

Pearson and Schrier built the 12-ft. long hearse using their own pattern to fit modern caskets. It weighs 800 lbs. without a coffin.



Photo courtesy of Loretta Sorensen

Horse-Drawn Hearse Built From Walnut

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

J.R. Pearson laughs that building a horse-drawn hearse 23 years ago was an impulsive pipe dream. But the beautiful walnut wood and curved glass hearse is a nice addition to his collection of old farm and horse-drawn

equipment and wagons that he built for The Barns Museum. Since it was featured 4 years ago (Vol. 43, No. 3), the Iowa collector has added another building for a total of 13,000 sq. ft. of space in five buildings.

The hearse was a collaborative project with his friend and wood supplier, Loren Schrier. Both were fascinated by hearses and finding an undercarriage from a hearse in Brookings, S.D., was all it took to get them started.

The steel parts were usable except for one broken spring, which an Amish friend made for less than \$10.

"We made up our own pattern and made it wider and longer for new caskets," Pearson says, noting they used cardboard pieces as they designed the hearse. The double-plated safety glass came out of a storefront and was cut to size for the windows.

"The biggest challenge was getting it out of the shed when it was done," Pearson recalls. The hearse needed to go out a back door 8 ft. off the ground, so they had to build a ramp and used a windlass and rope to let it down slowly. A crowd gathered to watch to see if the hearse would land intact. It did, and it's been used for four funerals, three of them with Pearson's Belgian draft horses. A couple of the funerals were especially memorable.

The first was for the grandson of the woman who did the hearse's upholstery work. Another was for an Oliver tractor collector; one of his tractors was used to pull the hearse.

At 5 1/2 by 12 ft. and weighing 800 lbs., without a coffin, Pearson takes precautions with the hearse. He checks out cemeteries first for unsafe slopes and won't use it when it rains.

At 82, Pearson no longer has horses, and the hearse is parked in one of his museum's buildings. It joins a few other wagons he built, including a Victorian coach and mail buggy. Other antique equipment dates from 1822 to 1950 such as an original 1911 threshing machine and an 1895 clover huller.

The museum is open for tours by calling ahead for a reservation, \$20/each for small groups of four or so; \$10/each for bus groups.

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Wathen's lost tractor after restoration.



Family Tractor Found After Nearly 35 Years

Chris Wathen had been searching for his dad Don's homemade 4-WD tractor with its 6-71 Detroit diesel and 5-speed Spicer transmission for years. When he finally found it, it was headed for the salvage yard. Another week or two and it would have been too late.

"I remember working on it with my dad," says Chris. "I was in grade school, and when I came home at night, he would hand me a wire brush and a slag-chipping hammer, and I would work on welds."

Completed in 1970, the Brute pulled a 7-bottom plow or a 21-ft. disk for several years before being traded off on a new IH 1466. The tractor was impressive. In "Don Wathen's Homemade Tractor," a recent article in Heritage Iron, Jesse Henderson describes the building process in detail. The search and finding process is nearly as fascinating.

Over the years, Chris had amassed a huge collection of large, articulated 4-WD tractors, more than 70 in all. Three of them were homemade. The Brute was not among them. Every lead to where it might be was a dead end.

"We had an open house for a local MM convention, and a fellow mentioned a tractor that he thought I would appreciate," says Chris. "I showed him a picture of the Brute, and he said, 'That's it.' Unfortunately, it had been 20-some years, and he couldn't recall where he had seen it."

Chris put the search into high gear. He put up posters of the tractor at co-op elevators and tractor dealerships in the man's home area. He describes them as the classic lost dog style. "Looking for this tractor. If you know of it, call me."

"I had one call," says Chris. "The man said, 'I know where it is, and I've been asked to haul it to salvage.'"

Chris got the phone number and name of the owner, called him, and arranged a visit.

He took Don with him. The owner took them out to a grove of trees. A tractor was there with saplings grown up all around it. It was the Brute!

"As we approached, I realized my dad had stopped walking," says Chris. "The emotion of seeing it again after 35 years had hit."

Chris and the owner settled on a price, a good deal more than the salvage value. It was the most unusual negotiation Chris had ever taken part in.

"He stood on one side and wrote out a price he wanted, and I stood on the other side and wrote out a price I was willing to pay," recalls Chris. "When we switched sides, we were \$500 apart. We split the difference."

When Chris came back to haul the tractor home, he had a real surprise. He added some diesel fuel, hooked up a battery, and turned the switch. After 10 to 15 years of sitting in the trees, smoke began to roll out of the exhaust pipe.

"I was able to drive it on the trailer," says Chris. "I was thrilled to get it back."

Once he had it home, Chris and his daughter AJ restored what was needed. It was minimal. Even the air cleaner had survived, as had four of the six tires installed by Don in 1970.

"We replaced two tires and replaced fluids and repainted it," says Chris. "We wanted it as close to original as we could get it."

Chris notes that he has high hopes for a repeat of the story of the Brute. Before building it, Don built a 220-hp. 2-WD with a 743-cu. in. Cummins. Like the Brute, the earlier tractor had disappeared.

"I would love to find it and bring it home," says Chris. "If anyone knows where it is, I would love to hear from them. Even if it's been salvaged, I would like to know that."

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Burros come equipped with 12 cameras, RTK GPS, and a 4G LTE modem. They're built with onboard 120-volt chargers for a power-up at any time.

Robotic Platforms Carry Cargo, Can Act As Guard Dogs

By Lydia Noyes, Contributing Editor

Burros are battery-powered and self-propelled robotic platforms designed to work alongside humans. Each weighs 420 lbs. and is infinitely capable of performing tasks related to carrying, towing, scouting, patrolling, pushing, and more, depending on the attachments.

"Burro founder Charlie Andersen grew up on a working farm leading him to believe that outdoor work should be automated. He also began to understand the many challenges robots face in industries like agriculture," explains Don Black, Burro's VP of Growth.

"Today, with advances in computer vision, GPUs, and deep learning, economical robots that go anywhere and recognize anything are suddenly commercially viable," says Black. "Simultaneously, farmers are running out of people - 80 to 90 percent of the U.S. crop workforce works in the \$60 billion specialty crop industry where wages are rising, the workforce is aging, and labor costs typically equate to around 30 to 40 percent of farm revenue. Growers are screaming for robots."

The company is led by a 40+ person team with thousands of Burro robots operating on three continents. Burros come equipped with 12 cameras, RTK GPS, and a 4G LTE modem. They're built with onboard 120-volt chargers for a power-up at any time. It's also possible to swap out the built-in battery in just 2 mins. without any special tools. Two Burros can fit in a 6-ft. truck bed, making them easy to transport to the worksite.

This powerful tool uses computer vision, high-precision GPS, and artificial intelligence. They receive over-the-air updates every 2 weeks so that the robots stay updated with AI models to improve their capabilities. New Burros come equipped with the company's patent-pending Pop Up Autonomy™, making them ready to



Multi-use robots are gaining popularity in specialty crop fields to save labor.

use immediately out of the box without the need to install infrastructure. Farm crews can have a Burro up and running in under 10 mins.

They can help field crews pick grapes, transport pots in nurseries, or serve as platforms for data capture on construction sites. Recently, the robots have gained attention for their potential to serve as "guard dogs."

With the Guard Dog Kit, Burros can run 24/7 and send alerts through text or the web at the first signs of an intruder. As it moves, its sensors detect activity on the site. If it detects a person, it sends an alert to the operator. The operator can assess the situation and take necessary action.

Interested readers can fill out the contact form on the company website to request a demo or buy a Burro and Guard Dog attachment. Pricing starts at \$19,799 for a Burro and 24 mos. of warranty/support and \$2,999 for the Burro Guard Dog attachment.

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