

Belt Buckle Collectors

Latest new hobby sweeping the country during these "belt tightening" times is belt buckle collecting.

These "keeper" buckles aren't the run-of-the-mill department store variety. They're usually made of bronze or pewter and have tractors, combines, guns and even fire trucks molded into them.

"There are many types of collections," says Wally Miller, a belt buckle collector from Creston Iowa. "Most collectors specialize. For example, my collection of more than 300 consists primarily of ag-related buckles. The charm of belt buckle collecting is that most of the buckles are free or cost under \$10. But some of them can get expensive."

'Expensive' buckles are made of sterling silver or gold, and inlaid with diamonds or rhinestones. While not as valuable as gold and diamond buckles, "limited series editions" can also be expensive. These are buckles that a company makes a set number of, usually around 1,000. They become valuable as the demand exceeds supply.

Magazines for belt buckle enthusiasts include Buckle Buddies, published monthly by Jan Rath, Henderson, Neb., and Buckle News, published by Walton and Mary Ballew, Jr., Waco, Texas. Both Rath and the Ballews are collectors as well as buyers, sellers and swappers of belt buckles.

The Ballew's interest in collecting began in 1977 and has grown to the point that Walton bought \$35,000 worth of buckles last year. These weren't all for keeps, however, as he resells many of them.

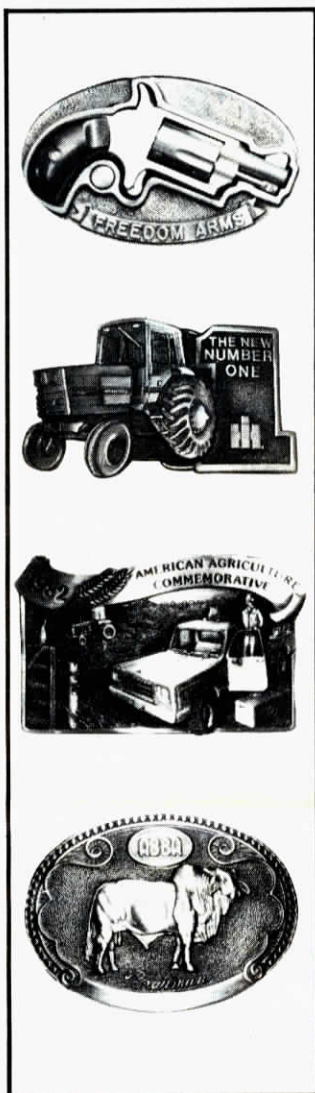
Besides running a western clothing store, Jan Rath organizes a Buckle Buddies convention each year for buyers, sellers and manufacturers to get together.

Interest in collecting ag-related belt buckles really took off when the Hesston Company introduced their first buckle for the National Rodeo Finals in 1974. The following year they started the tradition of producing a commemorative buckle for each National Rodeo Final. That first buckle, given away in 1974, sells for as much as \$400 today. A complete set of Hesston "National Rodeo Final" buckles can bring \$1,500.

Belt buckles produced by Tony Lama and Award Design Metals are especially popular with collectors for their high quality and value.

Lama produces a variety of buckles, including a "states" collection. Beginning in the mid-70's, 1,000 buckles with the state seal on them were made for each state, as well as for the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The only exception to this was North Dakota which stopped Lama from selling their state buckle because it used the state seal for the purpose of making a profit for a private company.

Those state buckles, which origi-



nally sold for \$14.95 each, now sell in a complete set of 53 for upwards of \$6,000.

Lama also makes a series that features buckles commemorating 13 different beef cattle breeds.

One of the more unusual belt buckles ever made features a working .22 caliber mini-revolver that will fire 5 shots, yet is small enough to fit onto a belt buckle. It's made by Freedom Arms, Freedom, Wyo. (You'll need to check your local gun laws about wearing this buckle).

If you'd like a free sample copy of the two publications for buckle belt collectors, contact:

FARM SHOW Followup, Buckle Buddies, R.R. 1, Box 178, Henderson, Neb. 68371 (ph 402 723-4749).

FARM SHOW Followup, Buckle News, Rt. 5, Box 340, Waco, Texas, 76705 (ph 817 829-1291).

For more information about the Freedom Arms buckle, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, P.O. Box 1776, Dept. BB, Freedom, Wyo. 83120 (ph 307 883-2468).



"Nobody has a tractor like this," says "Butch" Franzen whose Queen 11 looks like an ordinary Deere 4430.

TWO EXOTIC MACHINES LEAD THE PARADE

Latest New Tractor Pulling "Creations"

Two recently introduced "creations" are generally recognized as the most exotic, talked about new tractors on the current tractor-pulling circuit.

One is "The Judge", a 3,500 hp behemoth powered by two Allison aircraft engines and built by Ron Barga, Ansonia, Ohio. The other is "Queen 11", a converted Deere 4430 born in the farm workshop of Iowa farmer Matthias "Butch" Franzen, of Waverly.

"The Judge"

Ron Barga built it "from the ground up", powering it with two Allison aircraft engines out of World War II P-38 and P-40 fighter planes. The frame is home-made, and the transmission and rear end are cut down from a truck. The tires are 30.5 by 32 rubber, the largest size permitted for pulling contests.

The two V-12 engines are set side by side like a "W". They run at 4,000 rpm and can develop 3,500 hp. They're fueled with high octane airplane gasoline.

In recent competition the monster machine pulled 80,000 lbs. total weight 300 ft. in 9 seconds.

Pulling tractors are strictly a hobby for Barga. When he's at work in the fields, he drives one of his Internationals. Barga is a cash grain farmer

on 2,000 acres in partnership with his father and brother.

"The Queen"

On the outside, it doesn't look much different than an ordinary Deere 4430 tractor. But inside, it's a powerhouse. "Nobody has a tractor like this," says "Butch" Franzen.

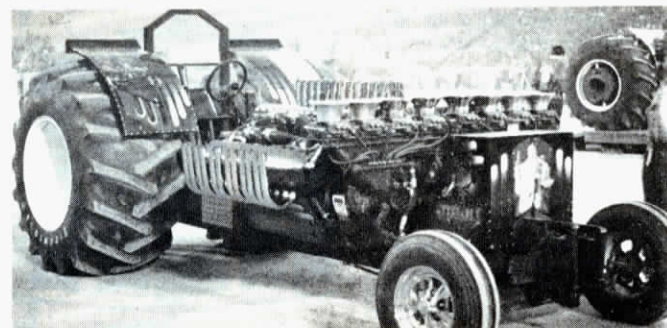
Franzen, who named it Queen II, predicts that someday it will indeed be the Queen of its class in every pulling contest.

Queen II started out with a 6-cyl. stock engine. This was modified by boring out the cylinders, replacing the pistons and rods with aluminum, and adding a supercharger, blower, and a three-port Enderle fuel injection system. The engine burns pure alcohol. Aluminum lightens the weight, and the alcohol burns more efficiently. The result is an engine speed of 6,000 rpm.

The tractor pulls in the superstock 7,500 and 9,500 lb. weight classes.

"We encountered lots of problems in developing it to this point," Franzen says, "and we're not done yet. We may go to bigger pistons to get still more power."

Many of the specialized engine and other parts were designed and built by Franzen and his "pit crew".



Ron Barga's 3,500 hp "The Judge" is powered by two Allison aircraft engines.