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Giant 11,000-Lb. "Trike" Turns Heads

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

"It feels like you are driving a locomotive down the road," says Jim Gesto about his nearly 11,000-lb. Tower Trike motorcycle. At 102 in. wide, 18 1/2 ft. long, and about 102 in. high, it has the largest footprint allowed for motorcycles.

For Gesto, a longtime rider who has lost friends in motorcycle accidents, his investment and design are all about safety.

"The first thing I want is the rider to get out of the crash zone, exposed to grills and bumpers. So, the driver is up higher. The second thing is stability - when hitting something - because of its weight, size and trike configuration. It handles like a race car," he says.

He adds that dual tires on the front make lane changes and driving on uneven surfaces safer; there's also a seatbelt. Finally, a cross and 10 commandments on the back express his personal convictions.

"The engine is bolder and bigger, 102 decibels at idle, so you need hearing

protection," Gesto says.

It attracted the attention of visitors at the Mid-America Trucking Show in Louisville, Ky., this spring, and former talk show host Jay Leno drove it for 1 1/2 hrs., Gesto says.

His first trike sold to a collector for \$119,000, but with jigs made for mass production, he's hoping to get the price down to \$70,000 to \$80,000.

Because of its size, he recommends potential customers come to South Bend, Ind., to ride one to see if they like it. As the owner of a couple of businesses, Gesto started making the Tower Trike as a hobby and has invested \$2.5 million in research and development.

"If it starts saving lives it's worth every penny," he says. "You're going to see and hear this trike." And that visibility makes riding a motorcycle much safer.

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Semi-Retired Farmer Is Always Inventing

"I didn't like the steering wheel on my Kawasaki Mule, so I built a different one using the steering column from an old Chevy pickup," says semi-retired Michigan farmer Dale Fisher. "I grew up on a farm and always had an interest in mechanical things, so figuring this out wasn't too difficult."



Photo shows original steering wheel on top of new wheel to show size difference.

Fisher sawed off the steering wheel from the Chevy column and welded it to a metal rod, which he attached to the top of the existing Mule steering shaft. "The new wheel has a spinner and is a lot easier to manage," Fisher says.



Locking system uses a turnbuckle to adjust door position.

Fisher also made improvements on his sliding barn doors. He designed a locking system that holds them tight and prevents them from flopping in the wind. He used a 3/8-in. turnbuckle, attached one end to the posts, then opened the other end so it's more of a hook than a loop. He secures the device with large hook-eyes mounted to both ends of the door.

"I just hook one end in place when I close the door and use the other turnbuckle to cinch it down," Fisher says. "The nice thing about turnbuckles is that you have that adjustment to get it in the right position. Your door can sit where you want it to be."

Fisher stores a travel trailer and a flatbed trailer in his 60-ft. long barn. Each time he wanted to store his travel trailer, he had to move the flatbed. To remedy the problem, Fisher fabricated a bracket that he clamps to the front of his loader bucket.

"Now I can move the flatbed with the tractor, get the travel trailer in and then I can push the flatbed back into place," Fisher says.

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Bracket clamps to front of loader bucket to move trailers.



Sam and Charles Schram rebuilt a 1918 Hawkeye Model K because they were originally built in their hometown of Sioux City, Iowa.

Brothers Rebuilt 1918 Hawkeye Truck

Hawkeye trucks were first manufactured in 1916 in Sioux City, Iowa. Sam Schram of South Sioux City, Neb., purchased a 1918 Hawkeye Model K from an auction in Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 2000 for around \$350.

Together with his brother, Charles, he dismantled the truck, sandblasted the frame and painted the body. The pair owned a truck salvage business, so they wanted it to end up with the look of a tow truck.

They rebuilt the original Buda 4-cyl. engine by grinding the valves and completing some head work. Since they couldn't find rings to fit, the originals were reused.

Transmission bearings and rear-end parts were also overhauled.

"It winds pretty good when you drive it," says Charles Schram. "The top speed is 15 mph. It even says in the warranty that it will be void if you drive the truck faster."

The brothers sandblasted the original steel rims and ordered pneumatic tires from Coker

tires. For the wheel centers, they contracted a Pennsylvania Amish colony to fashion new pressured oak spokes.

For the cab, they hired an old woodworker to build a wooden enclosure from scratch, similar to how the original model cabs were hand built to match a buyer's wishes.

Charles explains the brothers took on the project because the Hawkeye trucks were originally built in their hometown of Sioux City, Iowa, and they're very rare.

"Their value is in their hometown roots. My brother Sam passed in 2006 but I continue to parade it about once a year. There's no power steering and it's not easy to crank so you can get kicked if you don't have the spark right."

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Combine Catwalk Makes Window Cleaning Easier

During the fall harvest of 2019, Saskatchewan farmer Ron Silvernagle slipped and fell from the header of his Deere combine as he was cleaning the front cab window. As he lay in the hospital recovering from several cracked and broken ribs, the 80-year-old decided to do something about the predicament grain farmers routinely face.

"Most Deere combines have a step to get up on the pickup header but I'm kind of short and have to let go of the railing to reach it," says Silvernagle. "Even when you get up there, it's slippery. This time the pedal hooked the back of my leg and I ended up on the ground."

After his hospital stay, he designed and built a metal walkway with guardrails that mounts to the combine frame at the front of the cab.

The walkway is heavy-duty mesh and stretches from the cab door around to the right-side window. Silvernagle used 1 1/2-in. square tubing for the vertical posts and 3/4 in. for the railings. The toe-kick is 2 in. high, and he installed chains on either end of the platform for easy access.

"You come out of the cab, step on the walkabout and everything's level. The top railing is 3 ft. high, and there's about 2 ft. of space in front to stand on when cleaning the windows. The railings don't interfere with viewing the swath either."

Silvernagle built his fall protection for all three of the family's combines and estimates the total cost of material at around \$1,000 at



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the time. He believes combine manufacturers could easily build and incorporate this type of system into their equipment for much less cost.

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