



Bob Gordon is blind, but that doesn't stop him from building detailed, 1/16-scale wooden toy tractors and farm equipment. He wears old eyeglasses out of habit as safety glasses.

## Blind Woodworker Makes Finely Detailed Wood Toys

Some of Bob Gordon's customers have no idea he is blind.

His 1/16-scale wooden toy tractors and farm equipment include lots of little details such as lights, clutches and gearshifts. His articulated models oscillate like real tractors. He's shipped models throughout North America and overseas to Switzerland, France and Australia.

His experience as a farmer, carpenter and feed mill manager, along with pure determination to stay active, served him well when he lost his sight in 1993. His pacemaker's wires caused a serious infection, and he was rushed to surgery to remove the device. He nearly bled to death, and the doctors anticipated a bleak outcome. When he woke from a coma 10 weeks later, Bob was blind.

While he recovered, his wife, Ruth, took him to visit a friend who was in a wheelchair and only had the use of one arm, but was able to make wooden toys.

"I felt the tractor he was making and thought, 'I could do that too,'" Gordon says.

Fortunately, he knew a lot about tractors. He had collected more than 600 of them since he received an International H from his wife and son in 1976, when the family moved off the farm to live in Belgrave, Ont.

Gordon says he purchased most of his models cheap and had restored many of his metal tractors and implements. He attended shows and did restoration work for others. His first work without sight was restoring a True Scale combine. "The man never knew I was blind," Gordon says.

When he first started working on wood models in his well-equipped shop, he admits he just made a lot of sawdust and chips. But he was so familiar with his tools and toys that things finally clicked. His first complete tractor was an Oliver, which he selected because it was very simple. The hood covers the motor.

Though he has many models in his collection, Gordon doesn't like to base his work on them because many lack detail.

"Generally I like to start with the real tractor," he explains. "My wife or brother-in-law, Jim Taylor, take measurements for me. I also have them put down which side the generator, starter and other parts are on."

He begins each piece with a 3/16-in. thick piece of wood that is the width of the motor block and length of the tractor. He uses poplar wood from his brother-in-law's property that has been cut into 3-in. thicknesses and dried. Gordon cuts it into whatever size pieces he needs. His models have 60 to 200 pieces and he makes everything but the rear tires.



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Gordon separates pieces according to color, and Ruth or one of their grandsons paint the pieces, before he glues the tractor together. His daughter makes the decals.

Gordon uses a blind man's rule and regular equipment: table saw, band saw, lathe, sanders and other electric and hand tool. High school students, a friend and his son-in-law made devices to help make rear hubs and sand front tires on the wood lathe and assist him in putting on axle caps. The only mishap he's had is when he nicked his thumb cutting up leftover strips to toss in the fireplace.

As he became more skilled, Gordon added tractors with cabs, and then articulated tractors. He attends five shows a year and sells toys and takes custom orders. Mennonite groups in the area have become some of his biggest fans.

But many of his creations end up far beyond Ontario. One that gave him great satisfaction was a 4-WD 1508 Massey Ferguson.

"A man bought it over the phone at the Woodstock Toy Auction," Gordon says. "Later he called and asked for five more."

Gordon likes making multiple units; he always makes an extra one for his collection. He is currently working on five IH stationary balers.

Gordon notes he only makes enough money for materials. His models typically sell for \$50 to \$125. He likes making them, but he likes visiting with people at shows and at home even more.

"My biggest enjoyment is people coming to see my collection, both metal and wooden," he says. "Just phone ahead."

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**FARM  
SHOW**



The tour bus is a favorite activity at Fair Oaks Farm. Bus drives right through one of the farm's barns, following the process of milk "from grass to glass".

## Big Dairy Farm Big On Entertainment And Education

More than 137,000 visitors paid admission last year to tour a large Indiana farm even though there are no roller coasters or cartoon characters running around.

"Our birthing center is a favorite stop for many visitors," says Susan Webb, an administrative assistant.

With 32,000 cows on Fair Oaks Farm, about 100 calves are born each day. As many as nine cows are taken daily to a birthing amphitheater where the public can watch a calf being born. A stoplight outside the building is yellow when the hooves have appeared. Green indicates the birth is underway.

Another favorite activity is the tour bus that drives right through one of the farm's barns and follows the process of milk "from grass to glass". Visitors watch cows being milked on a 72-cow rotary milker.

When the 10 dairy farmers who make up Fair Oaks started their operation in 1999, they planned to be very public about what they were doing. In 2003, they opened a Dairy Store to sell their products. In 2004, the farm added the Dairy Adventure Center with fun, educational exhibits, a 3D movie

(with vibrating seats and sprays of water), the birthing barn, and a 45-minute bus tour. Since then they've added Mooville, an outdoor play area with Udder Heights, a milk bottle climbing wall; String Cheese Maze; MooChoo train, and the Dairy Air jumping pillow.

Located just off Interstate 65, Fair Oaks Farms is a popular destination for school field trips (\$4/child), as well as groups and individuals (\$7/child; \$10/adult).

Visitors spend about three hours to take in all the activities, Webb says. "Our homemade ice cream and grilled cheese sandwiches (on ciabatta bread) are also quite popular."

Fair Oaks Farms had a boost in visibility when Mike Rowe featured the farm in one of his "Dirtiest Jobs" television segments, doing everything from helping deliver a calf to vacuuming manure and emptying it into the methane digesters that provide electricity and effluent to spread back on the cropland.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Fair Oaks Farms, 856 N. 600 E., Fair Oaks, Ind. 47943 (ph 877 536-1194; www.fofarms.com).



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