

# Love Of Locomotives Inspired Him To Build One

“Growing up I was always fascinated with steam locomotives and trains, so when I had time on my hands in my 70’s, I decided to build one of my own,” says retired farmer, carpenter, handyman and all-around inventor Don Sizer.

“As a kid I had a foot-long model of an old steamer from Great Western Railroad, so I used that as my template. That little engine produced steam and made a chuppa-chuppa sound when it ran. It also had a whistle and bells on it, so I put those things on the one I built, which is about 1/3rd scale to a full-size engine,” Sizer says.

The undercarriage and power unit for Sizer’s engine is an old Toyota Tercel automobile that’d been given up for parts. Sizer removed the body, tuned up the engine, and reconfigured the chassis to accept framework for his 20-ft. long steam locomotive. The car engine and drive wheels are at the rear of the unit and idler/steering wheels are at the front. He reconfigured the transmission to hydrostatic drive so it handled easier in parades.

Controls that operated the car’s engine, steering and brakes are mounted in the engineer’s cab compartment. Sizer fashioned

the steamer’s framework out of scrap metal that he bolted and welded to the auto chassis. He used sheet metal for the cab and roof and rolled metal to create the silo-shaped boiler. Sheet metal also forms the steam compartment and the smoke stack. A single beam headlight is mounted in the center of the steam chest at the front.

Authentic-looking wheels and connecting couplers make the engine appear like it’s ready for the rails. The steam dome, air cylinders, sand box, a hand-painted name plate and oil reservoirs on each side behind the front truck wheels round out Sizer’s desire for authenticity.

“Building the engine was more fun than work, and people are amazed at how much it looks like a real locomotive,” Sizer says. It took him about 3 1/2 years to build with the help of a few friends and about \$20,000 in out-of-pocket costs.

Hooked to the rear of the engine is a 16-ft. long, 20-seat passenger vehicle that Sizer built and painted to imitate an old time trolley car. A farm wagon forms the chassis with metal framework outlining the sides, windows and roof. Sheet metal is used on the sides and roof along and make-believe rail



“People are amazed at how much it looks like a real steam locomotive,” says Don Sizer about his 1/3-scale model. A home-built, 16-ft. trolley car follows behind.

wheels extend below the framework. Bench seating carries the passengers.

Sizer recently donated both items to the Western Development Museum in North Battleford, Sask. where they along with countless steam engines, planes, tractors, field machinery and hundreds of artifacts

attract thousands of visitors every year.

“They’re in a good place now and a lot of people get to enjoy them,” Sizer says.

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## Signed Concrete Led Brothers To Old Tractor

If it weren’t for the concrete wheels, it’s unlikely the 1935 John Deere D tractor would have been rescued from a Nebraska junkyard to be restored. But three young boys had traced their names in the soft concrete, and about 6 decades later they were excited to have it back in the family to proudly showcase in California.

According to a recent story in *Green Magazine*, Henry Henshaw Flaming farmed near Grainton, Neb., in the 40’s and 50’s, and he filled the back tractor wheels with concrete for weight, a common practice then. The family scratched HH Flaming & Sons in one wheel, and the boys added their names to the other. When the family sold the farm and moved, the tractor was sold and eventually ended up in a North Platte junkyard about an hour away. Someone recognized the name, and Max Flaming eventually purchased the tractor. He hired Kent Hilferty, a John Deere collector and restorer, to restore it.

Turns out the Madrid, Neb., farmer is a relative to the Flaming family through his grandfather, and he was very familiar with the model as he has John Deere D tractors in

his own collection.

Parts of the tractor had been sold off, and it wasn’t a tractor he would have chosen to restore - except for the concrete wheels and the brothers’ interest in preserving it.

“The hardest thing was finding parts and making sure the concrete didn’t fall out. It made the wheels awful heavy to work with,” says Hilferty.

He completed the restoration in 2012, and the “boys” were pleased with the results. Karl traveled from Denver to ride the tractor in a local tractor event. Afterward, it was loaded on a trailer and transported to California where Max poured a concrete slab to display it in front of his business. It brought back good memories, and the brothers recalled how Paul hadn’t wanted to add an F for his last name and kept erasing it.

Hilferty appreciated the restoration project because of its story.

“The concrete in the tractor is what made it pretty cool, and it came full circle,” he says.

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Before and after photos show how Kent Hilferty restored a 1935 John Deere D tractor that was rescued from a Nebraska junkyard.



Tractor’s rear wheels were filled with concrete for weight long ago, and 3 young boys traced their names in the soft concrete.

## They Customize Vehicles For Wounded Veterans

When servicemen and women leave for deployment, they often leave a prized vehicle behind - a motorcycle, their first car, an ATV, and so on. If they return home catastrophically wounded as an amputee, they may no longer be able to operate those machines. A group of volunteer veterans in California are changing that one project at a time by retrofitting vehicles that are “adapted to the injury, customized to the soul.” In addition, they offer wounded vets therapy trips driving recreational vehicles.

Retired Marine Rob Blanton started Warfighter Made, a nonprofit organization, in 2012 after deciding most therapies offered through the military were “one size fits all.” The 21-year Marine served four combat tours and received the Silver Star for extraordinary heroism in Iraq. He also received a diagnosis for traumatic brain injury and severe post-traumatic stress disorder. After a brush with suicide, he vowed to turn his negatives into positives through Warfighter Made.

With other income to support himself and his wife, who is also a retired Marine, Blanton takes no pay for his full-time volunteer work. Nor do the other veterans who find that working on vehicles as therapeutic to them as the recreational therapy is for veterans who receive vehicles.

“It’s another avenue for veterans to get relief from their stressors. A vehicle is an extension of you as a person. It’s more personal to take a vehicle a wounded warfighter already owns and adopt it for them,” Blanton says.

The first project has been the most ambitious - transforming a Harley Night Train motorcycle so it could be ridden by a triple amputee. Volunteers added a sidecar, transferred the throttle and brake to the left, installed an automatic clutch, and exchanged the foot shifter for a hand shifter so the veteran, who only has his ring and pinkie finger, could enjoy riding again.

For people who want to support Warfighter



A group of volunteer veterans in California custom retrofit vehicles for wounded veterans.

Made, Blanton suggests they check out the photos and stories on their Instagram and Facebook first. Then they can contact or donate at the organization’s website.

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