Self-propelled wagon is made from a 1975 Datsun station wagon with steering wheel and controls on front of the wagon box. Horses look real from a distance.

Fake Horses Go Up And Down To "Pull" Wagon In Parades

Harvey Weir of Henribourg, Sask., caused a lot of people to smile at local parades last summer. He and his 7-year-old grand daughter Sarah "drove" a pair of horses pulling what looked like an antique wooden wagon.

What amused parade-goers is that once they got a close look they could see the horses were fake and the wagon was self-propelled. "Sarah held the lines as if she was driving the horses. To start up, she would slap the horses with the lines and, at the same time, I would step on the accelerator. To stop, she would holler 'whoa', and I would step on the brakes," says Weir, who carries a sign on the wagon that reads "Harvey's Heavy Horses".

The project started innocently enough.

"Last February I got the idea of making two fiberglass horses. After completing them I found some harness, and then I decided I should try driving them," says Weir. "I then made a self-propelled wagon out of a 1975 Datsun station wagon, with the steering wheel and all controls up high on front of the wagon box. I mounted a big caster wheel under the pole that carries the horses. The axle inside the wheel is 3 in. off center, which makes both horses go up and down 6 in. as the wagon pushes them ahead. They look like they're loping along."

He stripped the Datsun down to the wheels, chassis, engine, and automatic transmission, removing the entire frame and the seats. He shortened the frame and driveshaft by 1 ft., then installed a wooden floor on top of it. He removed the wooden box from an old 2-ton truck and bolted it to the chassis.

To make the horses, he made a heavy wire frame and covered it with fiberglass, which he painted black. The manes were made from either cow tails or sisal twine, and the tails from shredded-out plastic twine.

A 15-in. car tire serves as the caster wheel. A 10-in. long axle goes through the wheel, held on either side by metal forks. A metal shaft goes straight up from the forks and through a pipe, which allows the wheel to rotate 360 degrees.

A pole runs lengthwise from the wagon box straight up between the horses, where a wooden neck yoke makes it look like it's holding up the pole.

The drivers sit on a two-part plywood seat and rest their feet on a wooden platform just above the car's engine. A steering wheel is located between the two seats and a V-belt runs from it back to the car's original steering wheel so Weir can steer with one hand down between the seats. A cable runs from an add-on brake pedal around a pulley, to the car's original brake pedal. "When I push down on the brake pedal it pulls on the cable and puts the brakes on. The car's accelerator is also operated by cable. The car came equipped with a floor shift automatic transmission lever. I extended the lever.

"We drove it in seven different parades last summer and it really went over well," says Weir. "Next year I may cover the wagon and add a tape recording of the horses whinnying. Also, I hope to find some businesses that would like to advertise on my unit. It would help with the costs of traveling."

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"Built-From-Scratch" Rope Maker

Willard Pearson, Angora, Minn., makes his own ropes with a home-built rope-maker that he can operate with help from an electric motor. With the motor, it takes only one person to operate the machine.

"I often demonstrate the unit at local county fairs, where it's a big hit," says the 82-year-old Willard. "Kids get to make their own 6-ft. long ropes. Adults are amazed that it'll make ropes up to 1 inch in diameter and that I can make rope from many different materials, such as plastic or hemp baler twine."

Willard says he came up with the idea after he found an old rope maker at an auction and had no idea how to use it until a friend showed him what to do. It worked, but not too well, so he decided to build his own.

"I'm so happy that I learned how to build this machine and make rope the easy way," says Willard. "I've enjoyed making improvements on this contraption and showing it off to friends and neighbors. Now I'd like to pass the idea on to others."

The rope maker consists of a 33-in. high, triangle-shaped metal stand equipped with three pulleys that support a weight block, and a metal stand with a small electric motor at the bottom and the rope making unit at the top. The motor belt-drives a 10-in. pulley, which in turn chain-drives three shafts mounted in flange bearings on a steel plate. A 5/16-in. hook is welded to the end of each shaft. A jackshaft located between the motor and pulley is used to slow down the speed at which the rope maker turns.

A four-pronged divider is used to keep the three twisting strands apart until they have twisted sufficiently to begin "laying by". To turn the motor on or off, Willard uses a floor switch salvaged from an old checkout counter that's wired to the motor. "I keep the switch in my left hand and a divider fork in my right hand to keep the rope tight as I go along," he says.

"I start at the weight block end of the rope and run the strands through the divider to keep the three strands apart. Then I turn on the motor and hold the divider until the three strands start getting tension. Once the ropes have twisted together, I move along toward the revolving hooks. Once the rope is completely finished I turn off the motor and then put some tape around the strings. It takes about 10 minutes to make a 6-ft. rope. The heavier the twine, the quicker the rope can be made."

The rope can be made longer by raising a pipe on the weight stand. Willard simply removes a bolt, then raises the pipe and reinserts the bolt in another hole.

"I've made ropes up to 30 ft. long. The heavier the twine, the thicker the rope. However, I think smaller twine makes the nicest rope," says Willard. "By running the rope three times I can put 18 strings into one rope. It's so strong that you can use it to pull cars out of mud holes."

You need to have a weight, such as sandbags, on the base of the weight stand so it doesn't tip over, he says.

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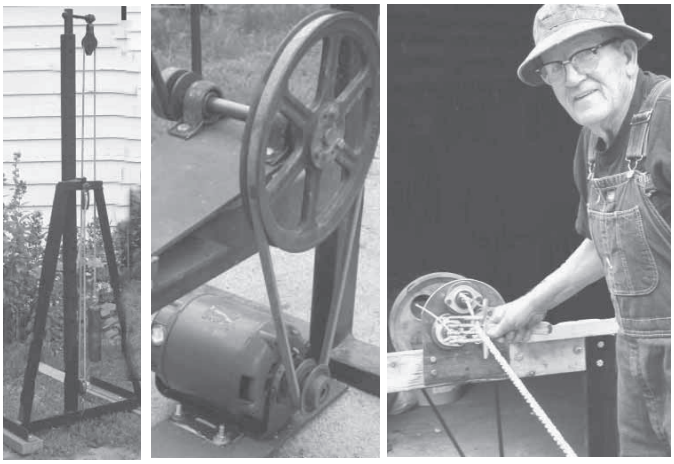
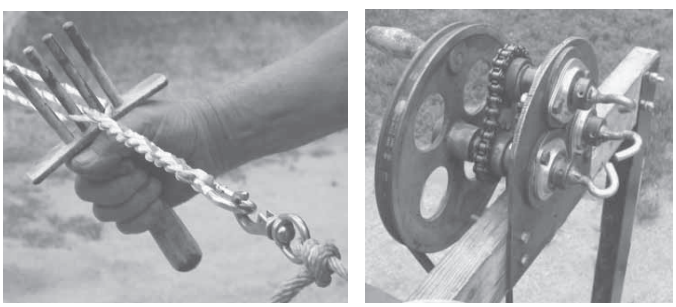


Rope maker consists of a 33-in. high, triangle-shaped metal stand with three pulleys that support a weight block (left). Rope leads from it to another metal stand with an electric motor at the bottom and the rope-making unit at the top (center). Pearson uses divider to twist three strands of rope together into one (right).



Four-pronged divider (left) is used to keep twisting strands apart. Strands attach to hooks welded to the end of each shaft (right).