



Jason Julian uses horses and custom-built power forecarts to power modern implements on his 60-cow dairy farm.



Forecart is equipped with a 115 hp, 3.9-liter turbocharged Cummins diesel engine, mounted on 1-ton Ford truck axles butt-welded together.

“Made It Myself” Powered Carts Make Horse Farming Easier

Preparing 15 to 20 acres a day of rock-filled clay soil for planting with an 8 1/2-ft. rototiller may not seem like a big accomplishment in this era of mammoth horsepower tractors. But when it's done by 4 draft horses it's quite an achievement. One that wouldn't be possible without his custom-built power forecarts, says Jason Julian. The carts have engines that power modern implements, reducing the workload on the horses and allowing them to cover more ground.

Julian and his wife Katrina own an organic 60-cow dairy and farm 225 acres near Medford, Wis. They started farming in 1996. In 2005 they switched to mixed power farming, using horses for the majority of the work and a leased 4-WD loader tractor for the remaining work. During the winter, the Julians' 9 Brabant/American Belgian cross horses are used for hauling logs as part of Jason's Legacy Horse Logging business.

Specialty equipment such as logging arches, hydraulic forwarders, and power forecarts make logging and farming economically feasible.

“The carts allow my horses to do a lot more work. It's a force multiplier and opens up options to use modern machinery and larger manure spreaders,” Julian says.

He credits mechanic and fabricator Dave Rodencal, owner of Interwald Repair, with transforming his design ideas into his first two carts.

The first cart was a 70 hp Leyland tractor engine mounted on a shortened wagon running gear. It had a belt drive with a tensioner and worked well most of the time. However, it was underpowered for the

silos and it slipped belts. By using it, Julian learned what features he wanted, and Rodencal designed and built a “more power” version.

The second forecart has a 115 hp, 3.9-liter turbocharged, inner-cooled Cummins diesel engine, mounted on 1-ton Ford truck axles butt-welded together.

“The improvements were that the engine faces forward (so no chaff from a baler plugs the radiator) and a Tayloria pto clutch that bolts directly to the engine eliminating the belt,” Julian says.

Built so the wheels fit between 30-in. rows, the unit also has dual pto ratios, 540 or 1,000, depending on what it is running. With more power it can easily run a corn chopper; a 3,000-lb., 8 1/2-ft. Maschio rototiller with two chisel plow shanks Julian controls with hydraulics; and operate equipment that blows silage and grinds and blows ear corn. It also has a 3-pt. hitch, 2 receiver hitches and a detachable tongue that can be moved to drive even or odd numbers of horses and be centered or offset.

It cost about \$6,000 to build 5 years ago compared to a manufactured version that runs more than \$20,000, Julian says. He uses the grey cart often, but at 3,000 lbs. “it was overkill for a lot of jobs” and he had sold his first cart.

He built his newest cart for about \$5,000, three years ago. Built on a frame he made of 2 by 8-in. tube iron, the red cart weighs about 1,500 lbs. It has a 35 hp Yanmar diesel engine that was salvaged from a semi's refrigerated trailer.

“It has four wheels but acts like a two-wheel cart,” Julian says. He explains that



“My carts reduce the workload on horses and allow them to cover more ground,” says Jason Julian.

the back wheels have brakes and hydraulic steering and the front has dolly wheels from a self-propelled haybine. They provide balance and stability, take the tongue weight off the horses, and make turning easier.

“The disadvantage is that with the extremely short wheelbase the ride is rough,” Julian says. “The advantage is that it's nimble and lighter.”

It works well for cutting and round baling hay and running 225-bu., pto-powered manure spreaders. He notes that he can do more work with less horsepower because the cart just has to run the pto for the implements. The horses provide the pulling power.

“We can bale for two or three afternoons on 9 gal. of fuel,” he says.

Mixed farming - using a tractor for loading and plowing, and horses for the rest of the work - is not for everyone, but the economics and quality of life for their family suits the Julians. Katrina helps Jason with the work. For example, Katrina operates the tractor to load manure into two manure spreaders hooked up to two teams. The horses have a

chance to rest as Jason alternates between the teams to spread manure, and they can move 20 loads of manure a day between dairy chores.

“Horse farming is a progression,” Julian says, and the couple has learned lessons along the way.

Power forecarts make it feasible to run a successful farming operation with horses, but the driver needs to earn each horse's trust before he can start up a noisy diesel engine for the horse to pull. Because of that, Julian is a fan of the Brabant crosses because of their gentle disposition. He shares his knowledge and practices through media such as Rural Heritage magazine. The website, www.ruralheritage.com, includes videos of him farming with his horses.

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Shrimping With Brabant Horses

Before Belgian draft horses worked the fields of America, their ancestors, Brabant horses, dragged nets and helped fishermen harvest grey shrimp from the North Sea of Belgium. They still do, thanks to tourism, local promotion and a few dedicated fishermen preserving the 500-year-old tradition in Oostduinkerke in West-Flanders, Belgium.

The gentle, sloping coastline and abundance of shrimp make the location ideal. During low tide, the horses walk breast-deep in the water parallel to the coastline, pulling funnel-shaped nets held open by two boards. A chain dragging over the sand makes the shrimp jump up and into the 23 by 33-ft. nets. Riders return their horses to the beach every half hour to give their horses a rest, and to sort and empty the nets. Blinders help keep horses calm.

Though Americans have never used

horses for shrimp fishing, there are some who appreciate the Brabant breed for its strength and temperament and are trying to increase its numbers in the U.S. (www.theamericanbrabantassociation.net).

“They are easy going without being deadheads. They are big, but not stupid and slow,” says Karen Gruner, of Gambier, Ohio.

She discovered Brabants about 25 years ago, when she was looking for a mare to breed with a donkey for draft mules. She happened across Babar, a Brabant, and was impressed with his offspring. She purchased a mare and has been a Brabant fan ever since.

“They want to please, they tend to be easy to train and fit well in a small sustainable operation,” Gruner says. “I ride mine as well as drive them. They range from 15.1 to 17.2 hands.”

In Medford, Wis., Jason and Katrina Julian



Brabant horses are still used each year for shrimping in Belgium. A schedule of fishing dates and times can be found on the visitor website for the city of Oostduinkerke. Just go to: <http://visitor.koksijde.be/product/2225/shrimppfishermen-on-horseback>.

use Brabant horses on their 225-acre dairy farm and for their Legacy Horse Logging business (see story at top of this page).

“The best thing about Brabants is their disposition. It's a horse you can count on in

tough situations,” he says.

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