



Steve Zimbrich powered his home-built tractor jalopy with an IH combine engine.

## Home-Built IH “Jalopy”

In 1971, a youthful Steve Zimbrich salvaged a 4-cyl. Continental engine out of a 1949 IH combine and built a little jalopy.

Zimbrich, of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, says building the jalopy was one way he and his brothers honed their shop skills, and that each of them built something similar while growing up. His brothers later went on to race stock cars in their spare time from farming.

Zimbrich’s little hot rod still gets a lot of use around the farm, often pulling light wagons. “It’s low to the ground so it’s easy to get on and off,” he says.

In 2001, his sons Nick, 11, and Chris, 14, asked if they could enter the jalopy in a parade in a neighboring town.

“We couldn’t do that in the shape it was in, so we decided to clean it up a little and put on some fresh paint,” says Zimbrich.

What started out as a little cleanup turned into a major makeover and restoration project. “We probably spent four times as long redoing it as I did building it the first time,” he admits.

To make the original jalopy, Zimbrich mounted the old hand-cranked combine engine on a frame salvaged from a 1956 Chevrolet. He used the rear end from a 1958 Ford, and the steering column and gears were salvaged from a 1957 Ford.

Nothing about the frame or engine was changed in the makeover, but he remounted

the seats to make them ride better and added leather seat cushions. Everything was taken apart and cleaned. Then new parts were added and the entire jalopy was reassembled. “I’d welded a lot of the parts together originally. This time, I took the time to make brackets for the seats and a lot of other parts, so we could bolt it together,” he says. He added new fenders, which were made with some help from a local welding shop, and this time, he installed running boards. He also added a new front bumper, made from 4-in. channel iron, with a cut-out for the engine crank. Even so, he also had to add several inches to the crank so they could start it from in front of the bumper.

Once the Zimbrichs had it all together and knew the old and new parts were going to fit correctly, they disassembled the entire vehicle, sand blasted off the old paint and rust, and repainted. Then they added new decals and finished it off with some classy hubcaps from a 1966 Ford Fairlane GT and a stainless steel exhaust pipe.

He put a block on the throttle so maximum engine speed is about 200 rpm’s below what it would have been on the combine. “This keeps the top speed down to 10 or 12 mph,” he says, “which makes it safer to ride on.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Steve Zimbrich, 5710 Town Hall Drive, Sun Prairie, Wis. 53590 (ph 608 837-6515).



Garden railroading is a hobby that can involve the entire family, say enthusiasts.

## Garden Railroading Catching On Fast

Garden railroading is a fast growing hobby. It can be as simple as laying down sections of track around and through an existing garden or as complex as spiking individual rails to miniature ties laid over a bed of fine gravel. Locomotives can be electric or even steam powered.

Just how many garden railroaders there are is impossible to gauge, but *Garden Railways* magazine has 37,000 subscribers. What attracts people is that it’s an outside hobby that can involve the entire family.

Marc Horovitz, founding editor of *Garden Railways*, says “There is something for everyone. Some do it for the railroad building, some for the gardening and some for the miniature landscaping. I would have to say that the best garden railroads are almost always the work of more than one person.”

Horovitz himself is an avid garden railroader. While many people have thousands of dollars tied up in their hobby, Horovitz says it is an investment that can start small and grow over time. He compares it to golf or going to the movies every week.

“People spend lots of money on lots of different pursuits, and what do they have at

the end of the day?” comments Horovitz. “With garden railroading, you have something to show for it, plus the tremendous satisfaction of having built it yourself.”

Before jumping into the hobby, Horovitz suggests doing the homework first. Besides his own magazine, he suggests checking out the internet for any number of garden railroading sites, both personal and commercial. There are also forums of hobbyists you can join. If the internet isn’t for you, check out books, other magazines and videos on the subject.

A fast growing subsector of the garden railroading hobby is steam locomotives. Here again, you can start simple and grow with the hobby. According to Horovitz, steam power equipment can vary from the extremely simple “fill with water, light the fire and let it go” to working steam engines with hundreds of parts that the operator really has to learn how to drive.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, *Garden Railways*, Box 1612, Waukesha, Wis. 53187 (ph 303 377-7785); Website: [www.gardenrailways.com](http://www.gardenrailways.com).



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