

Speedex Tractor Website A Treasure Trove Of Information

Mike Hamper might be the world's number one Speedex tractor fan. He runs a website (www.speedextractorinformation.com) where you can learn about the rare tractor brand. For a \$10 annual membership you get access to the Speedex collector community.

"An avid collector started the website, but he couldn't afford to keep it going," says Hamper. "I bought it, and we use supporting memberships to cover its costs."

Speedex tractors, both riders and walk-behinds, were built in the U.S. from 1935 through 1999. Started as the Pond Tractor Co. by Harold Pond, he changed the name to Speedex and in 1938 developed the Model B, considered the first 4-wheel garden tractor in the U.S.

Hamper has been enamored with the little tractors since he saw an S24 for sale in 1966. He told his dad it looked like a miniature Ford Ferguson. It was complete with a full set of attachments.

"We used it in our gardens for years, and eventually I bought it," says Hamper, an Ohio graphic artist and programmer.

Eventually he began doing graphics for Speedex, which had gone through various iterations and owners. In 1994 the then owner sold the company and gave Hamper a box of memorabilia. A chart in the box gave parts numbers associated with different years' tractors.

"I went back and looked at my S24 and discovered it was the first one of that model off the assembly line," says Hamper.

Since then he has collected more memorabilia and attended many meets. He has also collected 18 Speedex tractors, 5 of which are working tractors that he uses around his small farm. When he started, the old garden tractors could be picked up for \$10 to \$20.

"Today my best guess is that an S24 fully



Photo Courtesy, Lawn & Garden Tractor Magazine (www.lagtmag.com)

Over a period of 6 years, Mike Hamper restored a 1942 Speedex FG Lowboy (left) and at the same time built a smaller look-alike (center). To finish off his FG set he built an even smaller pedal tractor version. You can learn about the rare tractor brand at his website (www.speedextractorinformation.com).

restored sells for up to \$800," says Hamper. Thanks to his work for the company, some of which he was never paid for, Hamper has full rights of reproduction of all decals and designs. With his graphic arts expertise, he reproduces decals and sells T-shirts and baseball caps with Speedex logos and tractors on them.

"I sell the decals and clothes on eBay to help support the website."

The public side of the website offers belt size information, as well as downloadable tractor manuals for many models. It also offers information on Speedex tractor shows.

The home page includes links to photo galleries of riding tractors and walk-behinds, as well as implements and attachments once available.

"We now have more than 750 photos in our collection thanks to people sending in their pictures," says Hamper. "We also have a map where people can post a pin for their location and list the tractors they own."

Other pages include parts, a small classified ad section and a page where Hamper posts videos. The parts page directs visitors to an array of parts supplier websites and phone numbers.

The supporting member site offers even more, including discussion groups and opportunities to connect with other collectors. It also includes a video gallery and access to more than 40 brochures and other pieces of sales literature.

Hamper emphasizes a hope that the website collections will continue to grow. "We are always looking for memorabilia," he says.

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Website Offers Services To Pasture-Based Farms

When Seven Sons Family Farm couldn't find a website "shopping cart" for selling direct to customers, they hired software developers who made one from scratch. It worked so well they started offering "GrazeCart" to other pasture-based farms.

"We sell products sold by weight, so you can't take a credit card up front. You have to pack and weigh the order. Normal shopping carts couldn't accommodate that," explains Blaine Hitzfield, one of Seven Sons partners. "Also, we needed something for a local distribution system. We wanted them to order online and choose the location where they wanted to pick the order up. Plus we need to communicate pickup days and times."

Seven Farms invested tens of thousands of dollars to have the software developed and they have a developer on staff. The system has helped their Roanoke, Ind., farm grow to 4,000 customers in their tri-state area with 45 pickup sites.

A year ago, Seven Sons made the software available to other producers through its sideline business, GrazeUp.

"Eighty-percent of customers looking for grass-fed and niche proteins and organic foods turn to the Internet first," Hitzfield says.

Besides setting up a shopping cart, GrazeCart can take orders year round for later processing/delivery dates. It provides pickup options and dates for customers, whether it's at the farm, processing plant or sites in area cities.

GrazeCart is useful for farms of all sizes

in urban and rural areas, Hitzfield says. For example, Paul and Gabe Brown in rural North Dakota (www.nourishedbynature.us) use the software to sell meat from their grass-fed livestock. They set up their first pickup location and added 4 more within a year. A large Florida operation (www.fullcirculerealfoods.com) added a new route with six drop locations and increased from 405 customers to 1,483 customer registrations in 7 mo. with the help of GrazeCart.

"We license the software for \$39 to \$100-plus to farms," Hitzfield says, explaining cost is based on amount of use. Costs increase as business grows, so it's a fair approach for small and large operations.

"Visibility is the biggest issue farmers have connecting with customers," Hitzfield says, so GrazeCart also offers web design, branding, video, consulting and other services.

The model works for Seven Sons, which has 10,000 to 13,000 visitors a month to its website. About 60 percent are new visitors, and 40 percent are returning customers. About 4 percent make purchases, which is about double the standard commerce conversion rate.

"GrazeCart has helped us acquire a newsletter subscriber list of more than 6,000 weekly recipients," Hitzfield says.

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Old Outhouses Rebuilt As Garden Sheds

"I used to be in the business of tearing down old, dilapidated barns," says Mike Prescher of Pine Island, Minn. "At nearly every site I'd notice an old outhouse nearly hidden in the woods and I'd think, 'There's got to be a new-world use for these old-world structures.' That's when the idea hit Prescher to turn them into garden sheds.

Since then he's restored 76 outhouses and his business keeps growing. "It's a crappy job, but somebody's got to do it," he says with a laugh.

The biggest challenge he faces on many old outhouses is installing a new floor. The bottom of the studs and the floor boards have generally started rotting or are missing altogether. Prescher says he has solved most outhouse restoration challenges "by paying lots of tuition to the school of hard knocks."

Most outhouses he works on measure about 5 ft. wide by 4 ft. deep. Occasionally he finds a house that measures 6 by 6 ft. or more. Just about every outhouse has 70 1/2-in. studs, so with the addition of a bottom and top plate, they're exactly 6 ft. tall when complete, not including the roof.

Prescher's garden sheds are often decked out with porches, shelving for pots, flower boxes and red roofs "that really look sharp in their new location," he says. Gardeners also like to store long-handled garden tools in the sheds.

Prescher delivers most of his garden sheds and kids' playhouses on a customized trailer that he pulls with his truck. He generally has to load and unload the structures himself, so he's developed transport tricks that enable him to move sheds without extra hands, even



Mike Prescher turns old outhouses into garden sheds decked out with porches, shelving for pots, flower boxes and red roofs.

though they weigh several hundred pounds. He says "Once when I was delivering 2 restored outhouses on my trailer a lady pulled up next to me and hollered out the window, 'Nice camper!'" Prescher just waved and kept on driving.

The cost for restoring outhouses depends on the circumstances and how much time and materials Prescher has to invest in the project. "Rescuing outhouses from the burn pile is my hobby. I've given a number of them away for no charge, but I may charge a fee to cover my expenses."

One of Prescher's favorite restorations was a playhouse for his granddaughter, finished with electricity, sparkly inside lights, a dry-erase board for drawing, a comfortable chair, and an assortment of stuffed companions.

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