He Uses Pig Spleens To Forecast The Weather

By Janis Schole

Any TV weather man would be happy with the 70 percent accuracy rate claimed by Ken Porter. His weather predictions are even more remarkable because he doesn't have all the high-tech equipment that most weather men have. All he has is pig spleens.

Porter says changes in spleen width indicate temperature highs and lows, while the thickness and variation of the edges illustrate the amounts and periods of precipitation.

The Fort Assiniboine, Alberta, man has been making "pig spleen weather forecasts" for 10 years and many people who've followed his predictions say no one forecasts the weather better. Porter says his pastime brings him great pleasure. He admits it's as much an art as it is a science since there's a lot of interpretation involved. A good forecast takes two to four hours of tedious work, studying the variations in the spleen's width and depth.

Porter says changes in the width indicate temperature highs and lows, while the thickness and variation of the edges illustrate the amounts and periods of precipitation. The length of the spleen can also indicate the length of the winter. With his wife, Joan, Porter operates a small mixed farm, running a herd of 33 cows. They also finish out a couple of weaner pigs each summer to butcher in the fall for their own use.

Although he uses the spleens from his own butcher hogs, Porter also receives spleens from other local farmers. He does a new forecast every three months using two spleens each time.

He learned how to forecast weather using pig spleens from some old-timers in a Ukrainian community where he once worked. He learned that the pig used must be healthy and must have lived its life outdoors. The spleens of bears can also be used to create forecasts with good success, but aren't as readily available as pigs, Porter says. The spleen itself must be fresh because if it should dry and shrink or deteriorate in any way, it will give an inaccurate reading.

Porter says old-timers would carefully lay a fresh spleen on a white cloth and then read the outline of the imprint. He uses a higher-tech method by simply making a photocopy of the spleen. He then interprets it based on the dents and bulges visible on the outline of the photocopy.

"The first year I did a forecast was in 1987 and it was a pretty crude effort compared to what I'm doing now. At first, it brought a lot of good laughs from people, and there are still people who think I'm crazy. But now that my accuracy rate is at about 70 percent, more people are taking it seriously."

Since Porter uses local hogs, his forecasts apply only to the Fort Assiniboine area. His forecasts are accurate for his local area within plus or minus five degrees.

"I do six-month forecasts with three months of detailed information and three months that are general. Then I try to do a new one every three months so that they overlap and provide adjustments for accuracy," he says. "In 1995, my accuracy really improved for the summer forecast and I got a few more believers then."

To be humorous, Porter issues a disclaimer on his forecasts which states that he will reimburse disgruntled users of the "Porter Pig Spleen Weather Forecast" 100 percent of what they paid for the forecast. This, of course, is nothing because he does it just for his own enjoyment.

Over the years, Porter has had requests from forestry offices, timber companies, and individuals to provide copies of his forecast. His local newspaper began printing his forecasts regularly in 1994, and last year he was interviewed by CBC and CHED radio stations.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ken Porter, Fort Assiniboine, Alberta, Canada T0G 1A0 (ph 403 584-3829).

"Horseless carriage" is made up of parts off an old riding lawn mower. Top road speed is 25 mph.

POWERED BY AN 8 HP GAS ENGINE

"Horseless Carriage" Is Real Crowd Pleaser

"People clap and carry on whenever we enter it in parades. They've never seen anything like it," says Dennis Bieri, Jamestown, Mo., who, along with his brother Richard, built a "horseless carriage" that's powered by an 8 hp Briggs & Stratton gas engine that drives a 5-speed transaxle. Some of the parts are off an old riding mower.

The Bieri's used sq. steel tubing to build the frame and equipped it with a tractor "buggy top" to form a canopy over the seat. The 2-WD buggy mounts on 26-in. bicycle-type wheels and has a rear transaxle made from a 3/4-in. dia. steel shaft. The engine, located under the seat, belt-drives a gearbox (out of a riding mower) that chain-drives the transaxle. The transaxle is made in two halves, with a separate chain used to drive each half. Both front wheels are connected to spindles. The operator turns a mid-mounted steering rod to steer the rig. A squeeze horn mounts on top of the steering rod. There's a step on each side of the buggy for easy entry.

"We call it our eight horse buggy. It took a year to build but it was worth it," says Bieri. "It has rudder-type steering like the first cars had. A buggy spring in front and a pair of wagon seat springs on back give it a fairly smooth ride. The springs were our biggest expense.

"We got the idea from someone in New York who had made a similar powered buggy. We usually go slow in second gear although it would probably go 20 to 25 mph. The clutch and brake are both foot-operated. A hand-operated emergency brake mounts on the left side of the buggy. There's a small plexiglass window on the back side of the canopy just like on the real horse-drawn buggies. Both rear wheels are covered by steel fenders."

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"Check Planter" Built For 1935 International Farmall F-20 Tractor

By C.F. Marley

This antique International 4-row, 38-in. corn planter was used for some 30 years before going into retirement.

The planter was on display last January at the Gordyville Farm Show, Gifford, Ill. It was originally purchased new by Henry English in the mid 1930s.

Henry's son Don says he continued to use the planter up until 1965.

The planter was designed to fit a Farmall F-20 or F-30 tractor and was used to plant corn in "checked" rows. It was equipped with a check wire. The operator had to get off the tractor and set the wire at the end of each row. In the mid 1930s, no herbicides were used so weeds were controlled by "cross" cultivating. By check planting, corn would be planted evenly in all directions. The planter could also be used as a drill or as a "hill drop" drill. It could check and drop 2, 3, or 4 kernels per hill. When used as a drill planter it had nine different drill spacings.

The planter had a mechanical lift, says English. It got its power from the pto, which the operator engaged by using a lever.

The planter when new was available with fertilizer attachment, disc or blade furrowing attachment, gauge shoes, power lift, and single or double disc furrowing attachment. Shipping weight was 1,630 lbs.

According to Don, the planter was purchased for renovation by Bob Craig of San Jose, Ill. He has brought it up to full running condition and plans to demonstrate it at a show later this year.

Designed to fit a Farmall F-20 or F-30, the International 4-row, 38-in. planter was used for some 30 years.