



Amphibious “ATV” Powered By Deere Garden Tractor

When folks around Gibson, La., see Jesse LeBlanc riding his home-built “amphibious ATV” into the water, they’re often startled.

After all, it isn’t every day you see a Deere garden tractor looming above a 10-ft. long aluminum boat, churning through the water on big lugged rubber wheels. Nor will you often see a boat running on rubber wheels over dry ground.

LeBlanc’s 3-wheeled rig rides on a pair of 4-ft. high aluminum wheels lined with rubber lug treads on back, and a single 32-in. high aluminum caster wheel on front that’s lined with smooth rubber. The entire tractor fits inside the homemade aluminum boat, secured by just 6 bolts.

The tractor’s original rear axle is used to chain-drive a set of shafts, which extend through both sides of the boat and are used to drive the big rear wheels. The wheels are equipped with inner hubs that support a series of 8-in. long metal paddles, which help propel the boat through the water.

A steering arm extends forward from one of the steering spindles on the tractor’s front axle to a vertical steering spindle located above the front wheel. An aluminum frame surrounds the wheel to keep it from turning too short and bogging down in deep mud. The wheel is built with a single hollow, 20-in. dia. waterproof drum that aids in flotation.

“It’s a really awesome piece of equipment that can go just about anywhere. Yet it drives and steers just like an ordinary garden tractor,” says LeBlanc. “The shifting and throttle on the tractor were not modified.

“I built it so I could go into boggy areas with standing water. It’s particularly handy when I go into swampy woods to cut firewood. The trees I cut are often growing in standing water, which makes access difficult. I use the boat to haul chainsaws, wedges, and other tools up close to the trees so I can cut them down. If I think the boat might get too heavy with stuff, I can distribute the weight by pulling another boat behind me.”

He started with a 2001 Deere L100 garden tractor equipped with a 17 hp engine and manual transmission. He removed the tractor’s 4 wheels, then used a die grinder to keyway both sides of the rear axle – which consists of two independent shafts – and installed a pair of no. 60 sprockets. He also mounted two larger sprockets on a pair of 1 1/4-in. dia. stainless steel shafts that are located 8 in. in front of the rear axle.

“Each axle works independent of the other, just like on the original garden tractor,” says LeBlanc. “The big chain sprockets on the rear axle result in a 3:1 gear ratio that compensates for the big 4-ft. wheels. As a

result, the tractor travels at the same speed as it did out of the factory. If I want I can remove the sprockets and put the tractor’s rear wheels back on.

“All the sprockets are mounted on sealed pillowblock bearings, and I applied silicone around the bearings where the shafts go through the boat to make everything waterproof.”

To line the wheels with rubber, LeBlanc used a sharp knife and a rubber mallet to remove the tread from a pair of old rear tractor tires. “I cut along the edge of the tire’s tread by pounding on a large sharp knife with a mallet. Then I used self-tapping screws to attach the rubber to the wheels,” says LeBlanc.

He says he thinks his amphibious ATV would work great for duck hunters. “With the big wheels, the tractor and boat ride high enough that I can go through 8-ft. high cattails with no problem. The rig can go through both shallow and deep water, although it works best in water that’s 2 1/2 ft. deep or less. That way the rear wheels can touch the lake bottom, providing all the traction I need.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jesse LeBlanc, 248 Old Spanish Trail, Gibson, La. 70356 (ph 225 287-0679; jesseleblanc33@yahoo.com).

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