

Tornado Sculpture Spins On Semi Axle

Joe Smith's rotating tornado sculpture made out of scrap steel and old farm parts gets a lot of attention in tornado-prone Oklahoma. It's just one of the 88-year-old Leedy, Okla., sculptor's many pieces that he has welded over the past few decades.

"It has a 20-ft. pipe in the center and an axle off an 18-wheeler, so it's greasable," Smith says. The twisted mass of steel has a 1/2-in. rod frame with an assortment of parts welded on to it, including tractor seats, horseshoes and dump rake teeth.

Though it turns on the axle easily when spun by hand, Smith notes he needs to add more items for resistance near the top to make it spin with the wind.

Oklahoma gets plenty of wind to spin it, says Smith's son Lowry, who has watched his father build many moving (and stationary) sculptures over the years - in addition to farming and operating a bulldozer. Lowry and his two siblings have one-of-a-kind fence panels with saw blades, shovels, wrenches and other parts. Smith built a pair of roadrunners after glancing at a photo on a cellphone.

His moving art captures plenty of interest. Besides peacocks that bob up and down (with tricky-to-balance rock counterweights), his biplane is among the biggest and most detailed pieces. It moves in the wind and includes a pilot and co-pilot in the open cockpit.

The octogenarian has no interest in selling his work, and says he's not through yet. Like his sculptures, he has ideas spinning in his mind. Why or what they will be doesn't matter.



Photo courtesy Jocelyn Pedersen

Joe Smith's metal tornado sculpture rotates on a 20-ft. long pipe attached to the axle off an 18-wheeler semi.

"Tree Gym" Made From Branches

Cliff Johnson is a woodworker, Master Gardener and back-yard builder with a passion for creative projects. Over the years he's used vines, sticks and branches of every size and shape to build numerous arbors, trellises and pergolas. His latest effort is a combination jungle gym/treehouse that he built in his back yard.

"My grandsons sort of inspired me because of their tireless efforts to climb trees and build forts," Johnson says. "I really would've liked to build a big tree house high up in one of my 200-year-old burr oaks, but I decided something closer to the ground probably makes more sense. At least it makes more sense to my wife."

Johnson's most recent project involved harvesting more than a half dozen 4 and 5-in. ash trees from his wooded acreage and using the sturdy stems as poles that reach up onto the large lower limbs of a giant burr oak. The poles were bolted to brace branches, and then 2 and 3-in. dia. branches were used as ladder steps and horizontal frame pieces. Step rungs were secured to the poles using 5/16-in. lag screws. The triangular platform was built using discarded cedar deck boards Johnson had laying around. In total, Johnson invested less than \$20 in bolts and lag screws for the project.

"My grandkids were delighted when they saw it, and they immediately started climbing and hanging from it in countless different ways," Johnson says.

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Cliff Johnson's grandkids enjoy playing on the stick-built jungle gym that he and his brother built in his back yard.



An avid clay shooter, Robert Barnes wanted a clay thrower that was lightweight and could be taken anywhere.

"Pigeonator" Lets You Trap Shoot Anywhere

Robert Barnes can shoot clay pigeons anywhere with his mobile trap shoot. He can slip it in the back of a pickup or add wheels and pull it around with an ATV. The 5 ft., 9-in. by 4-ft. wide Pigeonator weighs only 120 lbs. fully assembled with seat, battery and 3 throwers.

"I'm an avid clay shooter, and I wanted a clay thrower that was lightweight and could be taken anywhere," says Barnes. "You can take off the wheels, throwers, seat, battery and even the corner stabilizers. Disassembled, it is very light and easy to load. Even assembled, 2 people can lift it into a pickup, or one can pull it around on the ground."

The Pigeonator has 2 leveling jacks on the back and one on the front. Each thrower can be turned left or right or quickly adjusted to one of 10 different angles and locked in place with set screws. Height for all 3 throwers can be adjusted by raising or lowering one or more of the jacks.

"The throwers are spring-loaded," explains Barnes. "The more you tighten down on the bolt that adjusts the spring, the farther the clay pigeon will fly."

Range varies from 50 to 75 yds. on a non-windy day. Barnes used toggle switches and electric door lock actuators for triggers.

"Turn the switches off to load and release with either the toggle switch or a foot pedal," says Barnes.

The seat is telescoping and swiveling. One person can sit in the seat, operate the throwers and shoot, or multiple shooters can take turns operating the throwers. Extra clays can be stored in compartments to either side of the 6-volt battery case behind the seat. A gun rack for a single gun also is mounted between the seat and the tongue with its ball hitch.

Barnes has only built the one prototype, but has applied for a patent. He is looking for a company to buy the patent and build Pigeonators.

"It's a blast when you get a couple of shooters on either side," says Barnes. "You can go through 3 boxes of shells so fast you'll be sore afterwards."

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Each thrower can be quickly adjusted to one of 10 different angles, and then locked in place with set screws.

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