Giant 87-Ft. Hoe Drill Still Going Strong After 20 Years

"It was one of the largest hoe drills in North America when I built it 20 years ago and, as far as I know, it's still bigger than any air seeder on the market," says Clifford Arnal, Ravenscrag, Sask., about his 87-ft. hoe drill that's made up of six Case-IH 7200 14-ft. drills hooked together with a one-of-a-kind transport hitch.

"We use it to plant 4,000 to 8,000 acres per year of wheat, barley, oats, and peas. A Versatile 835 310 hp 4-WD tractor pulls the unit.

"We built it because we needed more capacity and also because we wanted the accuracy of a drill. At the time, the biggest air seeder on the market was 50 ft. wide. We had Apollo Hitch Co. build our transport hitch, which has seven wheels and is designed to pull the drills endwise. In transport position it's 121 ft. from the tractor to the back of the last drill.

"The three rear wheels steer hydraulically, while the four forward wheels are solid. When we come to an intersection we can hydraulically steer the back end of the drill right from the tractor cab. All seven wheels are spaced about 14 ft. apart.

"Through the years we improved the system a little each year but the biggest step was in 1999, when we increased the size of the seed boxes and also added step-up walkways. There's enough seed and fertilizer capacity that we can plant more than 160 acres without having to refill.

"Cleaning leftover seed out of the drills isn't as easy as it would be with an air seeder, but we make the job easier by using a grain vac. Our drills don't have as much trash clearance as an air seeder does, which can be a disadvantage if the straw is long. To solve that problem we use a Straw Storm chopper on our combine. It chops the straw into shorter lengths so we can use our drill with no problems. Another advantage is that the soil warms up faster.

"We use a Gleaner combine as a drill fill. There's a flexible plastic down spout at the end of the unloading auger and also a specially-designed tarp over the tank. It takes the combine only about five minutes to fill the drill - 2 1/2 minutes for seed and 2 1/2 minutes for fertilizer. The combine's large tires allow it to go through wet fields where a truck would bog down. Some of our farms are a long ways apart, so we use a semi trailer to haul seed over the highway and then transfer it to the combine. If we have to haul the seed only 8 or 10 miles, we just use the combine."

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Arnal's 87-ft., hoe drill is made up of 6 Case-IH 7200 14-ft. drills hooked together with a custom-built transport hitch. He can plant over 160 acres without having to refill.

A Gleaner combine is used as a drill fill. It has a flexible plastic down spout at the end of the unloading auger and also a specially-designed tarp over the tank.

Semi Bale Handler Makes Feeding A Snap

By Janis Schole

Rick Lamb and his three brothers farm together at Claresholm, Alberta. They recently turned a 1985 semi truck into a big bale chore "tractor." The rig is now their only piece of equipment for feeding cows, and Rick says it should meet their needs, while saving them money, for the next 20 years.

"We were tired of rebuilding our Chevrolet 1-ton 4x4 and we were very limited in what a 1-ton can do," Rick explains. "With rougher, scattered land, bigger round bales and more cattle, we knew that we needed something more rugged. After looking for two years for something different, we finally bought a Western Star cab and chassis with 35,000 miles on it and a 3208 diesel 4-speed automatic transmission.

With the help of Kirchner Machine in Lethbridge, Alberta, the Lambs equipped the truck with a bale handler big enough to handle any round or square bale. They wanted to carry three round bales on the truck to simplify feeding, so they looked at a variety of commercial bale handlers and incorporated the best designs from each into their own.

The arms are 3 by 5-in., off an 8 by 8 square tube. A cylinder under the deck lifts the 6-in. bales, while a used, 2 1/2-in. cylinder squeezes the lift arm together. A 17 gal. pump delivers up to 1,800 lbs. pressure. The bales simply unroll on the ground when pulled by the truck. Behind the cab is a homemade 40-bushel hopper that can be put on the deck or removed with the arms. A hydraulic motor is used to auger feed grain, pellets, or alfalfa cubes from the hopper.

The truck enables one man to feed round bales and grain to about 300 to 500 cows/yearlings in less than three hours, including travel time, according to Lamb.

They like the smooth ride across the rough fields and the convenience of compressed air in the field.

Lamb says his semi-truck bale handling rig is built heavy enough to use for the next 20 years.

Two large toolboxes provide ample room for tools and parts or even newborn calves.

"Future possibilities for the semi are a front mounted point for a fourth bale or snow blade," Lamb says. "The 14.00 by 20 tires may be exchanged for 22.5 by 11.00 tires to pull a small fifth wheel trailer easier."

He says the $40,000 (Canadian) that was spent for the truck and bale handler can be justified considering the labor, gas and repair time that they'll save over the next 20 or so years.

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Rick Lamb and his brothers turned this 1985 semi truck into a big bale chore "tractor" that's equipped with a round or big square bale handler on back.

Back end of truck is equipped with bale-handling arms that unroll bale on ground. Behind the cab is a homemade 40-bu. hopper that can be removed with the arms.