

# Russian Combine Ready To "Invade" U.S. Market

Russian-made Belarus combines have been sold in Canada since 1975. Now Belarus Machinery Inc., the U.S. importer of Belarus tractors, has announced that it plans to begin selling the Don 1500 combine in the U.S. in 1991. FARM SHOW contacted farmers who've operated the Don 1500 to get their "tell it like it is" answers to questions about the capacity, reliability, construction, etc., of their machines. Names were supplied to us "no strings attached" by Belarus Canada.

**Edmund Demas, Alida, Sask.:** "It's an outstanding machine but I had quite a bit of trouble at first, mostly caused by parts not tightened down at the factory and some poor welding. They didn't pre-run the combine at the factory. After we got it field-ready, it did a good job and it was half the cost of comparable combines.

"It does an excellent job threshing with the big 58-in. wide, 31-in. dia. cylinder and 10 rasp bars. It's almost impossible to plug but if you had a problem, a pedal in the cab automatically drops the concave 8 in. to unplug. We had wheat up to 50 bu. last fall and even in tough straw the machine walked right through. That's because in Russia they're often working in high-moisture crops. In fact, one of the unique features on this machine is the vibrator in the grain tank designed to shake wet grain down off the sides of the hopper.

"The machine is easy to set and has a 15-function monitor. The 220 hp. engine has tremendous power. I've never heard it pull down. The air conditioner is the best I've ever seen.

"We ran 1,000 acres last fall and never cleaned the radiator or touched the air cleaners. One feature I like is that the bearings

**"One unique feature is the vibrator in the grain tank that's designed to shake wet grain off the sides of the hopper."**

have sleeves between bearings and shafts that are held in place with two bolts. You just remove the sleeve to pull a bearing. No puller required. It takes just 1/2 hr. to replace the big cylinder belt. However, the belts are not as good as we're used to. Also, the roller chain is poor. And a weld broke in the drum between the auger and feederhouse. But we got it fixed. There's no oil filter on the engine - it's got a centrifuge, which you just clean out periodically. It's cheap and works good.

"The straw chopper is excellent, leaving straw 3 to 4 in. long. And I like the big rice tires. We went into deep water with no problem. They could improve the controls. Some of the controls are on the steering column and some off to the right, so there's a lot of hand travel. I might relocate some of them since they're just cable controls. I also might extend some of the tinwork at the back in order to return weed seed to the grain tank. I'd like to keep it out of the field and am willing to let it go with the grain as dockage.

"I tested it against a Massey 860 in the same field and it was able to go 2 mph faster doing a better job. And the Massey left a green trail in the field where it harvested due to grain tossed out the back while the Belarus did not.

"One of the best things about our purchase was the outstanding financing. They

gave me an interest-free loan for 3 years and then a 5 1/2 percent interest rate, so over the 5-year life of the loan, the interest charge will be just \$1,800."

**Eugene Palichuk, Smoky Lake, Alberta:** "I like the price. The dollar value is really there," says Eugene, who owns a Don 1500 and has been operating Belarus tractors since 1978. "I owned two New Holland TR70's previously and this Belarus has 2 1/2 times the capacity of a TR70. It also has good cleaning ability but not quite as good as the TR70. Comfort is okay. It's fitted with a feederhouse reverser but I've never used it because it's never plugged."

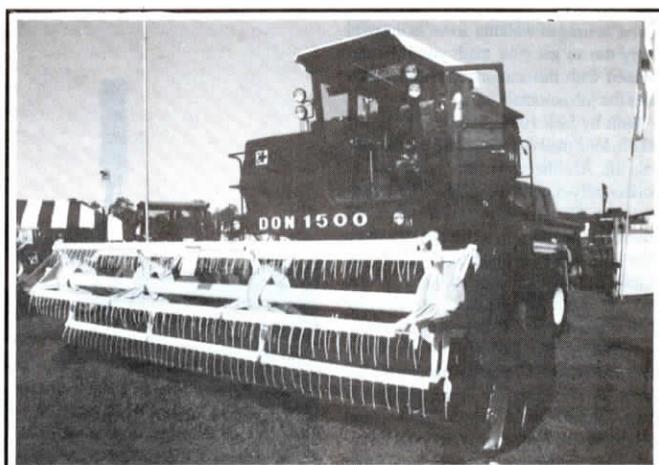
He says he hasn't had to buy a single replacement part in 2,000 acres but he does have a couple suggestions for improvement. "One thing I don't like is that you have to run the whole machine to run the unloading auger. I'd like to shut down the cleaning system when I unload while standing still. I may try to modify the machine somehow. Also the convenience of controls could be improved - they require quite a bit of hand movement."

**Joe Homenuk, Hudson Bay, Sask.:** "I bought a 1988 model Don 1500 in 1989 and it's been far better than I ever expected. I want another one," says Joe. "One of our reasons for buying it was that we wanted to save straw to bale for feed. Our Case/IH Axial Flow chopped it up too fine. This combine leaves it just right and can easily handle our big straw crop without plugging. It's similar in capacity to the Case/IH 1680, with much more capacity than our old Deere 7720 and does a much better job than the 7720, which we couldn't use in barley because of all the grain it would throw over the sieves.

"One improvement the Belarus needs is better fine-tuning of sieves, and the return elevator should go to the cylinder rather than to the refresher. In light crops we get lots of white caps - the sieves are not quite even. But the machine is extremely heavy including all bearings, shafts, frame, etc. The hydraulics are good and it's quite comfortable, although the cab is not as big as Case/IH. The best thing about the combine is that it has lots of power - they rate the engine at 220 hp. but it seems like 275 - and it's virtually unpluggable. Parts service is excellent. We lost a connecting link in the feederhouse and phoned the dealer. He called the company and we had the link here the next morning."

**Jim Strath, Souris, Manitoba:** "We bought our 1988 Don 1500 because of the low price. It wasn't much more than a pull-type combine and 30 to 40 percent less than a comparable Deere or Case/IH. Performance is outstanding. It's got a big diameter, extra wide cylinder and is rated at 220 hp. but seems like 300. The entire machine is built like a tank - no fancy braces. They just build it strong with heavy materials. The Russians haven't figured out 'planned obsolescence' yet.

"One problem we've had under certain conditions is with the bottom sieve, which



Farmers who've operated the Belarus Don 1500 say they like the simple yet heavy-duty design, along with the tremendous capacity and low price. The combine has a 31-in. dia., 58-in. long cylinder with 10 rasp bars. The 5-step straw walkers are 60 in. wide and 13 ft., 5 in. long. A 220 hp. 6-cyl. diesel engine powers the hydrostatic drive. The combine has full-floating quick-tach headers (cornhead chops stalks on-the-go), a feederhouse reverser, concave unplugging, and a 190 bu. grain tank. "We plan to sell it for about 30 percent less than comparably-sized U.S.-built machines," says E.W. Muehlhausen of Belarus Machinery, Inc., the U.S. importer which plans to sell the new combine through its 130 Belarus dealers nationwide. For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Belarus Machinery, Inc., P.O. Box 23608, Milwaukee, Wis. 53223 (ph toll-free 800 356-2336).

leaves white caps. I understand they've improved it on later models. I like the hydraulic drive and everything is fully monitored in the cab, which is rubber-mounted and fairly quiet.

"The steering takes a little getting used to. It's got big rear wheels and doesn't turn as easily as other models. Not a big problem. Fuel economy is good - we had a bumper crop last year with lots of straw and it burned 6 gal. per hour.

"If I were in the market for a combine, I'd buy another one. It does a great job at 2/3 the price."

**Paul Podworny, Poplarfield, Manitoba:** "It's not as good as an American combine but it's not bad," says Paul, who bought a demo Russian machine for \$60,000, which he says is half the price of the comparable Deere machine he was looking at. "I'm generally well-satisfied with it. I especially like the 220 hp., 6-cyl. diesel. Lots of capacity - you can't plug it up. We've run it in wheat, rape, and barley. It out-performed comparable-sized Deere and IH combines in the same fields. It does the work of three MF 510's, which I used to run.

"One problem is that it's a bit cumbersome to steer - takes a while to get used to. Daily maintenance is easy - little greasing and everything's readily accessible. My fuel consumption has been about 9 gal./hr. It could be better.

"Service and parts are not a problem. If they don't have the part you need here, they guarantee delivery from Russia in 48 hrs."

**John Thome, Wilcox, Sask.:** "I bought my first Russian combine in 1978. I've run my latest Don 1500 3 seasons and it's worked real well although it threshes a little dirty in durum and throws crop over the sieves. I think the cylinder is open too far. But it can keep up with any other large combine on the market and I understand they've solved the cleaning problem in the latest new models. Also, I had a little engine leak but they're fixing it. Service is great.

"The speed control is very touchy - it starts and stops quickly. I put American-

made roller chains on. The Russian ones weren't that great and the American ones cost about the same.

"When we bought this combine, they took my old one in trade and sold it right away."

**Quality Tractor, Caldwell, Idaho:** This Belarus dealer was one of the first to advertise Belarus combines for sale in the U.S. In 1990 they ran ads all over the West and Midwest. One of their employees, Chris Collins, who also does some custom combining, operated a machine that the company rented out to local farmers. "The Belarus easily out-performed a Gleaner N-7 that we tested it against. One of our customers, who runs a New Holland and a Gleaner, ended up parking his combines and just using ours.

"Farmers like the fact that it's got a bigger cylinder and longer straw walkers. Does an outstanding job threshing big crops and can match the biggest combines. It's hard to stop - you can run at full speed in the field. It's got lots of observation doors so you can see what's going on inside. It's easy to set - not complicated at all. We did have some breakages on the machine but no more than on any other combine.

"I believe that in 4 or 5 years it'll be the top-selling combine in the country, especially because it costs 30 percent less, at about \$98,000." Collins notes that his dealership also sells Belarus tractors, manure spreaders, grain drills and other equipment.

**Ken Brannian, Brooklyn 80 Implements, Brooklyn, Iowa:** Brannian got one of the first Belarus Don 1500's in the country and invited local farmers out to test it last fall. "One of the unique features is the 6-row corn head that chops cornstalks as you go," says Brannian, noting that 4, 6 or 8-row heads are available. He also likes the big engine and 5-step straw walkers, as well as the 190 bu. grain tank that empties in 2.5 min. And the fact that the driver can easily make engine adjustments by stepping out a second door on the right side of the cab.