

## BUYING TIPS YOU CAN USE

Randomly selected farmers “tell it like it is” in nominating their “best” and “worst” buys.

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# Farmers Nominate Best, Worst Buys

## OPINION

### Tell Us About Your “Best or Worst” Buy

Send your nominations to:  
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**Greg Papham, Two Rivers, Wis.:** As a mechanic at Strutz Farms, Greg’s responsible for keeping the tractors running, including a 1984 White 2-180 used for tillage work and silage chopping. In January of 1998, the tractor’s original Caterpillar 3208 engine had more than 6,000 hours on it and was on its last legs. That’s when the farmers decided to repower the tractor with a Caterpillar 3208T, upgrading to the turbo to keep up with the demands of the growing operation. They bought a rebuilt engine at **Truck & Tractor Parts (TTP)** in Warsaw, Ind. which turned out to be their “worst buy”.

“They told us on the phone that they had a 3208T ready to go but they’d need a cashier’s check for \$5,700 because we were from out-of-state. So my boss and I loaded up the 3208, which we were trading and drove the 6 1/2 to 7 hours to Indiana. They told us they still had to rebuild us an engine. Even though we’d been told they had an engine in stock, we reluctantly agreed to have them build one for us anyway. So we went home without an engine.

“When it arrived three days later, we were assured the engine had been dynoed and was field ready. We installed it and got the tractor into the field toward the end of April. After 40 hours, it started using a little oil, then a lot

lem. Fixing all these problems cost more than \$2,600.

“Finally, last January, I reassembled the engine, installed it and broke it in myself. After 22 hours, the tractor used only 2 qts. of oil.

“We figure we’re out about \$20,000, including tractor rental while the White was down.”

**Coy Cleveland, Paradise, Texas:** “Our best buy was a 1939 Ford 9N my dad purchased as a demonstrator in the spring of 1940. The Old Racket Box, as we called it, averaged 100 hours a year for 17 years. It was used for plowing and feeding cattle and spent countless hours on a belt pulley powering a wooden Keystone peanut picker. Besides general maintenance, the tractor had only one engine overhaul, one broken axle and one repair to the 3-pt. in the 17 years we owned it.”

**Virgil Newberg, Hinton, Iowa:** Virgil has taken his “worst buy” 1999 Ford F-250 XLT 4-WD pickup back to the dealer an average of once a month since he bought it last September. “For one thing, I’ve replaced bad transmission sensors three times because the truck wouldn’t shift right.

“But the big problem is with the power steering oil cooler and the air conditioning unit. With the new, raised front bumper on the 1999 models, the power steering cooler unit is now located too low for off-road use. Even though there’s a rubber deflector that extends about 2 in. behind the bumper, we break the unit or pull off the hoses every time we drive across corn stalks. I even had a neighbor tell me he had the same problem when he drove over a ridge of plowed snow last winter. Because the air conditioning unit is located directly behind the power steering cooler, it’s also very susceptible to bent fins when you drive across corn stalks. What these trucks really need is a steel deflector or skid plate under the front bumper, rather than the flimsy rubber deflector they’re equipped with. We called Ford several times about the problem, but they’ve never returned our calls.”

**Derk Radloff, Luana, Iowa:** Derk’s “best buy” is a Deere 4650 tractor with MFWD. “It’s clean-running and we haven’t had to do any work on it whatsoever, other than routine maintenance. It has plenty of power to suit our needs.”

**Gordon T. Redel, Red Deer, Alberta:** “The worst welder I ever owned was a 1998 Century 100 MIG welder. I wanted to use it in various buildings but discovered it needs at least a 20-amp fuse. Most fuses in my buildings are 15-amp so you’re limited as to where you can use it. It actually wasn’t a bad welder for light work, but the wire kept balling up inside the machine. After I used it a couple of times, I traded it for a 1998 Lincoln 155 MIG welder at the local Princess Auto store where I bought the Century. The Lincoln’s a best buy. It’s just an all-around good welder.”

**Tim Crawford, Janesville, Wis.:** “Performance was disappointing,” says Tim, unhappy with his Case-IH 4200 mulch tiller. “It ridged in the middle of the row and the rear gangs had a tendency to plug up. My dealer re-angled the front gangs, and that has made a tremendous difference.”

**Keith Brown, Cedar Falls, Iowa:** “My hands don’t get numb after using it for two or three hours, the way they did with other trimmers I’ve used,” says Keith, pleased with a Husqvarna 225 L “Pro Series” weed trimmer he bought in 1996. “I’ve had no problems with it. It’s a joy to use.”

of oil. TTP agreed to pay the freight to return the engine. After examining it, they said it had ingested dirt and that it would cost \$3,400 to fix it.

“We got the engine back in a couple of days, installed it, and were back in the field the same evening. That night it used 1 gal. of oil in three hours, yet there were no visible external leaks. This time TTP claimed it simply had to be broken in properly. We went round and round with the company for three months, during which time the engine used about a barrel of oil in 300 to 350 hours.

“TTP finally agreed to rebuild the engine a third time for \$6,800 so we sent it back to them. We changed our minds right away, however, and decided to rebuild it ourselves. We bought \$2,800 worth of parts directly from Caterpillar and sent the engine to Polk Diesel in Green Bay, where they looked at the block and heads and machined them out to exact factory specs. We took the injectors, injection pump and turbo to Diesel Specialists in Green Bay for examination. Between the two companies we learned that the cylinder walls were .003 to .005 in. out of round, the valve guides were bad, six of the eight injectors were bad, and the injection pump was set wrong - for trucks, not ag applications. The governor weights were also worn out and the turbo showed no signs of abrasion in the compressor housing and impeller wheels, which discounted TTP’s earlier claim that dirt in the engine was the root of the prob-