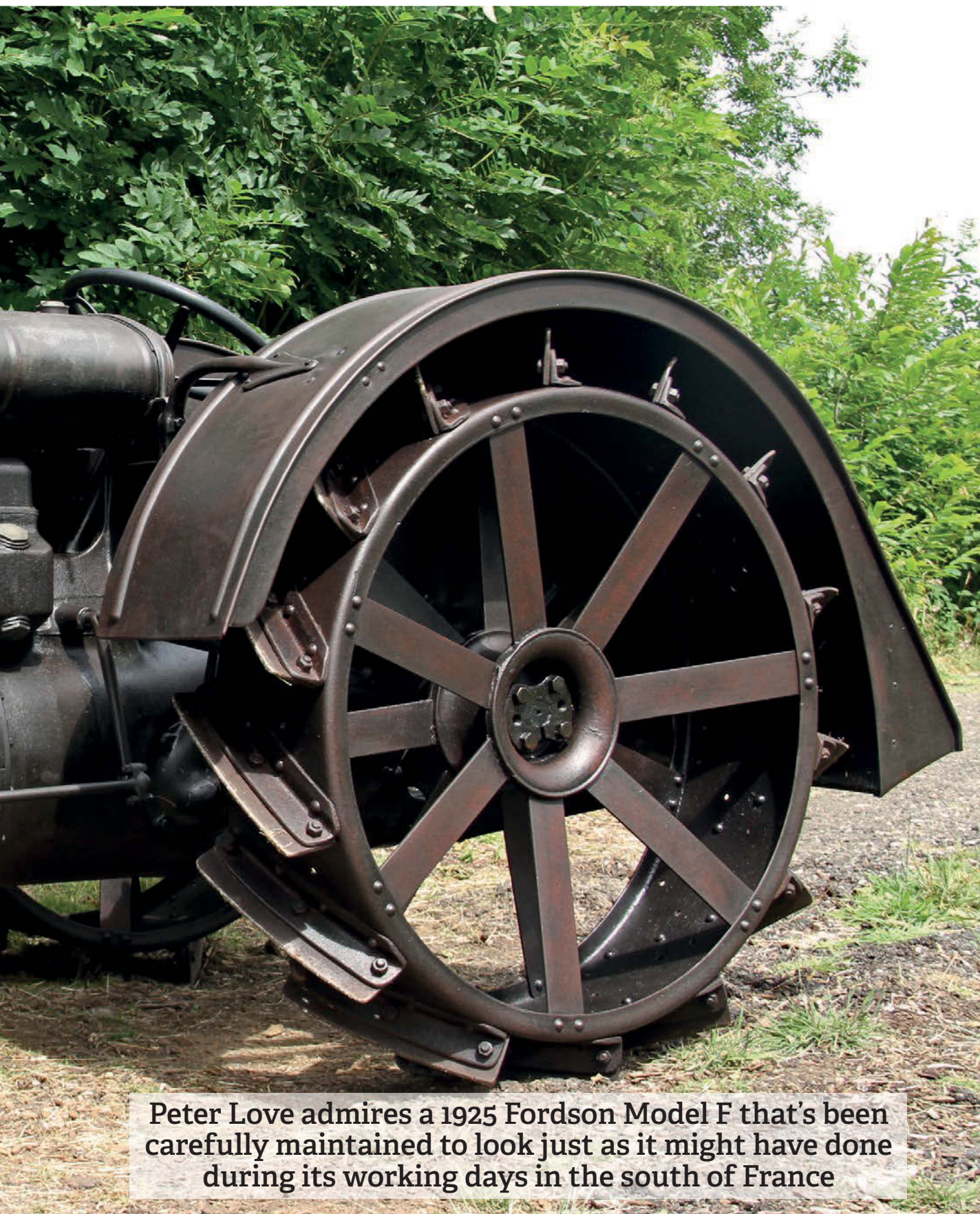
ABOVE RIGHT: Factory-built industrial versions of the Model F were produced by Ford, and were usually 'out-shopped' with solid wheels.

RIGHT: The long rear wings on the Model F accommodated two, small toolboxes in their tapered ends, but the real reason for their presence was to help prevent accidents caused by the tractor rearing up and toppling over backwards.



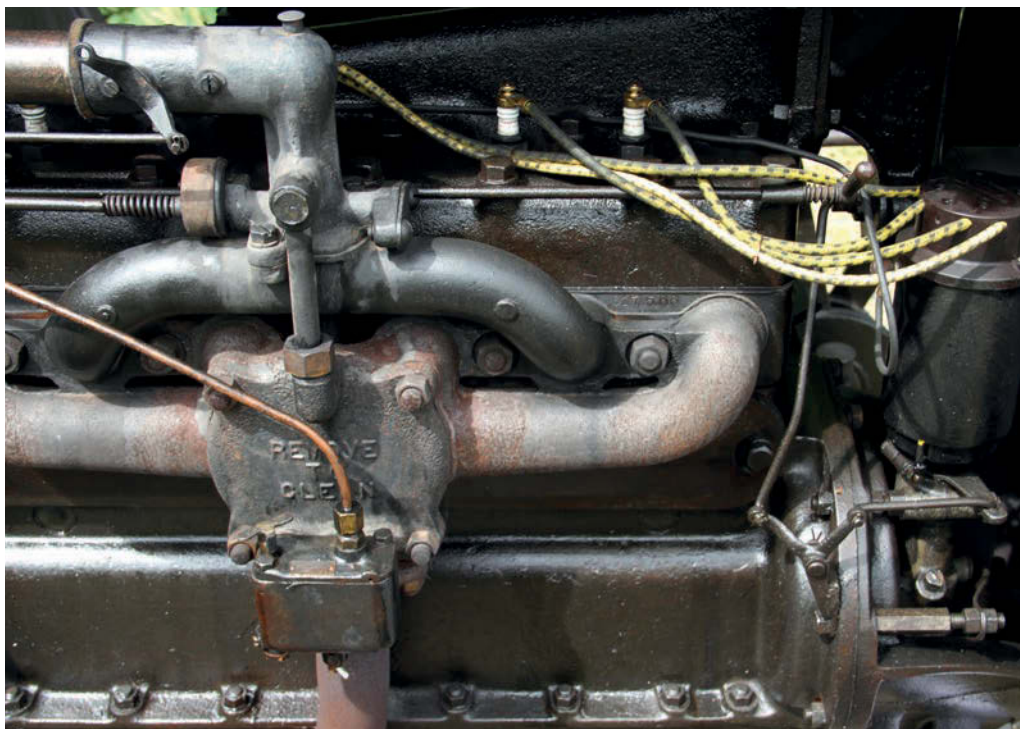
PURE NOSTALGIA





Peter Love admires a 1925 Fordson Model F that's been carefully maintained to look just as it might have done during its working days in the south of France

PURE NOSTALGIA



ABOVE: Viewed from the rear, the signs of previous damage to the offside mudguard are clear to see, but it's been carefully and sympathetically dealt with using a MIG welder, a sander and some oil-based dressing!

PREVIOUS PAGE: This fine, 1925 Fordson F simply oozes nostalgic desirability and period authenticity as it basks in the Kentish sun.

LEFT: Obviously, the braided HT leads have been replaced but, nevertheless, they have a pleasingly period look about them.

By 1925, the Fordson F had been dominating tractor markets worldwide for some seven years, despite the early 1920s slump in the market. Arguably, the model was at the peak of its success that year, given that an amazing 104,247 rolled off the production line in that 12-month period alone. What's more, it still had three years of production life to go.

Finding a lovely example like this one is no easy job these days and, if you happen to be lucky enough to stumble upon such a treasure, then a premium price will have to be paid. This Rouge North factory-built example was exported to France where it worked in the south of the country for a good number of years. However, a close inspection reveals that it can't have been put to terribly hard use during its working life.

Moving to the UK

After its time in France, the tractor was brought to the UK via Somerset-based Fordson tractor specialist, Cox & Turner Engineering Ltd. This company, as many of you will know, specialises in Model F parts as well as line-boring and white-metalling the big ends on the famous 4.1-litre engine that powers both the Fordson F and N models that enjoyed a combined production run between 1918 and 1945.

Eventually, this Model F found its way into the Billy Wood collection and, from here, it was rallied at a number of quality events at which it

“ Finding a lovely example like this one is no easy job these days and, if you happen to be lucky enough to stumble upon such a treasure, then a premium price will have to be paid ”

IDENTIFYING A 1925 FORDSON MODEL F

There were very few model changes in 1925, although it was the highest production year for the F (Serial No. 453360-557607).

The most notable differences that year were:

- The introduction of the two-filler fuel tank into mainstream production (although, according to production notes, the first one was fitted in April 1924, so quite a few of the 1924 tractors had single-filler fuel tanks.) These tanks were fitted with the new-design sediment bowl, in the rear, right-hand corner. The cast iron starting tank was no longer fitted, but the two ears on the air cleaner were still present, until a new pattern was made in 1927.
- The rounded, outer edge on the front wheels was introduced during 1925.
- The Holley 295 manifold and carburettor was introduced, although remaining stocks of the Holley 280 were still being used up, and the Kingston LD manifold and carburettor was also available (from 1924), so it would be correct to have any of the three carburettors.
- Square-end mudguards were first featured in the parts manual for 1925, so it's assumed that they were fitted as standard from 1925. They

had been available as an accessory from 1923. This design was used until 1927, when the pointed-tail mudguards were introduced.

- An ignition switch was added to the dash in 1924 (a brass contact point that connected with the advance and retard lever when fully retarded).
- Internally, the new silicon alloy steel valves were used, since they'd become available at the end of 1924.

Other features that this particular tractor has, but that were introduced earlier include:

- Toilet seat-type oil filler introduced in 1923, when the breather was put in the back of the dash casting.
- The five-hole, curved drawbar, introduced in 1923.
- A later-style coil box, introduced in 1924.
- A later steering wheel rim; the maple (wooden) rim was dropped in 1924, and replaced by a Bakelite-covered item.
- Rear wheel cleats had tapered edges.



Perhaps some work has gone into the block, but it's all been tastefully done with the sort of care and precision needed to ensure the all-important original look is maintained.

PURE NOSTALGIA



Billy Wood Jr takes the 1925 F for a spin.



Adjustments are made to the Holley 295 carburettor, to control the engine's slow-running performance, from the driver's seat.

was much admired. Unfortunately, though, ill health forced Billy to move the Model F on to a new home, and it found a grateful owner in east Kent.

Of course, owning a tractor like this can be extremely rewarding as, besides its age and all-round desirability, its original condition gives it the sort of appealing looks that never fail to draw an admiring crowd, wherever it goes. I observed this phenomenon for myself, while at a show where this actual machine was on display.

However, there's more to it than that as originally, like all the Fs built, this tractor would have been fitted with Ford's trembler-coil alternating ignition system, with the

powerful spark being created via the magnetised, 16-segment flywheel. In theory, this system was a great success, as it was on the Model T car. But, with the passage of time, reliability levels begin to falter and the system can become something of a weakness.

Impressive ignition system

Nevertheless, it was an impressive set-up in its day. Starting from the breakdown in the four trembler coils, to the magnetic velocity in the various components that make up the generating system located in the bell housing, this alternating current-based system was a very powerful one. It was way ahead of the normal magneto ignition system that

became prevalent later on. In fact, it wasn't until the 1970s that alternating current became standard on tractors.

Even by 1922, companies had started to offer magneto conversions; some were good, others, not so. But, by 1927, there were at least 80-plus conversions offered on the market by various 'add-on' makers worldwide. In fact,

“Its original condition gives it the sort of appealing looks that never fail to draw an admiring crowd, wherever it goes”

PURE NOSTALGIA

RIGHT: The 'toilet seat'-type oil filler was introduced by Ford in 1923 and isn't loose – a problem with some examples.

BELOW: That French magneto conversion is certainly a very neat installation.



“The big dilemma, of course, is whether to retain the current magneto-based ignition system or, for the sake of period originality, convert it back to trembler coil system?”



The correct mudguards; this design became standard in 1925.

this tractor is fitted with a French Scintilla Magneto conversion from the 1930s, that neatly sits in front of the timing case, and beyond that is the fan assembly.

The big dilemma, of course, is whether to retain the current magneto-based ignition system or, for the sake of period originality, convert it back to trembler coil system? Well, if you were to sand-blast, or heavily wire-wheel this lovely beast down (heaven forbid!) for painting, then perhaps you might also consider switching back to an original-style ignition system that's appropriate to the machine's year of manufacture.

However, as one is preserving the tractor in 'working' but clean condition, then maintaining it in the specification that most closely matches how it was when it last worked, seems to be the most sensible and desirable option. To revert back to the factory-style



Even the fuel tap doesn't leak on this superb example; many do on both Model F and N tractors.



A drawbar showing virtually no wear is another of this tractor's amazing features.

PURE NOSTALGIA

“ The objective certainly isn't to create an 'as new' effect; that would rob the tractor of vital, visual character ”

system would, in my opinion, detract from the vehicle overall, and result in a loss of both value and character.

An authentic look

But, achieving that authentic 'look' is no easy task, and certainly takes plenty of time and effort. It's a job that demands care and respect, too, and the best approach is certainly a subject of debate. While I'm sure there would be many owners who would be happy to reach for the power washer to clean-off the machine, but there are dangers associated with doing this.

Never forget that vintage vehicles require a delicacy and lightness of touch; go in too heavy-handed and that oh-so-important patina will be washed away for good. Dealing with an 89-year-old machine - as in this case - requires a sympathetic approach. Remove too much grime and you can cause issues. For example, you might create play in the steering joints, triggering the need for a rebuild. So, it's far better to take things slowly and gently, and not to paint the part afterwards - not even with protective red oxide. The objective certainly isn't to create an 'as new' effect; that would rob the tractor of vital, visual character.

Leaving the part outside in the yard - away from prying eyes - or even nestled in long grass with regular soakings from rain and dew, can easily help create a desirable, time-worn, rusting effect on the outside surface. The same can apply to tractor panels, such as a bonnet side; after a few months of this natural ageing treatment, you can add years to the look of a panel's surface.

Another very affordable technique involves the use of paraffin. Granted,



I'm pleased to say that this Model F has retained its correct seat; many don't.



To find the spokes and rivet heads in such good order on a tractor of this age is quite incredible.

it might take a time to do it but, with a stout paint brush, a pair of nylon gloves and goggles, its application can be just the sort of task that helps younger enthusiasts to get involved with the hobby.

However, adopting this approach doesn't mean avoiding the use of essential things like engine oil, or neglecting tasks such as greasing the king pins.

Oily dressing!

Once the tractor is dry, clean and all back together, you can use new (not old) engine oil. Something like a 20/40 grade (even 15/30) can be applied all over the vehicle using a clean brush, after which any excess should be removed with a rag. However, this isn't the ideal answer as, over time, the oil coating will evaporate and you'll lose that attractive, silky sheen.

There is an answer to all of this, and it was about 20 plus years ago now, while in a museum in Germany, that I noticed that the steam rollers and tractors on show looked as though they'd all been treated with a varnish-like coating over the metal and original paintwork. It produced a stunning effect similar to that seen on the Model F here, and it's a product called Owatrol Oil and you can find out more by visiting: owatroldirect.co.uk

If you do need to paint anything, perhaps use a matting agent or semi-gloss paint to get the effect you're looking for, but all in moderation. It takes time to create the right effect on something like a tractor, and you'll certainly need patience.

Some of you might be amused at all of the above, but it's all part of the restoration art. Of course, one of the most important aspects with any project, is to start with the right tractor in the first place. This Fordson Model F certainly has it all.

The author would like to thank Keith Bryan and Tony Donovan for their help with the preparation of this feature. ■



Luckily, the pins and bushes in the steering system were all found to be in remarkably good condition on this machine. Another indicator that its working life in southern France wasn't a particularly hard one.



All the correct data for this year of manufacture.

BUYING GUIDE

THE UNSUNG HERO!



Chris Graham gets under the skin of the Fordson Model N, to discover more about buying and owning one of these iconic little vintage tractors



There's something rather amazing about being able to spend just a couple of thousand pounds to buy yourself a fully-functioning and still usable machine from the Second World War. Admittedly, I'm not talking about a Hawker Hurricane or a Churchill tank, but it's arguable that, in its own way, the diminutive Fordson Model N tractor, played

just as much of a part in the result of the war as either of those two more widely recognised mechanical heroes.

The Fordson Model N was introduced in 1929, as a replacement for the Model F. Production began in Cork, Ireland, but switched to Dagenham, Essex, just three years later, where it continued until the model's

demise, in 1945. Undoubtedly, the Model N had become very long in the tooth by the mid-1940s and its replacement, the E27N, was certainly a better and more capable tractor.

However, that's not meant as any sort of slight against the Model N, which should be regarded as a landmark model. Its uncomplaining efforts during the hard war years

BUYING GUIDE



ABOVE: Buying a Model N is all about the detail. With so many parts being interchangeable with those from earlier and later models, it's important to recognise if things like the front axle, exhaust, wheels, wings and steering wheel are correct for the year of manufacture.

PREVIOUS PAGE: This 1935 Model N belongs to Nick Byrne, and has been superbly restored and finished in Empire Blue and contrasting orange paint.

LEFT: The type of tow hitch fitted is a point worth noting. As standard, Fordson fitted a straightforward plate on the Model N, but the Russell adaptive drawbar (as seen here) is a far more desirable and versatile option.

BELOW: Nick Byrne.



were instrumental in helping to keep the UK fed and, for many farmers, the Model N was their first experience with mechanical power. It was the machine that weaned them away from working the land with horses and, for those reasons alone, it deserves a cherished place in the history of these islands.

Hardy survivor

In reality, the Model N wasn't all that different from the Model F it succeeded, and the design of that tractor stretched right back to 1917. Nevertheless, it was very successful; a machine that was built to work and last. The fact that so many of the nearly a quarter of a million that were built, went on working for 10, 20 and even 30 years beyond their sell-by date, is testament enough to the quality of the original design.

But, as a direct consequence of that often-extended working life, many Model Ns were kept running with a hotch-potch of replacement parts taken from other models. So, it's common nowadays to find examples that have been fitted with both older and newer parts to keep them running. Back in the day, farmers did what was necessary to keep these machines operational, with understandably little regard for originality. Being a working, utility vehicle, the finer points of correct mechanical specification were very low on the list of priorities; the primary aim was always to keep the tractor useful, usually on the absolute minimum of a budget.

Nowadays, anyone who fancies buying a Model N is faced with the choice between choosing an already restored machine, or one that's still awaiting that process. In either case, whether or not the tractor will be 'right' in terms of specification, is the big question. Of course, much depends on your own objectives and expectations. Are you after an up-and-running machine simply to have some fun with at a few local shows and the odd ploughing match? Or is

MODEL N MILESTONES

- In 1929 Ford's tractor production moved from Dearborn, Michigan to Cork, Ireland, and the Model N was introduced, finished in grey paint.
- Model N boasted a 3hp power increase compared to the outgoing Model F. Cooling system (water pump added) and electrics (high-tension magneto) also upgraded. Larger water-washer air cleaner specified, with domed top.
- Heavier front axle and wheels included to help minimise the risk of front-end lifting.
- Production of Model N moved to Ford's Dagenham, Essex factory in 1932. In 1933, the colour scheme changed to dark blue with red wheels.
- Other improvements made included shortening the wings (re-locating the toolbox to the dash area or on the nearside of the engine). Shorter wings improved turning ability when towing an implement. Clutch pedal moved and seat positioned further back to aid implement operation.
- A PTO was added in 1934 and the option of inflatable tyres arrived a year later, as an alternative to steel wheels with spade lugs.
- Factory switched to 'Harvest gold' (orange) paint for the Model N in 1937. A higher-compression cylinder head was also fitted, to produce more power and run on the more efficient tractor vapourising oil (TVO). New, vertical air intake and exhaust stacks added on either side of the engine, and the water-washer air cleaner system was replaced by a new, oil bath-based system (eliminating freezing risk).
- Fordson changed from conspicuous, Harvest Gold paint to a less obvious dark green, once war broke out in 1939. Wartime shortages also resulted in narrower wings but a radiator-top temperature gauge was added.
- Model N production ended in the summer of 1945, with a total of 235,000 having been built.

your aim to own a correctly specified Model N that accurately resembles the tractor that left the factory in Cork or Dagenham?

For some experience-based insight into the dos and don'ts of buying, I took a trip to Somerset to consult Model N enthusiast, owner and restorer, Nick Bryne. He currently owns three Model Ns, and knows the tractor inside out, having restored all three of them to a very high standard. The first buying-related point he made was that buyers must expect existing owners to make

all sorts of claims for the tractors they're selling, regarding originality and restoration. In reality, though, the fact that these machines have all changed hands so many times in the past, makes it impossible in most cases to be completely sure about an individual machine's history. So take things with a pinch of salt, and make decisions based on what you see in front of you.

Renovation prospects

The good news, however, is that the relative simplicity of the Model

“Its uncomplaining efforts during the hard war years were instrumental in helping to keep the UK fed”

BUYING GUIDE

“The relative simplicity of the Model N’s design means that more or less every vehicle is recoverable”

N’s design means that more or less every vehicle is recoverable, assuming you have the budget, time and patience needed for the project. Nevertheless, it’s important to approach ownership of one of these ageing machines with your eyes wide open. Given that you could be buying a machine that’s 90 years old, your expectations regarding on-going ownership, reliability levels and maintenance requirements must be realistic.

Nick advises that any buyer should do as much research as possible before spending any cash. “It’s important to be aware of what the machine you’re interested in should and shouldn’t be fitted with. There are plenty of good reference books, and lots of existing owners and experts within the Ford & Fordson Association, who will be happy to help with advice and information,” he told me.

“The reality now is that the chances of finding a good, original and unmolested Model N are next to nil. Almost all now will have some non-standard parts fitted – perhaps a glass-bowl fuel tap, a fuel tank from a later model or the wrong magneto – but how important are such details to you? If it’s a running machine that you can use and enjoy, and it’s selling for a price you can afford, then it could be a good choice.

“A traditionalist, on the other hand, will want all the detail to be correct, and will relish the challenge involved in tracking down the parts necessary to bring their machine back to ‘as new’ condition. Both ownership approaches have their pros and cons but, arguably, the most important factor is that as many tractors as possible are preserved and kept running.”



Buying pointers

As well as all the usual pre-purchase checks (steering play, kingpin wear, tyre condition, presence of corrosion etc), there are several Model N-specific points that buyers should be aware of. For a start, with these tractors no longer having to work for a living, there isn’t the same pressure to keep them going through necessity. Couple this with the fact that values remain relatively low, and you have a situation where less sympathetic owners are reluctant to spend much money on an ailing Model N. Mechanical faults that can be relatively expensive to repair get ignored – as do many cosmetic issues – because there’s a growing perception now that these models simply aren’t worth the investment

needed to bring them back up to scratch.

“Model Ns being sold today will often be suffering with lots of niggling (and sometimes more serious) issues, which the previous owner never felt it was worthwhile dealing with,” Nick explained. “This is a great shame as, ultimately, such problems only ever get worse, and have an inevitable, knock-on and detrimental effect on the overall condition of the machine.

“A common problem that afflicts the Model N relates to the electrical system and, in particular, the magneto. Problems with this cause engine cut-outs and starting difficulties when hot. Originally, the tractor was fitted with a Bosch unit that performed very well, but was



Nick Bryne's trio of beautifully restored Model Ns; the green 1944 model in the background, the 1944 Industrial model in the centre, and the blue and orange 1935 model in the foreground.

unobtainable when war broke out. So Fordson switched to the Lucas GJ4 unit during the war years, but this was found by many to be a good deal less reliable, even though it performed well in Morris cars of the period. As a consequence of this, and the extra cost involved in switching back to a Bosch unit, lots of tractors were subsequently fitted with the Lucas RF4 magneto, when it became available.

"It is possible to test the magneto, by driving it using an electric drill (or on a lathe), then monitoring the output as the body of the unit is heated using a hot air gun (to simulate the heat effect associated with real-life operation). The problem is that the copper coils inside the magneto become cracked

with age and, when exposed to heat, the wires expand which opens the gap and breaks the circuit. Allowing the unit to cool again closes the gap, the voltage starts flowing again and the engine can be started.

"Talking of the engine, the age of these tractors means that internal, mechanical wear can be a serious issue (piston rings, bores, bearings etc). If you decide to buy a tractor with a badly worn engine - that can be heard knocking - then be prepared for the fact that the cost of getting a specialist to put that right is likely to exceed the value of the tractor."

Bearing wear

"The bearings inside the transmission are another relatively

common wear point on the Model N. Replacements are available, but fitting is a big and potentially expensive job if you're paying somebody else to do it. Front axles are something to be wary of, as well. There were two types used by Fordson on the Model N - a straight one and a bowed version. There have been instances where the bowed version has been wrongly fitted to a Model N that was designed for a straight one, resulting in a ride height that's far too low.

"The brake and clutch are operated by one pedal on this tractor - the first portion of the pedal travel operates the clutch while movement beyond that operates the brakes. It's a transmission brake fitted to this model which, despite the age of

BUYING GUIDE



The industrial version was equipped for road running, with lights and a horn. The electrical system is correspondingly more complicated.



The simplest of controls on this 1935 Model N. The four-spoke steering wheel with coated rim is correct for the period. Wartime models got a radiator-mounted temperature gauge.

the design, can still be reasonably effective assuming wear levels aren't excessive. However, worn brakes are commonly found simply because of the cost involved in putting them right.

"Replacement parts are available, but fitting them can be an issue for less experienced owners. The tractor has to be split, so that the front of the transmission can be pulled off to gain the necessary access. But the job is doable on a DIY basis and, once again, there's always help at the end of the phone from the many, mechanically-minded FFA members.

"As I've already mentioned, the Model N's electrical system is very rudimentary. All it consists of is the magneto and the four leads running to the spark plugs. The one exception to this simplicity is the Industrial version, which was equipped for road running, so included lights and a horn that complicate the electrical system to a degree.

"At a more general level, a common mistake that buyers make when looking at a prospective purchase is to fail to check that the back wheels are a matching pair. Back in the day, owners of tractors

“Back in the day, owners of tractors like the Model N would happily mix and match parts when problems arose”

like the Model N would happily mix and match parts when problems arose, and do so as cheaply as possible. So, if a wheel or tyre got damaged, a farmer would often opt to take a replacement off an older tractor, regardless of whether it was a matching wheel or not. First-time buyers, carried away with the excitement of viewing the tractor, can fail to notice such details, so always take your time when assessing a tractor.”

Other details

Nick continued: “Steering wheel designs ranged over the years, with subtle changes being made during the model’s production life. All Model Ns should be fitted with a four-spoke, not a three-spoke version from a Major. The earliest, Cork-made models featured much heavier spokes and additional drillings on the back boss. The steering wheels on ‘water-washer’ models had a powder-coated rim while, on later models, Fordson switched to a tubular steel rim, with indentations pressed into it and a coating for added grip. After this, a Bakelite-like coating was added which, of course, hardens, cracks and falls off with age.

“It’s also sensible to take a few minutes to check for wear at the business end of the starting handle. While the tip of the handle itself isn’t usually a problem (a worn pin can be replaced), the dog tooth that it engages with on the front pulley needs to be in good order. This inevitably wears with age, until it becomes so rounded-off that it becomes impossible to turn the



Narrow wings were a wartime economy measure, to save as much steel as possible for the war effort. The radiator blind was a common feature designed to speed engine warming.

engine. New pulleys aren’t available, so the options are either to source a good, secondhand one, or to carefully re-shape the original with a grinder to create a new ‘tooth’, although there’s only really enough metal to do this once.”

Overall, then, given the relatively minor nature of the problems that characteristically afflict the Model N, it’s actually quite hard to make

a serious mistake when buying one. The fact that you don’t have to invest thousands to secure an entry-level runner means that buyers are comfortably insulated from financial disaster. However, it’s important to appreciate that there can be significant repair/restoration costs involved if you’re set on producing a pristine and age-appropriate example. What’s more, with values as

WHAT TO PAY

At the bottom end of the market, it’s still possible to find entry-level Model Ns selling for £300-£400. But these tractors are unlikely to be runners, and will probably have bits missing, too.

To buy a running Model N which is all there, but in need of work, you should expect to pay at least £1,200. However, with Model Ns at this price, you must expect it to be fitted with various incorrect parts, and be prepared to spend some money if you want to bring it back to the correct specification for its year of manufacture.

At the top of the market these days, a really good Model N will typically fetch about £4,000.

BUYING GUIDE



MODEL N TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS	
Years produced	1929-1932 in Cork, Ireland 1933-1945 in Dagenham, Essex
Engine	267cu in. (4,379cc)
Power output	21hp
Fuel	Petrol or TVO or lamp oil
Paint colours	1929-1931: Grey 1932: Sir John Burr blue (transitional tractors) 1932-1937: Empire Blue/Orange (Essex cart colours) 1937-1940: Harvest Gold 1940-on: Green
Length	102in
Width	63in
Wheelbase	63in
Height	55in (exhaust type dependant)
Weight	3,600lbs (1,636kg)
Number made	Cork 31,453 Dagenham 204,493
Total	235,946

This 1935 Model N is fitted with the early, low-slung exhaust. A variety of exhaust and manifold options was used during the production run, all of which are interchangeable.

they are, Model N renovation is very unlikely to prove profitable; essentially, it needs to be a labour of love.

Given the historical importance of this tractor, its mechanical simplicity and the fact that it remains an utterly usable proposition up to 90 years after manufacture, it's difficult to understand why values aren't much higher. Nick has some interesting views on the subject. "There's a growing demand for easy-to-live-with options," he told me. "Many new owners want to turn a key to get their tractor going, not swing a handle. Starting the Model N's engine involves a specific, multi-stage procedure, which some find off-putting."

Getting started

"The engine has to be primed and then started on petrol, then switched over to TVO once it's properly warmed. What's more, every engine tends to have its own particular foibles, which owners can only appreciate with experience. So, the method for getting one started is likely to vary slightly from engine to engine; it's a case of getting to know your motor, how it runs and what needs to be tweaked when it doesn't.

"There also seems to be less tolerance among tractor buyers these days towards unreliability. New owners want their machines to be trouble-free and straightforward to take to shows, and ever fewer want to be messing around with TVO; so newer, diesel-powered machines from the 'classic' period are more in demand than older tractors from the vintage era.

"In my view, Model N owners must be prepared to put the effort in. It's not the sort of tractor that responds well to being shut away in a shed and ignored for months at a time. These old Ford engines require nurturing and mechanical sympathy, and can never be taken for granted. In practice, the reality is that very few Model N owners are lucky enough to own a tractor that will perform with complete reliability on every occasion. Getting even close to that situation requires a level of attention to detail that, regrettably, fewer and fewer owners seem able to deliver, nowadays."

Having said all that, the charm offered by a Model N – whatever its condition – is undeniable. It's a neatly styled, attractive little tractor that played an important part in history, and lived to tell the tale. So, if you fancy a slice of genuine agricultural aristocracy, and hanker after running a tractor of which you can be genuinely proud, then you really should be giving a Model N some serious consideration. ■

OWNER'S VIEW: NICK BRYNE

I bought my first Model N – a 1944 Industrial version – in 1984, although I'd owned an E27N before this. I've always been a Ford man (cars and tractors) but first got involved with the tractor side of things because a friend had an E27N half-track. My interest has developed steadily since then, and I still have the original E27N.

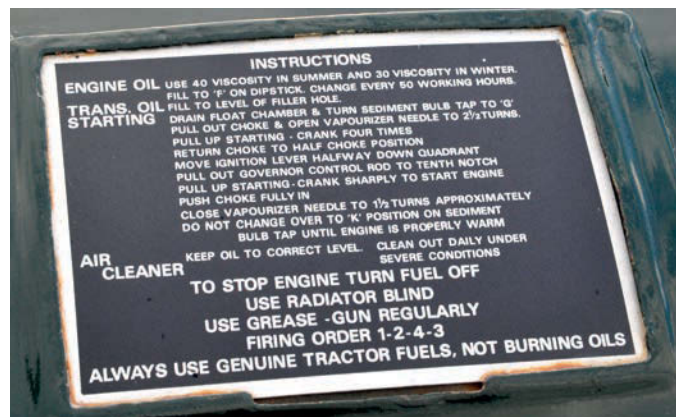
After I'd restored that first Model N Industrial, my appetite was well and truly whetted, and I bought two more Ns – 1935 and 1944 models – both of which are now fully restored to as near original condition as I can get them. My aim has never been to restore tractors for re-sale, and the only time I sell things is if I've bought a machine as a parts donor. After I've removed what I need, I'll then break what left and sell the parts, or move the vehicle on as one if there's a buyer for it.

Fordsons have always been the tractor for me, and I really enjoy working on vintage tractors. I have so much experience on these models now that I feel completely at home dealing with all aspects of their renovation. I work on newer tractors for a living, so I appreciate the contrast and genuinely prefer working on my older machines.

I've developed a real attachment to the Model N over the past 35 years, and can't ever see myself not having one or two in the shed. If I was forced to choose a favourite, I'd go for my green, 1944 narrow-wing model. That tractor was such a mess when I bought it about 12 years ago, and I and my two sons worked hard to bring it back to life.



This is the Lucas GJ4 magneto that was fitted to the Model N following the outbreak of World War Two. In practice, it wasn't a great performer, perhaps due to its exposed position.



LEFT: Starting and running instructions were provided on the fuel tank of wartime models, to remind and help users keep the machines running as reliably as possible.

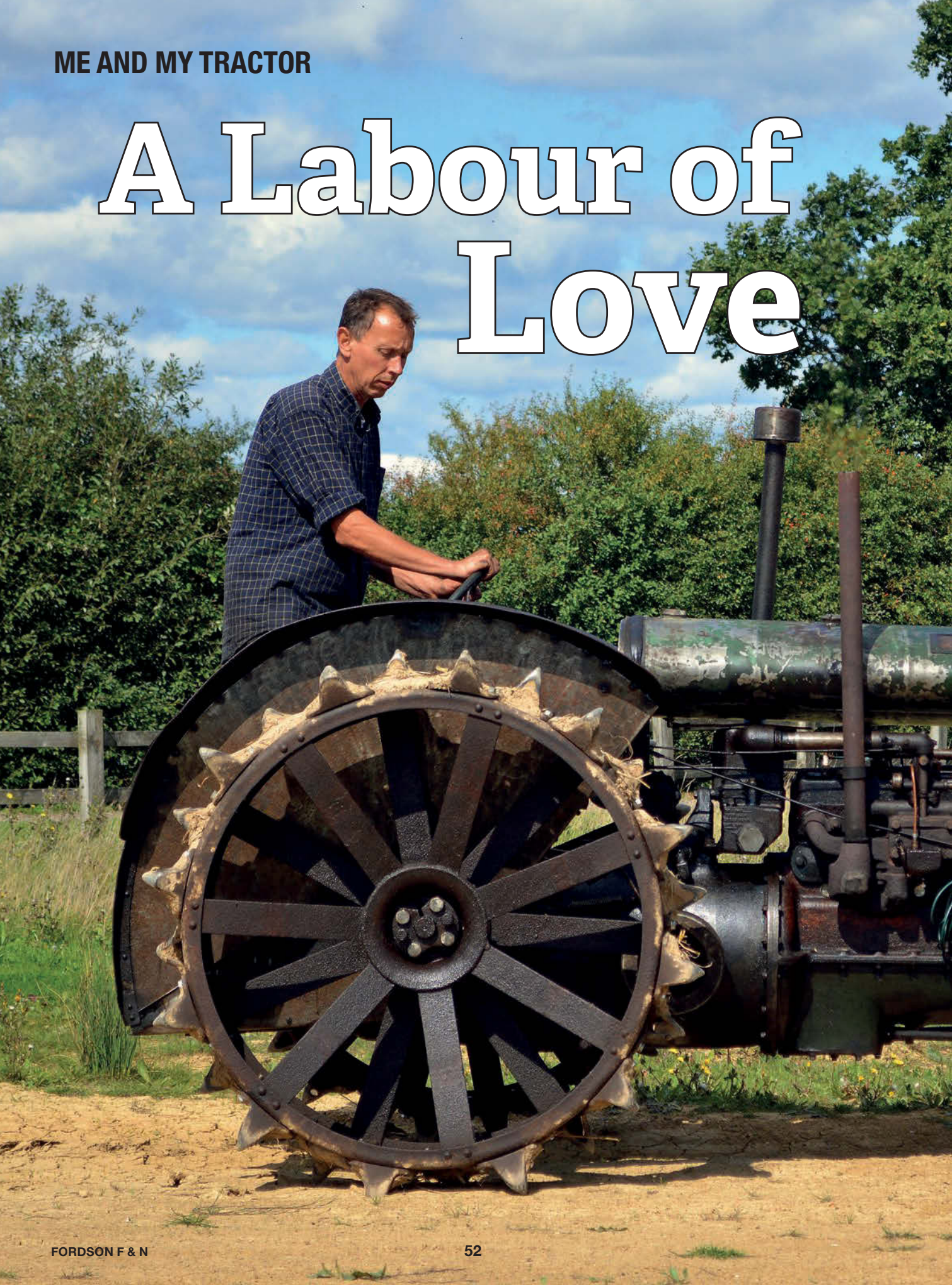




Despite its age, the Fordson Model F remains capable of being put to work on ploughing, cultivation or log-cutting duties, as this 1926, fully-restored, 'working clothes' example demonstrates.

ME AND MY TRACTOR

A Labour of Love





Ian Stevens' sympathetic treatment of his 1943 Fordson Standard N rekindles a beautiful childhood memory, as Alan Barnes discovered

Ian Stevens has some very fine machines in his collection of restored tractors but it's perhaps his 1943 Fordson Standard N that catches the eye most. At first glance, the tractor doesn't appear to have been restored at all, and the Fordson looks as though it's just been recovered from a field where it had lain, neglected and unloved, for the best part of 75 years.

However, it's taken a great deal of time in the workshop to preserve this authentic, period look and, for Ian, it's proved to be something of a labour of love because the tractor has strong family connections.

Old family friend

Ian explained: "This tractor has been owned by various members of my family since it joined us on the farm in Yalding, Kent, during the early 1950s. It wasn't new then, of course, and the documents reveal that the petrol/TVO narrow wing Fordson was registered on July 30th, 1943, to the Dorset War Agricultural Committee, and was given the registration BFX 169. The original logbook shows a nil-stamped period between 1943 and 1948, with a Ministry of Fuel and Power stamp.

"However, details of its specific use during the war years and early 1950s are, as yet, unknown," Ian adds. "So, if anyone recognises the original registration, I'd be pleased to hear from them. It seems likely that the Fordson was returned to Ford for an overhaul after the war and then,

Ian Stevens at the controls of his 1943 Fordson Standard N.

ME AND MY TRACTOR

“This tractor has been owned by various members of my family since it joined us on the farm in Yalding, Kent, during the early 1950s”

in 1953, it was sold to our family. There's an entry in the log book confirming the sale, and recording a £2 fee stamped on October 20th, 1953.

“It also appears that the tractor was fitted with a Hesford winch, although whether this came with the tractor or was fitted after it had arrived in Kent, is unknown. The tractor gave good service on the farm, being used for general agricultural duties as well as

working in the apple orchards. The Standard N was apparently 'retired' in the late 1960s, when a 1948 Fordson E27N was bought in 1967 and took over duties as the farm's main tractor.”

A childhood memory

The old Fordson was laid up for many years after that, and Ian has recollections of the tractor from when he was a boy. Fast-forward



Apart from the engine, this tractor is largely original.

a few decades and he actually acquired the Fordson in 2002, believing that it would make an interesting restoration project. However, the years during which it had been left exposed to the elements had done the tractor no favours at all, and it was in very poor condition.

Ian recalled: "A first inspection revealed that the Standard N was a more likely candidate for the scrapyard, rather than a restoration workshop. There was a crack in the engine block, no doubt caused by frost, while the rest of the engine showed signs of hard use and was very worn. There were no shims left on the end caps, the white metal was worn away and almost every moving part of the engine was badly worn. Even the front set of steel wheels had nearly worn flat, so it was very obvious that this tractor had certainly worked hard for its living."

The damaged engine could well have stalled the planned restoration there and then but, fortunately, Lady Luck played her part. Ian was carrying out some repair work on a customer's tractor, and the conversation turned to Ian's collection of classic tractors. When mention was made of the problem with the Standard, the customer took Ian down a muddy track, pointed to an engine in the hedgerow and asked: "Would this be any good to you?" Almost completely hidden among the undergrowth was an orange, Fordson Standard engine, which looked to be complete. But it was difficult to be sure about this because there was a tree growing through it!

A lucky find

Ian went on to explain: "Despite the tree, the engine looked complete, and there were no cracks in the block. The chap told me that it was a very good engine and had come from Lambourne and Ridley, in Brighton. This firm had closed

The replacement engine was recovered from a hedgerow, and came from an 'orange' Fordson Standard.



down years before, and the story goes that it had run two Standard Fordsons. Unfortunately, one of them had worm trouble and was scrapped, but the company hung on to the engine, which had hardly been used."

So, as you might imagine, finding a suitable engine, really kick-started the Standard's restoration project and, although it would be a ground-up rebuild, Ian had already decided that rather than attack the rust and dirt with a wire brush, he would carry out what could best

be described as a sympathetic preservation, rather than a full restoration. His aim was to retain the patina on the machine that had been created slowly over the 70 or so years since the tractor had left the factory.

"Sadly, I wouldn't be able to claim that the 1943 Standard would be original," Ian added, "because I intended to fit a replacement engine. But, I was determined – as far as possible – to retain as much of the original tractor as I could. I was also adamant that, once whatever

ME AND MY TRACTOR

The original front wheels on this 1943 Fordson have been worn smooth; a graphic illustration of the hard, working life it's endured.



work needed had been done, I wasn't going to apply fresh paint. It was clear that the machine had been repainted a couple of times during its working days and, on the bonnet, there were still traces of the painted registration number. Details like this simply had to be retained, so that the overall appearance would speak of those far-off wartime years when the tractor would have been operated by hard-working Land Girls."

Internal matters

Ian continued: "As it turned out, the replacement engine was found to be in excellent condition, apart from a problem with stuck pistons. Once the cylinder head and sump had been removed, I discovered that the pistons were actually 60thou oversize. There was also a full set of big end/crankshaft shims, loads of white metal and a set of valves that had been protected by thick engine oil. The whole unit was carefully stripped and the pistons were removed without too much difficulty. The core plugs were also taken out, after which the block was steam-cleaned to remove all the traces of dirt and oil."

By this time, Ian had already stripped down the rest of the tractor, and the Hesford winch had been removed. The gearbox, clutch, front and rear axles were also removed and thoroughly steam-cleaned. For a tractor which had lain neglected for so long, most of the parts were found to be in very good condition. Consequently, the gears, worm drive and axle bearings were all good enough to be reused.

"I started the rebuild of the gearbox, paying special attention to the worm drive and the gearbox bearings; I was determined that this Fordson wouldn't have a 'whine' while working," Ian told me. "After fitting new gaskets and shimming-up some of the bearings, the back end of the tractor was reassembled and I was then able to turn my attention to



There are still remains of the original, painted registration number, which Alan took great care to preserve.



The radiator needed soldered repairs to some of the cores to deal with fluid leaks.

ME AND MY TRACTOR



Ian Stevens unloading his Standard; a tractor that he has very carefully 'preserved', rather than 'restored'.

the clutch." Here, though, the news wasn't quite so good, as scoring was found on the plates, and the bevel plates were flat.

Ian constructed a jig and re-bent the plates in a press to the correct bevel. New flat plates were acquired, and the clutch rebuilt. He also overhauled the steering box, air filter and water pump, after which the radiator was thoroughly cleaned. The latter was also in reasonable condition, and only required some minor soldered repairs to some of the cores.

“A first inspection revealed that the Standard N was a more likely candidate for the scrapyards, rather than a restoration workshop”

Leaking tank

The TVO tank presented a few problems as it leaked rather badly, although Ian put this right with a good deal of careful soldering. The glass bowl and taps were cleaned and Ian fitted new O-rings. Other jobs included making and fitting new bushes and pins for the front axle, carefully checking the wheel bearings and reassembling the front axle.

Having recovered and overhauled the second engine, work on its rebuild began. The crankshaft and pistons were refitted, and new piston rings had been sourced from Cox and Turner. The valves were reground and fitted along with the camshaft followers and new springs. Ian also fitted new rope seals, a new copper head gasket and refitted the flywheel.

"I turned the clutch bolts 90° to present a flat side so the clutch would not catch, and also

overhauled the governor; sorting out the pip weights and dealing with the wear on the shaft. I was pleased with the progress of the project; the work had been flowing along very nicely, with no major problems being encountered to cause any real concerns. The tractor was coming together well. The engine was back in, as were the radiator, water pump, new fan belt, fuel tank, the rebuilt magneto, new fuel pipes, overhauled carburettor and manifold." The magneto had been sent away to be overhauled, and Ian was delighted with the results - the rejuvenated unit provided a much-improved pulse and spark. New plugs and leads were fitted, together with a rebuilt governor.

Running again

With fresh oil in the engine and rear axle, the water pump greased and the radiator full of water,



Ian and his young son at work with the Fordson, captured in a photograph that has a real period feel about it!

“With the fuel switched on, the throttle half-out and full choke, it took only a few pulls before the tractor burst into smokey life!”

petrol was poured into the tank for the engine's first test run. It was turned over for a while to lubricate the bearings then, with the fuel switched on, the throttle half-out and full choke, it took only a few pulls before the tractor burst into smokey life! The smoke gradually cleared and Ian was delighted to find the rebuilt engine running smoothly, with no signs of oil or coolant leaks.

The sump bolts were re-tightened to give the crank seal a chance to bed in, the gears and clutch were checked for clearance, the rear wheels fitted and Ian was then able to take the Fordson for its first test run around the yard. All was well and, with the tractor now most definitely a 'runner', the remaining jobs to be done centred on the bodywork.

The mudguards were suffering with a nasty case of tin worm and, sadly, really were beyond saving.



Ian and his father with the 1943 Standard, which the Stevens family bought in 1953 for use on its Kentish farm.

But Ian concluded that the arches and side supports were in good enough condition to be used again. Old rivets were drilled out and the patches of rust cut away and new metal was cut and fitted to the original parts using hot rivets. The original footsteps couldn't be repaired but Ian managed to take

a pair from another tractor and fit those instead.

That completed the job and, with its faded paintwork and steel wheels, Ian Stevens' Fordson now represents a fine example of the essence of a 'sympathetic preservation', which is exactly what he set out to achieve. ■

ENGINE SWAP

It's a **PERFECT FIT!**





For years, Peter Varnham had been toying with the idea of converting his Standard Fordson from TVO- to diesel-power, using a Fordson Major E1A engine. Now he's done it, and here's the result

"I was lucky to have a spare Fordson E1A engine that was left over from a previous project, so finally decided to press on with the conversion. The engine was stripped down and a full Agriline engine rebuild kit was put in the block. Two, two-foot-square plates, 10mm thick, were marked-out; one to suit the engine flywheel housing bolt holes, and the other to fit the tractor's clutch housing, along with the area in the centre of the plates for the flywheel and clutch assembly to pass through.

"With the plates drilled, centres removed and shaped on the outs to conform to the engine and clutch housings, it was then time to look at the clutch assembly, and work out the width needed for the clutch. The

ABOVE: Peter's tractor is certainly no museum piece and he appreciates the extra power delivered by its 'new' diesel engine.

LEFT: Peter Varnham's smart-looking Standard Fordson, which he converted from TVO- to diesel-power, using an engine from a Fordson Major E1A.

ENGINE SWAP

“The drive fingers were worn, so a good, second-hand set was sourced from Yeovil-based Fordson tractor specialist, Cox & Turner Engineering Ltd”

drive fingers were worn, so a good, second-hand set was sourced from Yeovil-based Fordson tractor specialist, Cox & Turner Engineering Ltd, and the one supplied was in good order.”

Careful marking-out

Peter marked out a 6mm plate and carefully drilled it to pick up the original clutch cover bolt holes on the E1A flywheel. Next, a piece of large-diameter shaft steel was machined to bolt the clutch fingers to, and then welded centrally to the plate bolted onto the flywheel. The engine block was offered-up, the fingers on the flywheel engaged with the clutch, and the distance between them measured. A band of strip steel was rolled to the right diameter, and then tack-welded between the two adaptor plates joining engine and back-end together.

Peter adds: “The radiator and original fuel tank were positioned so that measurements could be taken to fabricate the radiator and



The Major E1A's diesel engine fits beautifully into the space available, although it took a good deal of engineering skill to get it securely mounted.



Apart from one slight oil leak, which was swiftly rectified, this conversion has been a complete success.

front axle mountings. The Fordson engine has mounting bolt holes cast into it for the front axle and radiator mount to attach to, but there's no arrangement like this on the E1A engine.

“The diesel engine is supported at the front by a ¼in plate that's bolted to the engine block, behind the timing gears, with extensions folded at 90° to the plate and then bolted to the two side channels running from mountings at the clutch bell housing to the front of the tractor, where the front axle mounting (tombstone) is bolted between them.

“I made two thickeners for the plate that's bolted to the engine, and fixed the mounting I'd fabricated, to the engine plate. As an extra stiffener, I ran a length of 100x10mm flat steel on both sides from the adapter plate at the clutch bell housing, to the back of the fabrication for the radiator and axle.”

Engine gets the works

With the mounting for the engine, front axle and radiator completed, Peter then turned his attention to the engine. It was given the 'full works' before being mated to the

tractor's back end. Eventually the big moment arrived, when Peter was able to turn the ignition key for the first time. “Thankfully, it was an instant success, and started first time,” he said. “We had a runner and everything seemed fine. The oil pressure was good, the clutch felt smooth and responsive and the gears selected well. What's more, overall, I was very pleased with the way the replacement engine looked in its new home. It fitted very well and there was no question of it looking either undersized or crammed-in.

“However, it wasn't long before I noticed that a puddle of oil appeared on the garage floor. A close inspection revealed that oil in the clutch housing was being thrown into the starter motor, and then leaking out between the end plates. So, after removing the starter motor and washing the oil out, I machined the casing behind the bend, which allowed me enough space to get an oil seal in. That seemed to do the trick and it hasn't spilt another drop since. I've been chain-harrowing with the tractor since and, thankfully, I can see no oil showing at the starter motor, which is great news!” ■

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OWNER'S TALE

The pursuit of fun

Gareth Roberts' quest to find his fix of tractor nostalgia came in the shape of a narrow-wing Fordson N dream machine, as Jo Roberts explains





OWNER'S TALE



Gareth's grandparents, Pam and Arthur, back in the day, on board a narrow-wing Fordson just like the one he owns today.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Inspired by his grandfather, and his uncle Pete, who ploughs with a Fordson N, Gareth was determined that, one day, he would have his own Model N.



Gareth's grandfather, Arthur Penrhos, ploughing with his old Fordson Model N back in the 1950s.

Photography: Jo Roberts

For most enthusiasts, there's often a single reason that sits at the core of their fascination with old tractors, some influence from a person or a place; something that kick-started the whole obsession. For my nephew, Gareth Roberts, that important trigger came in the form of a few old black and white photographs of his grandfather, Arthur Penrhos.

Gareth was a small boy when his grandfather died, but there are plenty of photographs. The most interesting of these date from the 1950s, and show a skinny young man behind the wheel of a Fordson Model N, or 'Fordan Bach', as we called these tractors in Welsh.

Early experience

The first tractor that Gareth's grandfather drove was a Fordson, and there's a family story that gets told about how his father - Gareth's great grandfather - bought his first Fordson, and disliked it from the first moment he set foot on it! He tried driving it across a field, wasn't sure how to stop it and, as a horseman, his natural instinct was to shout 'Whoa!'. But, when that failed, he stepped off the back of the machine and strode back to the farm, leaving the tractor chugging its way across the field. Another family member had to run after the Fordson and bring it under control.

So, it was clear that Gareth's great grandfather hadn't been impressed by what appeared to him to be a noisy, temperamental thing with no brain! He was probably rather upset to see his familiar world changing so drastically - his knowledge was of horses, and not tractors, so he must have felt rather out of his depth.

But Gareth's grandfather, Arthur, was, of course, younger and more adaptable, so he soon became quite at home behind the wheel of the Fordson. Sadly, though, he didn't see fit to hold on to the old



I love the eye-catching number plate, and the way it's been painted so carefully down the rear mudguard.

tractor when its engine failed and, instead, packed it off to the scrap man. Family members have often lamented since that this potential heirloom was unmercifully melted down, but things were different back then; nobody wanted these outdated little tractors, and money was too tight to turn down a few pounds in cash from the scrap man.

First tractor

From the age of 11, Gareth pestered his dad for a tractor and, while his father agreed that an old tractor could be the basis for a great hobby, he steered Gareth away from

petrol-powered tractors and in the direction of a diesel Ferguson. A Fergie is a nice, simple tractor for a young lad to learn to work on, and parts are readily available. It also meant that, by the time he was old enough to be behind the wheel, Gareth could start helping his dad with little jobs, which was useful.

Gareth and his dad bought a Ferguson TEF from a seller in Anglesey, although it was originally a Caernarfonshire-registered tractor with 'JC' on the number plate, rather than the 'EY' you find on Anglesey-registered machines. The priority then had been to find a TEF for sale

locally but, looking back, Gareth is glad that the tractor was first registered in North Wales. A tractor with provenance wasn't crucial to an 11-year-old boy but now, years later, these things are more important to enthusiasts. Today it's nice to know

“ He tried driving it across a field, wasn't sure how to stop it and, as a horseman, his natural instinct was to shout 'Whoa!' ”

OWNER'S TALE



The opportunity to buy the narrow-wing Fordson came recently when Welsh ploughman Gwynfor Parry decided that the time had come to sell his Model N.

the tractor has spent all of its 63 years in North Wales.

The Ferguson had been standing for a while and needed work, but that was all good fun for a budding mechanic. Gareth, with the help of his dad, serviced the brakes and replaced the faulty starter motor. The tractor has been in regular use since, cutting thistles with a finger bar mower, carrying firewood and, in recent years, Gareth has had his own transport and taken it to shows. Gareth, now 26, is a mobile

mechanic with a Series 2 Land Rover as his work vehicle. "I'll never sell the Fergie, because it was my first tractor," he says.

However, much as Gareth loves his little grey Fergie, he never really stopped longing for a Fordson like his grandad's so, a few years ago, he set about searching specifically for a narrow-wing Fordson Model N.

Fordson found!

Gareth recently found the tractor he was looking for; it was just a few

miles away, being sold by Welsh ploughman, Gwynfor Parry. Gwynfor had bought the Model N in 1989, and was only its second owner from new. When new in around 1943, the Fordson was first sold to a farm in Llangernyw, and has a Denbighshire registration, with the very memorable number plate, 'FUN 141'.

Gwynfor used to compete with the Fordson at ploughing matches with a trailed plough but, in more recent times he's started to concentrate on

“ Sadly, though, he didn't see fit to hold on to the old tractor when its engine failed and, instead, packed it off to the scrap man ”

ploughing with a Ferguson tractor. Ploughing in the Ferguson class is well and truly Gwynfor's forte these days; he's represented his country, had much success and taught several budding ploughmen how to plough competitively. However, with the Fordson having been idle for several years, he decided it was time to sell it to someone else who would use and enjoy it.

Gareth went to see the tractor armed with a magneto (Gwynfor had warned him he'd need one!) and, once it was fitted, the tractor started immediately and the deal with struck. Gareth was chuffed to bits with his new purchase. "It's just like grandad's tractor with the narrow wings," he says.

Earlier Fordson Ns came fitted with wide mudguards, but it's said that, as the Second World War progressed, it became increasingly important to save metal, which is a reason why those models built during the latter part of the war – unlike their predecessors – have much narrower mudguards. It's interesting to see how war shaped the Fordson N, not only with the change in mudguards, but more so with the development of military versions, and the radical colour change from bright orange to discreet, dark green.

Usable condition

Gareth's Fordson is in nice condition; not tatty, but not so spotless that one is afraid to use it for odd jobs. He's taken it to several shows, and the 'FUN' on the number plate always attracts people's attention, as does the fact that so many people have, or have had, a dad or a grandad



Gareth filling up the Fordson on a lovely, September morning.

who owned one of these tractors.

"It's brilliant to be able to own a tractor that was around during the Second World War," says Gareth, who has a fascination for the history of his old vehicles. "The fact that my grandad owned one like this drew me to the tractor in the first place, but I've also been influenced by my uncle Pete, who ploughs with Fordson Model Ns and, seeing his tractors, made me want one myself."

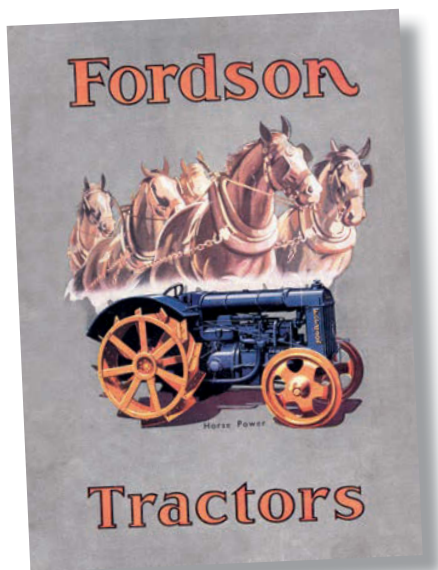
Gareth admires the simple yet sturdy workmanship that went into

the design of older tractors like the Model N; he isn't someone who's keen to have the latest thing, his interests lie with quirky, old machines you can mend and maintain yourself. Old tractors are something that a person can mend at home relatively inexpensively and, for people running machines on a budget, that's very important. It's no doubt part of the reason why so many younger people are taking up the hobby, and long may that continue. ■



Oddly though, the tractor is currently fitted with two different sorts of front wheel. The reason for that is lost in the mists of time.

Best of the bunch



An early brochure for the Fordson Model N; a rare collector's item these days.

BELOW: A Fordson that was assembled at Dagenham and in its correct colours.
(Pic: Stuart Gibbard)

The Fordson Model N, produced between 1933 and early 1937, was highly-regarded by many farmers and, here, Peter Longfoot explains what really made it stand out from the rest

My grandfather ran an all-Fordson fleet, and always referred to the earliest variant of the N as a 'water-washer Ford'. It was his policy to change the tractors regularly, but as the later, oil-based air cleaner models started to join the fleet, a water-washer was kept back simply because it was so user-friendly.

The dealer, Motors & Tractors of Stamford, would send a man out for the first day or two of operation, to check that all was in order. It wasn't unknown for it to take two men to pull the engine over; one on the starting handle and the other with a length of rope tied to the handle. This was sometimes necessary as

brand new engines could be very tight until the 'newness' had worn off.

Nevertheless, despite those initial issues, these tractors were generally regarded as being reasonably good starters, compared with the later models, when modifications to the cylinder head caused problems. It was during that later period that the Fordson gained a reputation as being difficult to start.

Model development

Ford had been producing tractors at its Cork, Ireland, plant since 1919. In 1929, the 'New Fordson' or Model N entered the market, succeeding the Model F. This was the tractor that featured the toolboxes cleverly





Some parts still carried 'Made in Irish Free State'. (Pic: Stuart Gibbard)



An early 1932 Fordson Model N – note the narrow wings. This tractor was rescued from Fullers scrapyards in Chatteris by me, for £50. It should have been painted light blue with yellowish wheels.

built into the bottoms of the long mudguards. There had been production problems at Cork since its inception and, when Ford's new facility at Dagenham started vehicle production at the end of 1931, it was only a matter of time before tractor production moved there too.

In early 1932, the tractor was again updated. This included the introduction of the 'long steering column' which, with a longer seat mounting spring, relocated the driving position from on top of the back axle, to behind it. This move also necessitated a clutch linkage modification. The expensive, 'long mudguards' were redesigned with no toolboxes and narrow tops.

These tractors were only produced at Cork for the first six months of 1932 and, today, they're very rare, with few examples surviving. At this stage, the Model N was painted pale blue with the wheels that were nearer to a yellow than an orange. Also, nearly every casting on the tractor bore the legend, 'Made in Irish Free State'. This was also stamped into the end of the fuel tank.

During the second-half of 1932, as the machine tools were moved to Dagenham, tractors were assembled from parts made both here and at Cork. These tractors are also rare today. Many of the parts still had 'Made in Irish Free State' displayed on them, but this diminished as Dagenham production came on-

stream. The mudguards were again altered, with the now familiar 'wide tops' being introduced. These transition tractors were still painted in the lighter blue with yellow wheels.

Colour change

The last change was the colour, which was switched to the familiar dark blue with orange wheels combination. The livery was reputed to have originated from the Essex farm wagons of former years. These tractors were furnished with 42x12in, cleated rear wheels as standard. Spade lugs were available as an optional extra. Rubber tyres were also offered as an option. The Fordson N remained in production in this form until it was replaced by the oil air cleaner model, in 1937. Dagenham produced only 6,394 units up to the end of 1934, rising to just under 10,000 in 1935.

The Model N has always had a reputation as being 'cheap', but it was a very reliable machine with a number of features that other

makers simply didn't offer. No tractor before or since has been easier to mount and dismount. The driver's position was perfect for the operation of the implements of the day – and still is for match-ploughing with a trailed plough.

The pre-war tractors were fitted with a Bosch magneto, not the cheapest option. A belt pulley was available, in combination with – and part of – the same unit, and a PTO drive was also available. The provision of a combined oil clutch and brake made the tractor very forgiving when starting under load, and stopping was instant. Both these units were reliable in operation.

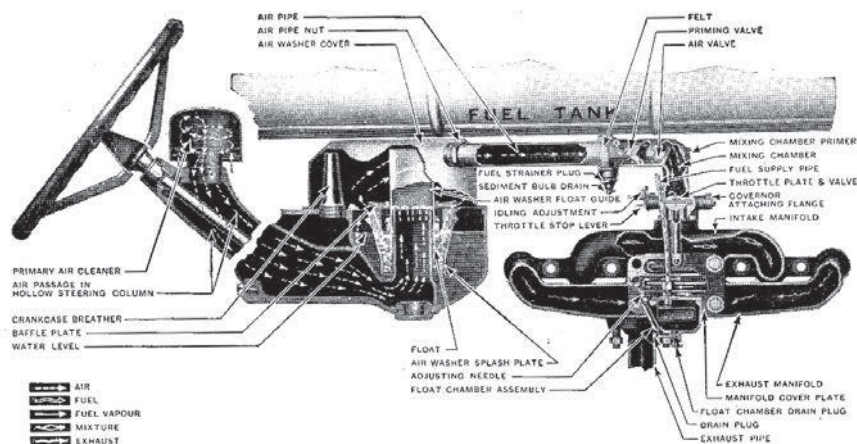
The Fordson had a reputation of being difficult to get into gear. However, with a correctly-maintained tractor, this was far from the case. The Fordson clutch contained a number of plates that were very slightly 'dished' in shape and tempered, like a spring. The idea was that, when you depressed the clutch pedal, the plates

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

There were a few features of the Fordson that could have been improved. The fuel vaporiser wasn't the best; it warmed the fuel with a small amount of air, then mixed it with the rest of the cold intake air – not the most efficient arrangement. The water pump needed regular lubrication and careful maintenance. Even then, the shaft and bushes would require replacement at regular intervals.

The underslung exhaust supplied as standard was reputed to have burnt many a driver's right boot. The fact that the engine was a side-valve unit made it thirsty. Engine service hours were not particularly long, making engine overhauls a not uncommon feature of Fordson ownership.

MODEL N OVERVIEW



A diagram of the Fordson water-washer air cleaner system.

themselves overcame the surface suction created by the oil they ran in.

Gear selection issues

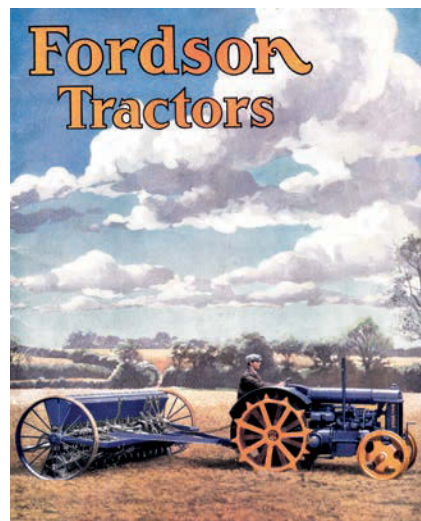
When things were set correctly, the plates parted and the clutch worked as it should. But, if the plates lost this tension, either as a result of overheating (which was possible with very severe use), or due to age, then they would start sticking together, making gear engagement very difficult. One dodge was to dismantle the clutch and reassemble the plates in a different order, thereby giving each one a new surface to run against.

Ford, by chance, had used a water-washer air cleaner on its earlier Model F and this, enlarged and modified, was carried over to the Model N. Many early tractors of all makes had a water-injection feature incorporated into the intake system. This was included to prevent pre-ignition of the low-octane fuels in use at the time, when the engine was under load.

But, with a water-washer air cleaner, there was no need for water-injection because the intake air became laden with moisture, which prevented pre-ignition. The tractor also pulled better. It's known that a tractor offers better performance at night, when the air is cool and damp; a water-washer air cleaner, created the same effect. The downside was that it was necessary to top-up the water level up to three times a day. The Fordson had a float in the air cleaner, which shut off the air supply to the engine when the water level got too low to clean the air properly.

Ratio choices

Another feature of the Fordson was the choice of two gear ratios. Both options gave a top gear speed of 7.75mph at 1,100rpm. The standard or 'Green Spot' ratios were 2.19mph in first and 3.09mph in second. The 'Special Ploughing Gear' or 'Red Spot' option gave 1.74mph in first



A later version of the Fordson water-washer brochure.

and 2.45mph in second. The option fitted was denoted by a red or green 'spot' that was usually painted on the rear of the back axle housing.

In 1936, a low top gear option, giving 4.3mph, was made available, both in red- and green-spot options. At the same time, a side-mounted PTO was offered as an optional extra, but was only available with the 4.3 transmission. The gearbox casting was modified to accommodate this attachment. The top gear ratio was denoted by either 4.3 or 7.74 being stamped around the machined edge of the transmission case, where it joined the engine mounting flange.

By now, the Fordson was offered as a standard agricultural model on steel wheels, a 'Utility' model with Dunlop, Firestone or Goodyear tyre equipment, or a row-crop version. There was always a debate about whether it was better to have the green spot and pull two furrows faster, or a red spot and pull three at the lower speed. The choice was yours although, during the Second World War, most Fordsons were delivered as Red Spots, by decree of the Ministry of Agriculture.

So, the water-washer Fordson was a good, reliable and popular tractor. It was easy to use, had a low first cost and, most important of all, it did the job efficiently within the prevailing economic climate of the time. ■

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ME AND MY TRACTOR

BUILT IN BOLOGNA!



Tractor enthusiast, Thomas Neeb, shares
the story of his beloved Fordson Model
N and its very special secret



I live in South Germany and have been collecting vintage tractors for more than 20 years. Naturally, I started with German models, but it wasn't long before I had my first British tractor – a grey Fergie. I grew very fond of the Ferguson, so much so, in fact, that it was soon joined by a 35.

My love of British tractors had taken hold, and I soon found myself at The Great Dorset Steam Fair, staying in the same cottage as Len Beckett, who, as many of you will know, is a staunch Ferguson enthusiast.

Friends with tractors

We hit it off straight away, and have struck up a deep friendship, particularly as I've travelled to Britain many times in the years that have followed – visiting rallies, collections and meeting many other, like-minded individuals.

Besides my Ferguson 'virus', my trips to the UK saw me becoming more and more interested in Fordson tractors, particularly the older models. Buying a Fordson

LEFT: Thomas Neeb's stunning Fordson N was assembled in Bologna, Italy. (Pic: Gerald Sandrieser)

TOP: Thomas Neeb.

ME AND MY TRACTOR



Thomas is enthusiastic about classic Land Rovers as well as Fordson tractors, and enjoys combining the two interests. (Pic: Thomas Neeb)

F seemed a little out of reach, so I decided to focus my efforts on a Standard N water-washer. Once back in Germany, my search for one began and, surprisingly, it wasn't too long before I found one. This is where the real story really begins. I saw the tractor advertised in a German tractor magazine, and was specifically drawn to it because it was said to be a water-washer model... I like the blue livery of

these models. When I first saw it, I was disappointed – it was a non-runner, it was fitted with modern wheel rims with rubber on and, most annoyingly, it was orange with ugly, green-painted wheels. The seller told me the tractor came from Switzerland and had been used for road work. Hence the reason for the colour – highway orange! After checking the engine number and making a few phone calls to my

friend, Hartmut Lindner (a Model N owner), I decided to buy it and take the risk of it having no major problems.

Getting started

The first job I did was to clean and dismantle the tractor. I noticed that the manifold had some cracks in it, but I hoped these could be repaired. I hadn't seen a manifold with a bronze plate before, so I guessed a replacement would be hard to find!

The next job on the list was to dismantle the engine and remove the pistons, then check the condition of the rings and the big end bearings. Fortunately, everything appeared to be in reasonable order. So, with all the parts cleaned and new piston rings fitted, I methodically put the engine back together.

The governor and steering box were overhauled by my father. He is a great mechanic and a genius on the lathe. Then, with the components of the main unit back together, and the old paint having been removed – along with the oil – the new base primer could be



Despite some cracks, Thomas was able to retain the original manifold.

“My love of British tractors had taken hold, and I soon found myself at The Great Dorset Steam Fair”

sprayed. This was then followed by the nice coat of dark blue paint; the colour that's synonymous with water-washers and E27Ns.

The finished result looked fantastic and exactly how I wanted it, but it was still a non-runner! So, I turned my attention to the heavy radiator (which I found to be in good condition), the mudguards, footplates, fuel tank and seat. These were all treated in the same way as the rest of the tractor; stripped down, cleaned, primed and painted. Thanks to the thickness of material used to build tractors in those days, they were all found to be in good, reusable shape!

During a trip to the UK, I picked-up a set of cast wheels at Richard Pocock's, and made arrangements for them to be transported on a truck, across the Channel, so that



The hollow steering column acted as an air passage between the air pre-cleaner and the bowl.



'Bassa compressione' translates as 'low compression'.



Like all model Ns, the left-hand side of the tractor is somewhat spartan, but this serves to accentuate the superb wheels that Thomas sourced from Richard Pocock, in Dorset.

I could then collect them on the other side. A dealer picked up some tractors and had some space for my wheels, so transported them to The Netherlands for me. This meant that I could take some time off work to collect them, and have a mini-break near Amsterdam, to boot!

Wheel treatments

With the wheels safely back at home, I sand-blasted, primed and filled them. I used a red-orange paint, instead of bright orange, which is the proper colour for this tractor. Over time, the tractor found its way together, and looked great in its paint scheme, but it still hadn't run! The day came when I decided to try starting it for the first time. After some phone calls to my friend,

Hartmut, and some practice starting, I tried out the new things I'd learned at home.

In Germany, there aren't many Fordsons around, as they were not imported here, so it's hard to find people who know much about them. I filled the fuel tank and opened the tap to let it run into the float chamber. I adjusted the magneto and main jet, and was then ready to try starting with the handle. I tried for one hour, adjusting things as I went and, after two hours spent swinging that handle, the engine still hadn't started. I could smell petrol and the plugs were wet, but it just wouldn't run.

I decided to make a couple more phone calls, to see what other information I could glean.

ME AND MY TRACTOR



The closed-pattern Firestone tyres really set the tractor off.

Unfortunately, nothing much changed and, after nearly two weeks of trying and giving myself blisters on my hand from the handle, there was still wasn't a peep coming from the engine.

One day, I removed the manifold from the block to see if something was blocked. Perhaps I'd forgotten to remove a towel from the intake system during the cleaning process – in those situations you think about everything, no matter how odd it seems.

Starting problem solved!

I found the manifold full of petrol and the little valves carbonised and

closed – so the unburned fuel could not run out. So, I cleaned the valves and got everything back in place and, thankfully, this had the desired effect! It took me a few goes to get used to the starting procedure, as we Germans aren't used to petrol-powered tractors – diesel was the fuel of choice from very early on in this country!

I was very happy and proud of my 'washing machine' – it was smooth, ran well and sounded great on the rally field. Over the years, the more I looked at other, similar tractors in Britain, the more I realised that mine was different. The first and most interesting difference is the bronze

plate on the manifold – I still haven't seen another like it. It states it's for use with 'gasoil'.

The next difference is the sign on the cylinder head, close to the bronze plate. It reads 'bassa compressione' which, in Italian, means low compression.

Also, unlike 'normal' Fordsons, there's no writing on the fuel tank, or on the casting underneath. After several years spent investigating, I found no explanation for any of these differences! But all this changed in 2011, after I attended the Tractor World show in Malvern. I visited the Ford & Fordson Association's stand at the event, and showed them some photographs of my tractor. Unfortunately, nobody really had any information for me, but it was suggested that I talk to both Peter Love and Stuart Gibbard.

I told Peter that I'd heard that

“I hadn't seen a manifold with a bronze plate before, so I guessed a replacement would be hard to find!**”**

Fordson tractors were assembled in Italy in the old days, and he confirmed that he had a couple of contacts in Italy – a collector, and someone that had been a Ford dealer right from the beginning.

Built in Bologna!

After a while, I got some more information, which confirmed that what I'd heard was correct. From 1923, Ford operated a plant in Trieste, Italy, where it assembled Model T cars and Model F tractors. It was only an assembly plant, as taxes for producing vehicles from scratch were very high.

The business proved to be a success, so a new plant was opened in Bologna, in 1933, where it turns out that my tractor was produced. Due to different fuel quality in Italy at the time, some major components were different to those used on tractors produced in Britain. The machines built in Bologna were



LEFT: Fordsons assembled in Italy had no lettering on the rear of the fuel tank.

BELOW: A 'British' tractor, assembled in Italy, relaxes in the German countryside.

fitted with an Italian cylinder head, and the bronze plate where the vaporiser was mounted.

Therefore, I have a Fordson with Italian roots. I'm proud to own such a rare thing and, as such, I rally it wherever possible. A year ago, I bought another Fordson to add to my tractor collection. My dream came true and I'm now the proud owner of a 1918 Fordson F, with a

'ladder side' radiator. The tractor is actually a non-runner, but it has good potential to be otherwise. For its age, it's in good order. There are parts that need to be replaced but, at the moment, I'm content to leave it while I work on my Land Rover. It's safely stored in a nice, dry shed, but the aim is to get it out and about on a rally field just as soon as I can. ■



Muck and bullets

June 9th, 1865 was a typical English summer's day in the village of Staplehurst, Kent. However, the events of that day could have robbed England of one of its most revered authors, when a London-bound train thundered across the village bridge and ran into a 42-foot wide gap where the track had been removed for maintenance work.

The ensuing mayhem injured 40 people and claimed 10 lives. Among the survivors was Charles Dickens, who was returning from a visit to Paris; the carriage he was travelling in came to rest hanging over the bridge parapet instead of plunging to the ground.

He found his way out of the carriage and helped administer to the dead and dying before returning, hours later, to retrieve his manuscript. Lady Luck had smiled on the esteemed author that day, and the world wasn't deprived of his final novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, published later that year.

Another lucky escape!

Now, fast-forward to sometime during the latter part of the Second World War, to another lucky escape. The scene this time is Cross at Hand Farm, just south of the railway line. This is where our subject tractor was first registered and used during the war. Here it was almost certainly attacked by German aircraft as it still bears the scars of strafing on its off-side rear mudguard, possibly from a Messerschmitt Bf 109, or similar aircraft, armed with 7.92mm-calibre machine guns. The damage doesn't look severe enough to have been caused by 20mm cannon, which were also known to have been carried by Axis aircraft.

At this point, there's no reason to suppose the damage came about in any other way. Indeed, Bill Foreman, who now owns the Fordson N, has been told the tale of a similar event



Bernard Holloway unravels the history of a wartime Fordson Model N, and reveals a few interesting surprises along the way



A serial number puts this Fordson's build date at 1942, although Bill Foreman found that this Model N has all the hallmarks of a 1939 model. A replacement block is thought to be the reason.

WARTIME HISTORY



The tractor was bought for £1,200 at auction as a non-runner. The total cost of the restoration and purchase is around £3,500.

happening to a Fordson in East Anglia, which a Land Army Girl was operating at the time.

Bill bought the tractor from a closing-down sale at Barty Farm, Staplehurst, in 2016, and paid £1,200 for the green-liveried N, described in the catalogue as 'a 1939 model'. He said: "I attended with no thought of buying a tractor, but bought the non-runner on a whim to ensure that it wasn't lost to posterity. My aim was to restore it to working order and original specification."

Production date

The serial number in the log book places the date of production at 1942, and details the first owner as a Mr Orpen of Cross at Hand Farm, who first registered the tractor in 1943. Three more years would pass before he registered it under the 'Roads Act 1920', at a cost of five shillings (25 new pence) for the licence – if only for its modern equivalent! The Filmer family became the new owners in 1955, registering three addresses in the log book, the last is Barty Farm.



An erratic line of shell holes; some had been previously filled-in over the course of the tractor's life.

The anomaly between HKM 635's serial number and the 1939 model specification is assumed to be because of a replacement block. Model Ns of this period were known to suffer from engine maladies, and the common effects of frost action. Many were rebuilt in period, just to keep them running, with parts from scrapped tractors as new parts weren't readily available, particularly during the war. Hence, many today have parts that wouldn't have been fitted by the factory.

Eager to get to the bottom of this anomaly, Bill sent photographs to a Fordson collector who looked at 12 key points and verified that, in his opinion, the specification tallied with a '39 model. These included the correct model year fuel tank with recessed lettering and rib, air cleaner, cast wing brackets, slight curve in the axle with rubber bush, dash and radiator casting/design. It's more than likely that, when attacked, the tractor was running a different wheel and tyre combination, or on steels with spade lugs. The present set, although in period, show no signs of damage, which seems odd as they'd have been in the line of fire.

Other components may also have been hit and damaged, including the block, necessitating replacement. Another overriding pointer to its age were the traces of factory orange found under the green paint. During 1940, both new and Ns of an earlier vintage, were painted green to mitigate the attention of marauding eyes. An action that successfully reduced the incidents of farm tractors being attacked and destroyed by aircraft, and may also have made the lines of tractors parked for distribution at Dagenham, more difficult to spot from the air.

Nuts and bolts

Bill's approach to restoration is thorough, to say the least. He's owned and restored a 1955 AP22 Porsche, and still owns an



The engine, minus its cylinder head, is easily brought into the workshop using Nigel's hydraulic crane.



Bill and Bob (right) lift off the heavy sump assembly to reveal the big end and main bearings.

RIGHT: The first time the N ran after the engine rebuild, it started first time after a heft on the starting handle. After some smoking, it ran cleanly on TVO when up to temperature.

BELOW: Despite loose and missing big end shims, the diameter of the crank and main bearings showed no appreciable wear.



“It was almost certainly attacked by German aircraft as it still bears the scars of strafing on its off-side rear mudguard, possibly from a Messerschmitt Bf 109”

immaculate 1963 Super Major. His initial task was undertaking basic maintenance work, sending the Lucas RF4 magneto to Ribblesdale Auto Electric Units Limited for an overhaul, and replacing the attendant leads and plugs. The head was sent off to old school friend and mechanical engineer, John Pearson, for skimming and lapping of the valves. The accompanying images show a plated repair to the block,

assumed necessary because of frost damage.

Before the wide use and availability of antifreeze, farmers would endeavour to lessen the chances of such damage by draining the cooling system at the end of the working day, and refilling it the next morning. But some were either forgetful or unlucky. The repair remains ‘as purchased’, and is leak-free.

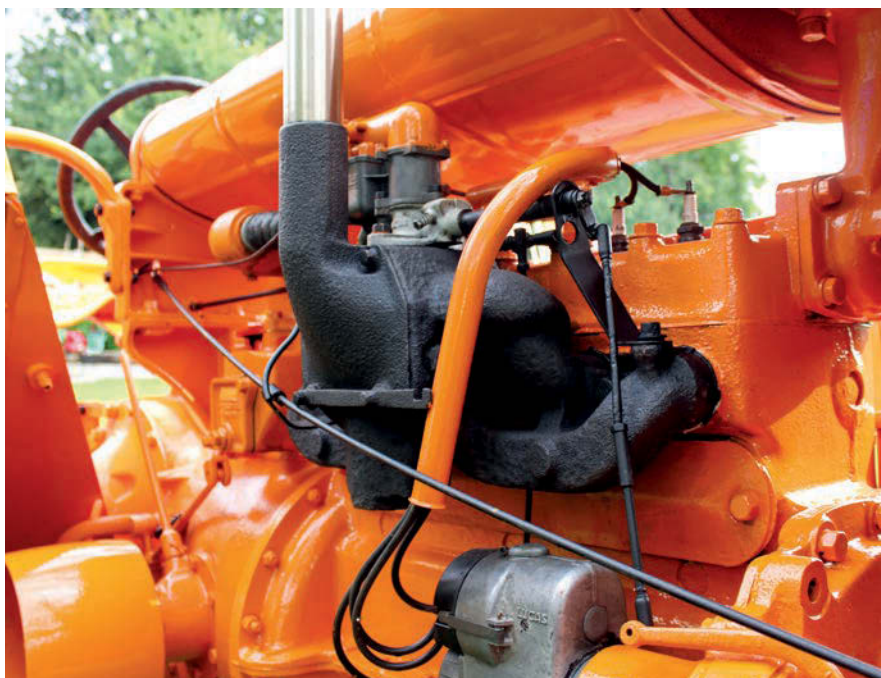
WARTIME HISTORY

Bill's enthusiasm got the better of him, though, as he decided to refit the overhauled head and repaint the tractor before it had been run-up. A decision he now regrets because, although it fired first time after a dose of petrol and a hefty swing on the handle, it never reached sufficient temperature to allow it to be switched over to TVO. This was because, as the revs increased, so did an ominous knocking from around cylinders one and two. It was time to call in the reinforcements. Friend Nigel Finch, with his hydraulic lift arm, Bob Baseby with his mechanical knowledge, and yours truly with notebook, pen and camera.

Back to pieces

The front end of the N was dismantled once again, and the tractor was split. The block, still retaining the flywheel, was carefully swung by Nigel into the workshop and turned on its back so that the sump could be removed to expose the over-engineered internals. Simple is always best, in my book.

The con rod for piston No.2



Attention to detail is what Bill and Bob were all about during this restoration.

was grabbed just to show some mechanical appreciation of the subject. Then, the big end cap was found to be loose; the castle nut with split pin in situ, had a slight but perceptible amount of movement and rotation. So, the cause of the knocking was - hopefully - solved.

The cap was removed, revealing an odd selection of shims - three on one side, but one whole one and a broken shim on the other. It was assumed that some shims had either been chewed up as they worked their way loose during the mechanical action of the engine and had been ingested, or had never been fitted. It was hard to be sure.

The 'mains' were tested in time-honoured fashion, with a four-foot pry bar, and were found to be as solid as a rock. Sighs of relief all round, but the remaining pistons showed similar defects to No.2, and were withdrawn. On the assumption they were the originals, whoever previously overhauled the engine hadn't replaced them in the correct bores.

Luckily, there was no appreciable sign of wear to the liners or pistons, although the rings were replaced as a precaution. One other small ray of sunshine; the crank was checked with a micrometer, and found to be within acceptable tolerances, another sigh of relief. Cox and Turner Engineering supplied new shims, gaskets and a raft of other minor components to allow



The new owner is proud of the finished tractor. Who would have thought that, back in the dark days of the war, it would be restored to its former glory 70 years later?

reassembly, and the overhauled engine was then reunited with the back end.

Finishing line

The next time the engine was started was one year after purchase and after Bill had repainted it and the front-end components once more. On this occasion, it ran nicely, with no repetition of the previous defects, and has continued to do so, enhanced by its high-ratio axle that ensures it shouldn't get left too far behind on road runs.

As for the rest of the restoration work, it goes without saying that, in this case, if it was mechanically required, it was attended to. Also, if the tinwork was found to be a little rusty and beyond repair, replacements were fabricated and fitted. However, for the sake of originality, all existing components and tinwork were retained, where possible. There are some minor jobs still to do, but Bill assures me that the stainless-steel exhaust is only temporary, and that the final job will be to pick out the cast 'Fordson'



In the driver's seat; Bob is very pleased with the outcome of his efforts. Without his help, Bill admits it would never have been completed.

lettering in the appropriate colour.

Much of the accolade for this work belongs to Bob who, like Bill, is a member of the Ford & Fordson Association. Bob worked hard using his mechanical and fabrication skills to return the tractor to the road, and Bill freely admits that, without his

help and knowledge, it would never have happened. The pair must have done something right as, first time out, the Model N won the award for Best Working Tractor at the Shoreham Heavy Horses Show, held in the picturesque surroundings of the Darenth Valley, in Kent. ■



First time out, the Fordson N won the 'Best Tractor at Show' award.

The ploughing Standard

Robert Copland has been ploughing with the same wartime Standard Fordson for nearly 40 years. Kim Jackson visited his smallholding in Dumfriesshire, to find out more...

As is the case with many who enjoy vintage tractors as a hobby, Robert Copland also knew them from a very early age. His father was a champion ploughman who happily passed on to his son the finer points of the art.

Robert was born in a bothy above a stable at Closeburn Mains, near Thornhill, in Dumfriesshire, during

the war. The family lived on there for a while, until they moved to a cottage on his father's employer's other farm, Townfoot, in Thornhill. Robert Copland senior was, by this time, a well-known ploughman, and had twice won the junior class with a pair of horses at the match organised by the Dumfriesshire and Kirkcudbrightshire Ploughing Association.

First Standard arrives

A Standard Fordson arrived for Mr Copland's use in the late 1930s, and this was replaced by another Standard in 1947. Shortly afterwards, the family moved to Hermitage Farm, Haugh of Urr, Kirkcudbrightshire, and Mr Copland found himself in charge of a David Brown. But he continued with



competition ploughing, as did the farmer's son, John Prentice.

The family's final move was made in 1954, to Mid Locharwoods, Ruthwell, in Dumfriesshire, as Robert Copland was now a smallholder. The livestock he had amounted to four cows, and his tractor was a 1942 Standard Fordson. The majority of the time, however, Robert junior didn't live on the farm; he had reached secondary school age and his parents thought it best that he attend Wallacehall Academy, at Thornhill.

Back at Mid Locharwoods, young Robert was keen to help, especially if it involved tractor work, and was given the job of putting the muck out as soon as he could start the tractor. Strenuous work, because they didn't have a loader and the muck spreader had to be loaded by hand. It also has to be said that he wasn't sorry to see the Fordson N go, as the 12-year-old found the replacement petrol/TVO Fergie – soon to be replaced again by a diesel Fergie – easier to drive, and especially to plough with.

Too young to plough!

He entered his first ploughing match aged 12, and got his photo in the paper, showing some very neat furrows. Due to the law of having to be 13 to work a tractor, this was the age that was reported, but the picture will not be included here as he was on a Ferguson!

As a side issue, local ploughing matches were very popular in those days, and it wasn't unusual for the local press to dedicate a full or even double page to coverage of them. It was also very common to have all the ploughing manufacturers present at such events, where they'd check that all the ploughmen had set their ploughs correctly.

In the past, most blacksmiths would have made farm equipment, including ploughs, and Harkness ploughs of Ruthwell were the ploughs of choice for the Coplands. Mr Copland senior was good friends



PLOUGHING PASSION

RIGHT: Three generations of Robert Coplands, taken in the early 1980s; Robert's father died in 1986, after successfully making the transition from horses to tractors, and his grandson has elected for a life away from tractors.



BELOW RIGHT: Robert Copland has spent more than 50 years driving Fordsons!

months. But Robert wasn't cut-out to be a farm worker, and he started an apprenticeship with the local Ford agent, McKnight Motors.

Tractor business

This company was a dealership for both cars and tractors, and Robert was involved on the tractor side of the business, which dealt with both industrial and agricultural machines.

New tractors were also sold, but the Dumfriesshire farmers wanted their tractors to last, and Robert still saw a lot of Standard Fordsons, E27Ns as well as Majors. Robert was in the workshop for a couple of years until his boss, Iain McKnight, knowing of Robert's prowess in the ploughing field, made him the company's demonstrator.

In those days, the main tractor sold was the Fordson Dexta, and Robert would often go as far as Stranraer, some 80 miles away, to demonstrate it. His job also included the correct adjustment of any ploughs that were sold, to ensure they were set correctly for the

farmer's tractor. One demonstration he particularly remembers was with a four-wheel-drive Dexta. A field had been selected at Terregles, on the outskirts of Dumfries. It was a successful day, with three 4WD orders taken, although not by the farmer on whose land the demonstration was held.

Robert still knows of the existence of two of those machines, with one still being on its original farm. But what stood out most from the demonstration was the steepness of the field and, looking back, Robert reckons he was daft to do it. He had a heck of a job turning, and only managed to plough downhill; reversing back up the hill after each run, with the plough in the air!

Ransomes ploughs

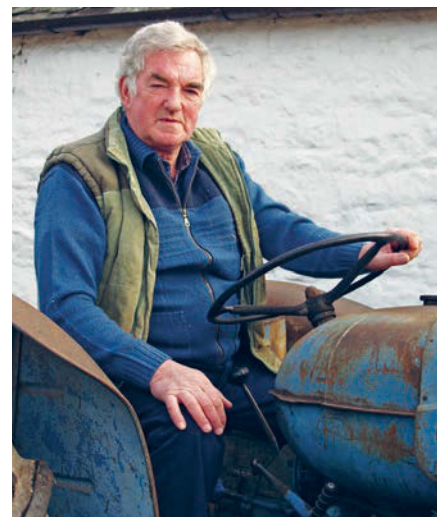
As with many Fordson dealers, Ransomes were the ploughs of choice, and new examples regularly arrived at the local railway station for Robert to test. He was expected to attend all the local ploughing matches, and he tended to do

half-and-half, as demonstrator or competitor; with McKnight expecting more tractor and plough orders if Robert did well (which he often did). Robert, though, was spared having to attend the Scottish Ploughing Match, as Ford and Ransomes would send their main men there.

However, Robert soon tired of demonstrating, and set his sights on becoming a lorry driver. He did that for the next six or seven years. In due course, McKnight sold the business to Landmec, Ford lost a lot of tractor sales in the area and the dealership for Dumfriesshire and Kirkcudbrightshire was given to Ralph Lloyd. Lloyds continued to sell Ford and now New Holland tractors from Dumfries, with its head office in Carlisle.

Robert returned to tractors when he became manager of Oliver & Snowdens at Lockerbie, selling John Deere machines. Then that company was taken over by Carrs, which was – and still is – Massey Ferguson dealers. Shortly after this, Robert decided that it was time to set up on his own.

Robert's company took mobile feed mixers around farms, and supplemented this by selling fertiliser and straw. He had six trucks on the road, and 10 mills. He was the top operator for Feed Mobile Ltd (equipment made by





With Robert now retired, the only stock on the holding are hens and horses, which he looks after with the help of a trusty Fordson Major.

Farmhand), and also had the same tractor agency for a while, but there was little time for this side of the business. He finished his working life with AW Blake, which specialised in hiring machinery, and Robert looked after the Dumfriesshire side of the business, until his retirement in 2008.

Robert's tractor

Now to the hobby side of the story. Back in the early 1970s, Robert knew someone in Hexham who was desperate to have a steamer. He knew someone else with a Sentinel and, after managing to broker a sale, was given a Fordson Standard as his part of the deal. However, the tractor was in bits; it had been stripped for repair, but never finished. So, Robert set about putting it back together, and the two have been inseparable ever since.

However, anybody looking at the green Standard will quickly be able to spot that it's not 100% original because, about 30 years ago, it

was fitted with a canopy to make it stand out a bit more. This work was undertaken by Robert's friend, John Kenny. Lights have since been fitted, with some extra ones being added a couple of years ago, in preparation for a 24-hour ploughing marathon charity fund-raiser. The other, non-original part is the E27N engine, which has always been part of the Standard for as long as Robert has known it.

The plough Robert uses is a Ransomes RLSD, which he bought from Somerset. It was a good deal, costing just £12, although that was 35 years ago, and the haulage cost was significantly more. When Robert started ploughing, he entered the junior classes and then, as an adult, the open classes. Although he generally had an older tractor than most, there were no vintage classes to enter, unlike today.

An important landmark in the story is the formation of the Dumfries & Galloway Vintage Machinery Club, which happened in 1976. Robert

and Jim Irving were the instigators, and the fledgling club held its first ploughing match the following year. That event has since grown into the largest, vintage ploughing match held in Scotland and, since the early 1980s, has been one of the two Scottish qualifiers for the Society of Ploughmen's British Championships.

Most of the time, Robert is seen with his 'unique' Standard and RSLD and, between them, they've claimed scores of prizes. Robert's finest moment came at the 2003 European Championship in Denmark, when he represented Scotland in the trailed vintage class; he'd gained his place by being the highest-placed Scotsman at the Scottish Championships, the year before.

Robert's ploughing experience has resulted in his talents being in demand as a judge, and he's officiated at both the British and Scottish championship events, as well as the European Championships held on the Isle of Man in 2007. ■

MODERN ENGINE SWAP

Hi-tech Model N!

This is the story of Rick Cobley's unique Fordson Model N, which he converted beautifully to run with an engine from an Austin Montego!

Back in 2002, Davey Sheills, a Scottish tractor restorer, had just moved from Scotland to be near his daughter, and knocked on my door as he'd been told that I had a few old tractors.

Months later he reappeared, excited as he'd found a partially-refurbished grey Fergie in Lancashire, that the owner didn't have the time to finish. "Could he use one of my sheds to finish it for them?", he asked. "Of course,"

I replied and, by Christmas, it was fully-restored and returned to its owner.

Needed sorting!

He followed this with the restoration of my Nuffield DM4, which had a seized engine, and admitted that he wasn't too impressed with the engineering. After stripping the clutch for engine removal, and looking at the steering, he declared: "Lord Nuffield needed sorting!"

After the mechanical work was completed, my father died, and I took a break for a while.

A while later, Davey turned up again, similarly excited by the prospect of restoring an International 50T baler, even though the source of the information wouldn't reveal its location. Fortunately, I knew the owner and, although he wouldn't sell, we agreed it could come to my farm for restoration by Davey.



Looking superb and running a treat, despite the chilly conditions.

The owner paid for the parts, and an old Fordson N was offered in appreciation.

Davey stripped and cleaned the N, while I was busy hay-making. When I found time to examine the tractor, I quickly realised that the costs associated with returning it back to its original specification would be too great and that, at the end of the day, the tractor wouldn't be of much practical use to me, either. However, if I changed the engine, that might be a different matter.

With the rising cost of petrol in mind, it was decided to switch to diesel power, but the question then was what engine to use? Davey wanted to fit a Nuffield motor, but that would require a structural sump and flywheel housing, which would be very costly and time-consuming to fabricate. I was also aware that the N was a very slow tractor in standard trim, so a 'fast' engine would be a good choice.

The right engine

I discounted the Ford Transit 2.5-litre, direct-injection diesel engines I had lying around in the farmyard, on the grounds that they would require the fabrication of a steel chassis to carry the front axle.

However, I then remembered that, tucked away in the corner of one of my sheds, was the engine from my wife's scrapped Austin Montego car. It was a Perkins Prima two-litre turbo diesel, and I thought that could work. This engine has a very slim base, and a better rev band than the larger motor from the Transit, but alterations would be required to convert it from front- to rear-wheel-drive. The gearbox-mounted starter motor, which comes in from the opposite direction, would need some thought, too. It was also apparent that the very small flywheel wouldn't mesh with the ring gear, even with an adapter plate to hold the starter motor alongside the engine, and many beers were



The Austin Montego's two-litre engine seems happy enough in its new home.



The great man himself, Davey Sheills, on the Fordson Standard N that was to be transformed.

“I was also aware that the N was a very slow tractor in standard trim, so a 'fast' engine would be a good choice”

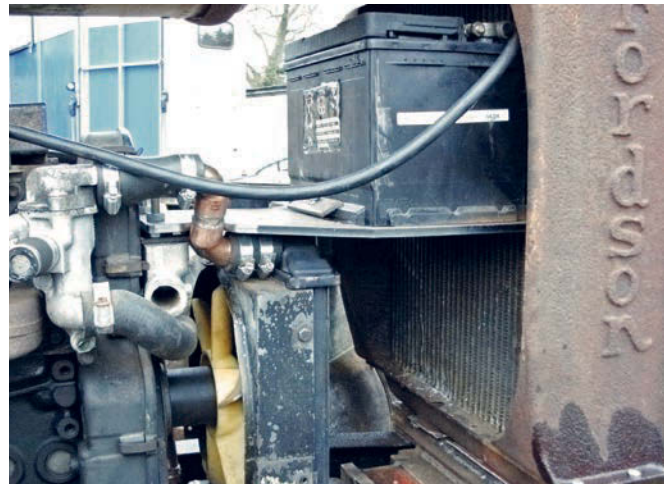
consumed as we considered how best to solve this problem.

In 2008, I went to a farm sale, near Stoke-on-Trent, and one of the small lots was a Perkins Prima engine and gearbox from a Sherpa van; just what I needed, and mine for £30! The engine was a duffer but the flywheel, backplate and starter were transferred to my engine, and things were moving.

MODERN ENGINE SWAP



New spigot shaft in place and ready to receive the Sherpa clutch.



The Mini radiator and battery were a good solution to a problem.

A 19mm steel adapter plate was laser-cut at the local engineering workshop, to mate the engine and gearbox, but we still had the clutch to sort out. Belt-drive was discounted on the basis of reliability, and I didn't fancy hanging the wet clutch on it as the thickness of the original Fordson flywheel meant it would have to hang out several inches. I didn't know if a sealed starter motor could be found for the prima if I used a wet clutch, so it was decided to use a dry clutch.

Clutch differences

The Fordson clutch drive shaft was huge compared to the splines on the Sherpa clutch plate I intended to use, and wasn't long enough to reach the Prima spigot bearing. The length required was calculated and the Sherpa and Fordson drive-shafts were taken to an engineering works where the Sherpa shaft was threaded, then screwed into the end of the Fordson shaft with some shaft seal Loctite; no welding needed.

Next was the clutch release bearing, usually carried in a tube concentric to the drive shaft, but the Fordson had no such tube, and engineering the release bearing to align properly would be difficult. So, I used a carbon thrust bearing that just touched, but this required a pressure plate with a thrust pad instead of fingers. One from a Land

Rover 2A was ideal, and it fitted straight onto the Sherpa flywheel!

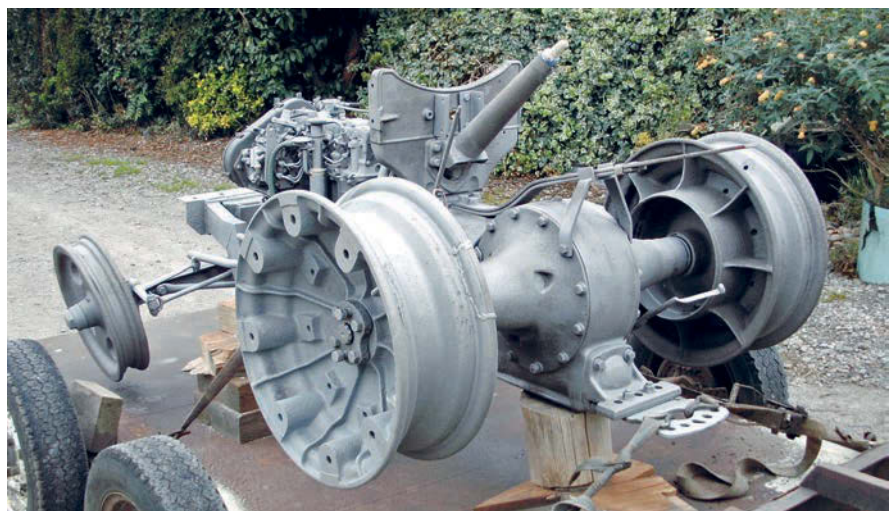
The next job was to find the thrust bearing, and an old Nuffield DM4 release shaft and bearing was used. These were welded to a pair of angle iron brackets placed on the 19mm adaptor plate. The only modification needed to the DM4 release shaft was to the operating lever, which was bent inwards to clear the Fordson bell housing, and then connected to a Land Rover Series 3 clutch slave cylinder.

This was mounted on a bracket held by two of the ring of bolts holding the gearbox in the front of the Fordson transmission. A modified Land Rover pedal box operates the clutch. To properly

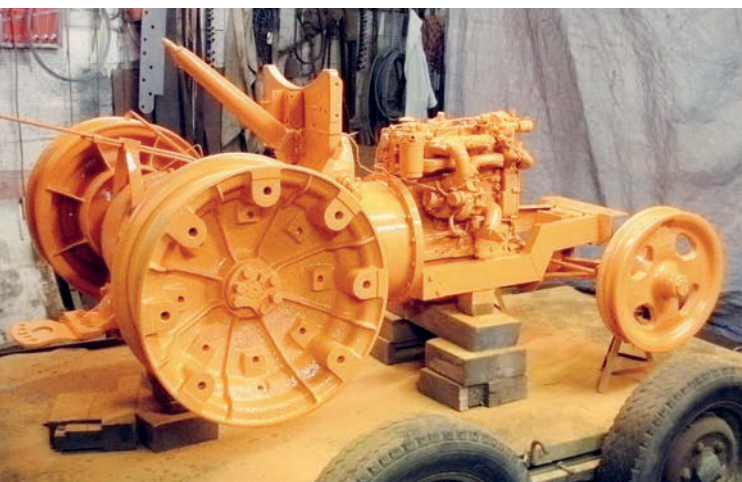
mount the master cylinder my friend, Steve Ellis - who can alloy-weld - cut it off at 22.5° and gave it half a turn before welding it back on to sit vertically.

Front axle mounting

The engine, clutch and transmission were now one unit, so my attention turned to mounting the front axle. Some 4x2in channel (from an old muck spreader) was bolted to a bracket, then welded to the 19mm adaptor plate. This projected forwards and was welded to another bracket bolted to the front engine mounts, making a stiff structure onto which the axle and non-functioning original radiator were mounted. Use of the salvaged steel was a stroke



Just back from the sand-blasting shop, all raw and ready for some primer to be applied.



Now in top coat and looking good, the Fordson is nearly there.



The new dash panel in place and painted, complete with all the gauges.

of luck because, after it had been blasted and painted, it had the same pitted finish as the rest of the tractor! To prevent fouling of the steering arm on the chassis, we bent the chassis inwards, and it was at this point that the grinder jumped and I cut through the tendon on my right thumb, which required a painful operation to reattach and time off work.

The tractor was now nearing completion, and only needed a battery tray and radiator to cool it. A Mini radiator and MG Midget fan were fitted, with a battery tray installed behind the original radiator (most people never notice this). The tractor was first driven in March 2010 and, in May of that year, I went to the Belvoir Castle Rally and saw Brenda Hill's Harvest Gold Fordson, and decided to finish my tractor in the same colour.

The last part to be made was the dashboard; although Fordson Ns never had anything like this, I felt it went with the conversion. The electric start was an important feature to me as it's my wish that Davey should be able to come to my farm and drive it to a local rally one day.

Paint preparation

The tractor was taken to my local sand blasters and, on its return, was placed in my heated workshop;

spraying commenced when the metal had warmed up. First, 3.5 litres of Spaldings buff primer (a yellow, red oxide) were applied. Building up several coats, it takes on a gloss appearance. After about an hour, the paint had dried and gone matt, so on went 3.5 litres of gloss. It's the quantity of paint that gives the finish.

The following day, the tractor was placed into another heated shed to dry for a month, while I got on with the wings, which were brought secondhand from the Welland Rally. These were also blasted then prepared for painting. I used a high-build, two-pack primer made by Lechler (Lechler.eu), which can be tinted to any colour, so I used a similar shade undercoat as the top coat to mask any chips that may occur in the future. After nearly five litres of primer in four applications, sanding-back in between each, I had the finish I wanted. Then I sprayed on three litres of top coat; it's time-consuming building up the layers and letting them dry enough so that the next coat doesn't run. However, judging by the public's reaction at the Newark Show, all the effort had been worth it.

When painting the tractor, you can't just unbolt the wheels to paint them, so the tractor was mounted on a trolley with tyres removed and the wheels left in situ. The tractor was finished in synthetic

paint from Old 20 Parts Co, which is its interpretation of the pre-war Fordson colour. The original tractors were finished in synthetic paint and, in my opinion, this suits them better than the modern, two-pack finishes, and a slightly different shade of Harvest Gold than most restorers use. I believe it's only the colour, not the technical merits of my tractor, that got me the prize at Newark, but who knows?

The final touches were to fit the air cleaner, exhaust and the stainless steel headlamps, and it was finished just hours before the Newark Show. At the show, I expected to have lots of fingers waved, and to be 'told off' for fitting the wrong engine. I never expected the attention and kind words it received, or to have people crawling all over it for the whole weekend. The last thing I ever expected was a trophy! ■

“When painting the tractor, you can't just unbolt the wheels to paint them, so the tractor was mounted on a trolley with tyres removed and the wheels left in situ”

A RARE SURVIVOR

A PERKINS PEACH!



Peter Gillet's 1935 Perkins L4-powered Fordson Model N is one of the few of its type to survive today.



The ammeter and oil pressure gauges are both original.



Peter Gillet fabricated the two-level drawbar himself, to replace the winch that came with the tractor, but he wouldn't do it again!

Not many Fordsons were fitted with Perkins' L4 diesel engine, but this 1935 Model N was. However, there wasn't much to it before the restoration, as Peter Henshaw explains!



Old tractors, it has to be said, are relatively straightforward things to restore, if the parts are available. No chassis to worry about (usually), no interior on older, cabless models and very little in the way of tinwork to worry about. What's more, the engines and transmissions tend to be simple, tough and built for a long life.

Compare this to the situation with most classic cars; rust is the real enemy of any car restorer – the monster lurking in the back of shed! Car chassis or unitary bodies can be welded-up if they're not too far-gone, but it's tricky. Then there's the more elaborate electrics to deal with, plus all that irreplaceable interior trim. No doubt about it, tractor restoration has its advantages, and this is why a sturdy and ready-to-work machine can be rebuilt from quite an unpromising start.

A bag of bits!

Peter Gillet's Perkins L4-powered Fordson, bought from Richard Pocock back in 2002, certainly falls into that category. "There wasn't much to it," he told me, "just the

engine, front axle, back end a winch, plus a pair of rear wheels. There were no electrics, and no tinwork, apart from the fuel tank." He paid £600 for this collection of parts, but they certainly had potential.

The L4 Perkins conversion is less well known than the E27N P6 – this four-cylinder diesel engine was never a Fordson factory option and, when it became available in the early 1950s, Ford didn't approve it (presumably the company was more keen for farmers to replace an ageing Model N with a brand new Super Major!). Some tractors were given a new lease of life with an L4 conversion, but not that many, so a survivor is well worth saving.

Better still, all the signs were that this one had been properly converted – one tell-tale sign is that the fuel tank, which has twin fillers for the original petrol/TVO tractor, has been converted to a single filler. In addition, it's clear that the conversion plate, between engine and bell housing, was clearly made for the job, and that the tractor was fitted with the proper, Perkins front bracket under the radiator. So, all the signs are that this machine was sent to Perkins for the conversion to be done.

Work to do

Having said all that, there was still plenty of work to do. The engine was running, but needed a complete rebuild. The head was cracked (not unknown on the L4 Perkins, according to Peter), but was rewelded OK, and the bottom end had to be rebuilt with new liners being fitted. A Lucas agent overhauled the injectors with new nozzles, though this alone took six weeks, thanks to the difficulty of finding the right bits.



This type of heavy-duty front axle was also fitted to Muir-Hill loaders.

A RARE SURVIVOR

Engine parts came from Perkins, via Cox and Turner Engineering Ltd and, just in case, Peter has two other L4 engines put by, one from a converted Nuffield, and the other from a combine. But he's not intending to cannibalise them - he'd rather build another L4 Fordson. "If another tractor comes along with the right conversion parts," he explained, "then that's what I'll do."

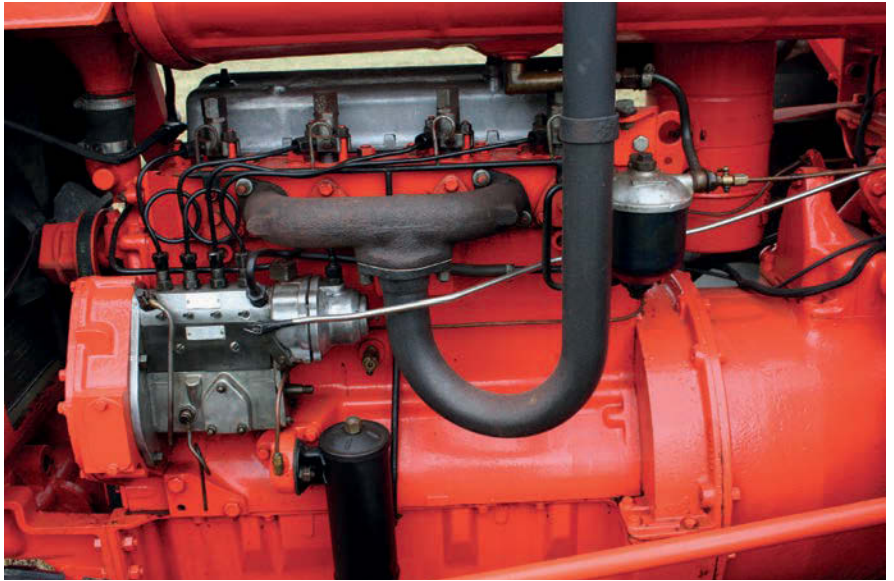
John Perrett, who did the engine work, managed to source a full gasket set from Alan Weels, at Yetminster Motor Factors - Alan had bought up a job lot of Paynes gasket sets for cars and tractors, and still had some. These treasure troves have probably all gone now. Another example is Saunders, the old British Leyland garage in Sherborne, Dorset. It closed in the early 2000s, but Peter remembers that it still had some pre-war Fordson stock on the shelves. It's understandable, given the location in rural Dorset, that a car dealer would stock common tractor spares as well, but how did they survive the decades in between?

Roots in the forest

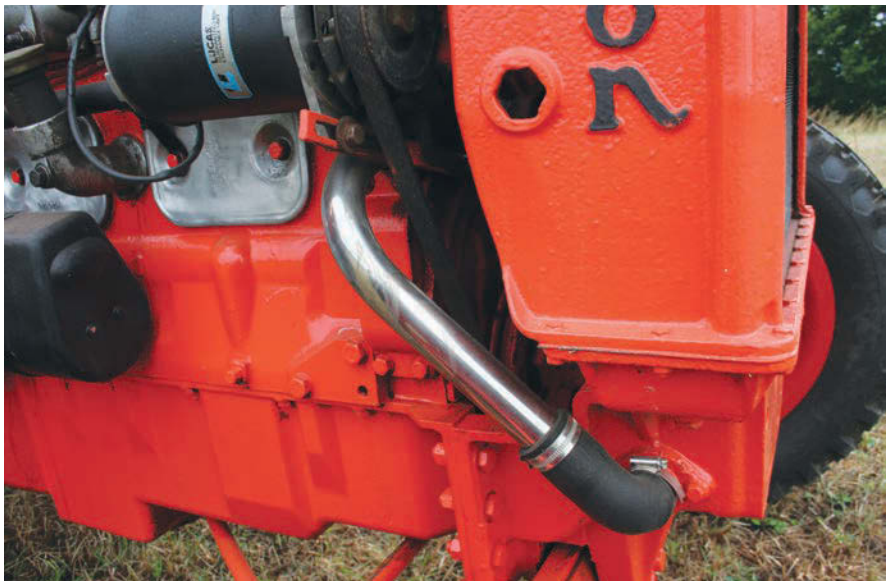
Anyway, Peter and Kevin Frampton (who did much of the restoration) think the tractor is a 1935 N, and that it was originally used for forestry work, as it came with a big winch, though Peter decided to restore it as a standard farm machine.

A heavy-duty front axle, together with an enormous weight, counterbalanced the winch. According to Peter, the stronger front axle was needed because winch tractors were liable to rear up when pulling hard, and could come down with a bit of a thump! Front wheels to match the axle were found in a scrapyards, though Peter points out this happened 10 years ago; they probably wouldn't be so easy to unearth now.

The transmission proved to be all fine, and they found that the worm drive rear axle had a high, 11:1 ratio plus a high-ratio top gear;



The Perkins L4 diesel engine can be tricky to start from cold but, with the heater, Ki-Gass system and a powerful battery, Peter's example starts well.



This shiny, stainless steel pipe, running between the radiator and the engine block, started life as a fairground ride handrail!

enough for an exciting 22mph on the road! In fact, Peter reckoned that would be a bit too exciting on a pre-war tractor and, with three other Fordson rear ends put by, mixed and matched parts to give a more reasonable 16mph top speed.

There were plenty of other things to sort out - all the steering joints were replaced, together with the cups and seals that protect them, and the result is very little slop in the steering. New front wheel

hub covers had to be fabricated, a reconditioned dynamo turned up at a local autojumble, and the original starter was overhauled.

Mix and match

The radiator was quite new, so no problem there, but the tractor had no exhaust, intake or air cleaner - an E27N air cleaner fitted, as did a Muir-Hill intake. Incidentally, if the radiator-to-engine-block pipe looks suspiciously shiny, that's because

it's actually an ex-handrail from a fairground ride and is made of stainless steel! "It was just the right shape and bend," says Peter, "so we simply cut off the length we needed." The seat pan was rusted out in the centre, but otherwise OK, so a welded-in, 4mm circular plate sorted that.

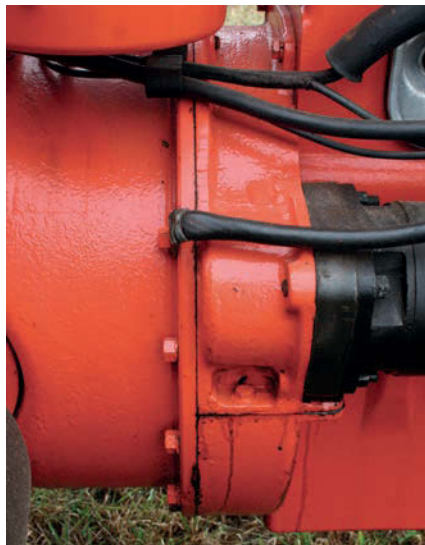
Perhaps the biggest problem was a lack of rear mudguards, so Peter got a new pair made by Roy Mayglothling, in Kington (07890 589982), who's still kept busy sending wings all over the country. "He makes them fantastically well," Peter said, "including pressing-out all the stiffeners - they are really good, reproduction mudguards. With all the rolling and stiffening needed, they are actually far more complex to make than you might think." Peter already had some original external brackets on the shelf (though these are now being remade), but the new mudguards were supplied with everything else, including the footplates, at £750 for the pair.

Kevin fitted Mk1 Land Rover lights - not original, of course, but just the sort of thing that might have been fitted in the 1950s, plus a Ki-Gass system. "The L4," he added, "starts fine once it's warm, but needs a lot of TLC from cold. But, with a combination of the heater, Ki-Gass and a powerful battery used in the right sequence, it'll go.

Sweet as a nut!

The engine certainly sounds sweet as a nut, as you would expect with all those new parts. Peter decided to make up a two-level drawbar to replace the winch. Being a heavy-plate fabricator by trade, he was able to do this himself, copying an original. "I'd never do it again, though," he admitted ruefully, "because it was a lot of work."

As well as the belt pulley (an original one covered with hundreds of layers of oiled paper, to give better grip for the belt), Peter had



One of the clues that this a professional L4 conversion carried out at the Perkins factory, is the presence of the engine/gearbox mounting plate.

a suitable PTO in stock, which fitted straight onto a blanking plate on the side of the transmission. It was a period extra, often used for powering binders and the like. Finally, the whole tractor was sprayed by Kevin in a bright orange, supplied by Farrow & Ball, and very fine it looks, too.

The result is a superb example of the rare L4 Fordson, and Peter's



The new mudguards were beautifully made by Roy Mayglothling, who specialises in this type of work.

clearly pleased with it. What he won't be doing is taking it ploughing, even though replacing the winch with a drawbar means it could do that. He is of the (probably wise) opinion that the Perkins meaty, 50+hp output would probably be too much for the worm rear end, when hauling hard through heavy soil. As it is, here's a rare Fordson conversion that thoroughly deserved its restoration. ■



Kevin Frampton, who sprayed the tractor for Peter, clearly did a good job, and deserves a spin on the Fordson.

NEXT ISSUE – DON'T MISS IT!

THE FORD 1000 RANGE

Issue 4 in the *Tractor Collection* series will spotlight the Ford 1000 Series range, which arrived in the mid-1960s. It started with a four-model range that represented a significant turning point for Ford, marking the company's progression from the popular and trusted Fordson-branded machines, into a fresher, more modern era. The new models – initially the 2000, 3000, 4000 and 5000 – looked sharper and much more in keeping with the times but, ever wary of upsetting its customer base with too much change, too quickly, Ford retained some of the traditional model names in the UK, in a bid to keep long-time users feeling comfortably reassured.

Codenamed '6X' and then '6Y' by Ford, this exciting new tractor range was designed from scratch, from the ground up, and certainly proved to be a winning formula. Popular with farmers right from the off, these machines have now become true classics, and the idea of this new bookazine is to mark and celebrate that well-deserved status.

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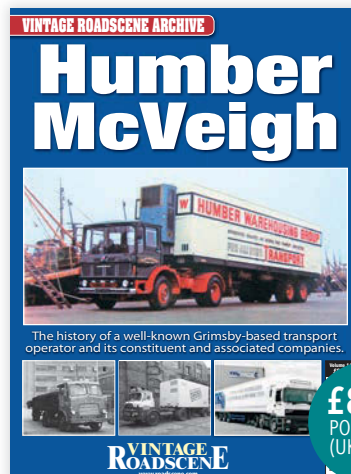
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Fordson enthusiast Nick Bryne has both Model F and Ns in his vintage tractor collection; this is his fine, late 1927, F.

