Up-front post driver tilts hydraulically in any direction and mounts on a telescoping table that extends 3 ft. out to the side and 3 ft. to the front.

A lift arm loads posts onto carrying platform at center of machine. Platform tilts hydraulically to the side to make it easy to unload.

Self-Propelled Fence Building Machine

Thousands of showgoers at the recent Farmfest farm show near Redwood Falls, Minn., stopped to stare in awe at a big red machine that was unlike anything they'd ever seen before.

It took people a minute or two to figure out what the machine was designed to do, and then many of them would comment that it looked like it had come straight from a factory rather than out of a farm shop.

The big self-propelled machine was designed and built by Dan Hall and his four sons, Jeremy, Andy, Tony, and Michael. The four brothers, aged 17 to 22, did nearly all the work, turning to their dad "occasionally" for guidance.

When Dan Hall and his wife, Terese, got out of farming four years ago, they went looking for a new way to make a living that would allow them to keep living in the country. They hit on the idea of doing custom fencing. Demand was so strong, they were soon in business full time with enough work to keep them and all four of their sons busy. They specialize in high-tensile livestock and security fence - up to 8 ft. tall - and they'll work anywhere within about a 120-mile radius of their home near Butterfield, Minn.

Initially the Halls used a heavy-duty commercial-built fence post driver. But they wanted something bigger and faster that could also carry posts and the wire. That's when they got the idea of building a self-propelled machine.

They found a Case 600 self-propelled combine at a sale and set out to modify it.

"Ever since my boys have been little they've been builders," says proud mother Terese Hall. "They've done a lot of building around the farm but this was by far their biggest project."

The young men stripped the combine down and then beefed up and shortened the frame. The operator platform, which raises up for easy access to the transmission and hydraulic components, was moved lower and placed up front between the big drive wheels.

The up-front post driver was patterned after a commercial rig. It's made from a big H-beam and is big enough to drive a 10-in. dia., 12-ft. long wood post. It tilts hydraulically in any direction for easy use on uneven ground. And it mounts on a telescoping table that extends out as much as 3 ft. from the side and 3 ft. ahead of the self-propelled machine.

"It lets you drive right along the fence row and drive posts without ever having to back up," says 17-year-old Michael Hall, noting that all components on the post driver were "overbuilt" to stand up to tough conditions. A stabilizing "foot" drops to the ground right next to the driver when extra support is needed.

Behind the operator platform is a post-hauling platform with a lift crane that loads and unloads posts. The platform also tilts hydraulically to the side to make unloading easier.

A wire spool on back makes it easy to string out the first wire which is used for alignment of the posts. And a blade under the rear of the machine is used to clear the fenceline before beginning work and also as a hydraulic lift to pull out posts, if needed.

"People are supposed to clear the fence row before we come out but they often don't do a good enough job. The blade makes it easy to quickly clear and level out the area to be fenced," notes Michael.

The tractor is fitted with the original engine and mechanical transmission. One improvement the Hall brothers say they might make to the machine in the future is to add hydrostatic drive.

Hydraulic-controlled blade on back of machine is used to clear fence rows before beginning work, and also to pull fence posts.

The Halls bought a second Case 600 combine which they say they might use to build a second self-propelled fence machine. They might also be interested in custom-building a machine for sale.

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He Uses His Baler To Reseed Pastures

"Over the years this idea has made a big difference in improving the pastures on our ranch," says Frank La Macchia, Gonzales, Calif., who injects clover and other grass seed into the bale chamber on his small square baler as he bales. He later feeds the bales to his cattle on pasture, scattering them around on particularly dry areas.

The cattle either eat the bales and redeposit the seed onto other parts of the pasture, or they trample it into the ground. Either way, the seed generally germinates.

A small plastic hopper bolts to the top of La Macchia's New Holland 500 baler. A pair of rubber tubes run from the bottom of the hopper through holes cut into the baler, just ahead of where hay reaches the bale chamber. A screw auger mounts inside the bottom of the hopper and an extra "star wheel" is mounted on the bale chamber. A steel shaft connects the wheel to the screw. Every time the baler's plunger pushes forward it turns the star wheel, which rotates the screw and causes the seed to fall through the tubes and into the bale chamber.

"It works like a charm and is a cost efficient way to improve pastures. We don't have to do anything extra because we have to feed our cattle anyway," says La Macchia. "It works just like in nature - cattle eat part of the seed, but most of it gets stomped into the ground. We use it mainly in areas where it's difficult to reseed, such as on ridges and rolling pasture. We've been using this idea for seven years and every year our pastures get better. We bale in the spring and feed the bales in the fall right before our rainy season. We seed a mixture of annuals and perennials, including four or five different kinds of clovers, two kinds of vetches, brome and other grasses.

"In the fall we go to the pasture with a pickup or wagon and break the bales apart, spreading flakes of hay every 10 ft. or so in a row. We spread the bales in barren areas or wherever the grass is short. We also spread them on roadsides and barren banks. When the rains come the seed will stay wet because it's under the hay."

He says the same idea would work with round or big square balers. "The hopper on a round baler could be designed to run off an electric motor operated by the tractor's 12-volt battery."

He adds seed at a rate of about 2 lbs. per ton of hay. The hopper can hold 50 lbs. of seed so he can bale 25 tons of hay before he has to refill it. "We tried using a meter system like the ones found on grain drills," says La Macchia. "However, we found that clover seed is so small it gets through the meters even when they're stopped. By changing the position of a sliding shield mounted above the screw we can control how much seed falls into it."

La Macchia injects clover and other grass seed into bale chamber as he bales. A pair of rubber tubes run from hopper through holes cut into baler.

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