



Photo © Duane's Photography, Atkin, Minn.

Gene Kelling's lineup of John Deere B tractors spans every year the tractors were built.



Kelling on his 1939 Model B with a 2-row cultivator attachment that he refurbished.

One "B" Led To 33, And Then Even More

As Gene Kelling approached retirement from the Aitkin, Minn. Highway Department, he often wondered how he'd occupy his days and weeks without a fulltime job. In the fall of 1999, after paying a neighbor \$100 for a long-ignored Deere B, he found his answer.

"Restoring tractors wasn't really on my retirement radar," Kelling says, "but after I sawed down trees to cut that old B out of the wind break and started cleaning it up, I really enjoyed it." Later that year another neighbor's B was damaged in a fire, so Kelling bought it. He stripped it to the frame, restored all the parts, painted it and put on new rubber.

"I did two tractors that first year and that

gave me the bug," he says.

Kelling also did some research and found that Deere B tractors were made from 1935 to 1952. That information gave his restoration projects a new mission: finding B's made in every production year. After that, the hobby grew like corn on a hot summer day.

After three completed tractors, Kelling outgrew his garage workspace, so he built a 40 by 80-ft. shed. Over the next 10 years, Kelling bought and restored two and sometimes three model B's every year. By 2011, he had 33 B's in his collection, along with a couple Farmalls, an 8N Ford and a Massey. When he's not working on tractors, he restores canoes and has 8 of those in

storage, too.

Kelling said finding tractors from every production year was a challenge, but his current collection is complete with at least one and sometimes two models for every year from 1935 to 1952. Serial numbers verify the year every tractor was built.

He has purchased B's from Iowa, the Dakotas and Minnesota, in various stages of repair. "All of them needed parts, paint and TLC, especially the one I brought home in three large boxes," Kelling says with a laugh. "My collection is basically complete, though I'd like to get a nicer B from 1947, put new rubber on a few tractors, and paint a few others," Kelling says.

In the past few years Kelling has expanded his green and yellow hobby to include a 1939 H, a 1939 L with a single bottom plow, and a 2-row cultivator with a hand lift for a 1939 B. "There's really no end to this collecting and restoration once a person gets going," Kelling says. "My shed is full, but a neighbor offered me storage, so that's not an excuse anymore."

Every tractor in his collection is a good runner, and Kelling takes at least three different ones each year to the Aitkin County Fair.

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Illinois Farmer Celebrates His Collection Of Allis Chalmers Rigs

Jim Niemann, Litchfield, Ill. has 36 pieces of Allis Chalmers equipment, including 10 combines representing all models the company ever made -- from a 1935 threshing machine all the way up to pull-type models and self-propelled models. He also has many Allis Chalmers tractors, and a cultivator, baler, silage blower, etc.

"All the machines are in good working condition, and occasionally I still use some of them to harvest my wheat and soybeans," says Niemann. "I use Color Back to keep all the equipment bright and shiny, and I store all the machines in a shed. I often use a power washer to keep them clean."

Here's how his collection got started.

"In 1994 my father and I attended a farm auction where there happened to be a good looking 1937 Allis Chalmers WC tractor and a 2-bottom steel wheeled plow. My dad was reminiscing that back in 1937, he traded a team of horses and cash for an outfit just like this tractor and plow. (In those days, implement dealers were willing to take farm animals, mainly work horses, on trade.) I just had to take this outfit home with us, and that was the beginning of my collection.

"My dad had purchased a new no. 60 Allis Chalmers combine in 1937 and did a lot of custom work besides his own, and he had the only combine like that one in our area. I then found a very good one just like that one at a farm auction. At the time Allis Chalmers combines sold at very reasonable prices so that's when I started my collection of All-Crop Harvesters. When I bought it some farmers were still using these combines to combine clover seed, as Allis Chalmers was noted for the best clover harvest machine on the market. Since buying that first 1937 no. 60 combine, I've purchased and used every Allis Chalmers pull-type combine model made over the years, and then started collecting the various self-propelled Gleaner models after they bought out Allis Chalmers.

We're presently using an R-62 Gleaner, so we've been harvesting with Allis Chalmers-Gleaners on our farm for 64 years."

So, his Allis Chalmers harvesting equipment collection now consists of a 1935 restored Allis-Rumely threshing machine and all of Allis Chalmers' various pull-type combine models including a 1938 restored no. 40; a 1952 no. 60; a 1959 no. 66; a 1962 no. 72; a 1960 no. 90; and a 1954 no. 100 self-propelled model. He also has 3 pull-type Gleaner combines -- 2 self-propelled and one pull-type.

"My latest purchase is a 1957 no. 66 pull-type combine equipped with a 2-row corn head that's still in great condition," says Niemann. "The company made a total of only 850 2-row corn heads for this machine. I plant some corn in 38-in. rows so I can use this machine along with my 2-row mounted Allis Chalmers corn picker. It's easy for me to plant corn in 38-in. rows since we plant all our corn with a Great Plains twin row planter set on 30-in. centers. All I have to do is close off some rows and the outside rows of each twin row is 38 in."

He also enjoys "playing around" with his 1929 McCormick corn binder and silage cutter-blower. "I also have many Allis Chalmers antique tractor models including a WC, a WF on steel and rubber, a B, CA's, a WD, WD 45's, and a restored M crawler. I also have plows, a disk, planter, cultivator, grain drill, hay rake and RotoBaler."

For the last 5 years, Niemann has held a "Gospel Concert on the Farm" where he displays his entire collection. He and his wife perform gospel music in the evening, using antique musical instruments. A few years ago a local public TV broadcasting station even did a 1/2-hour show on the event.

"The program is held in our 44 by 80-ft. antique barn. It's a metal building but it has wood posts and the walls are painted white so all the equipment shows up really well.



Aerial view of farmstead the day of the concert and open house. About 250 to 300 people attend each year.



Inside the barn during a concert. Everyone brings lawn chairs and has a great time.

About 250 to 300 people attend each year. People are able to look at all the equipment and bring lawn chairs so they can enjoy the concert later. There's 70 ft. of 4-ft. wide shelving around the barn's walls where we display small antique equipment that we used

on our farm many years ago."

The next concert will be held in June 2012. Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jim Niemann, 2124 N. 8th Ave., Litchfield, Ill. 62056 (ph 217 324-5574).