

In 1963, a 4-WD County Sea Horse tractor churned across the English Channel.



Swimming Tractor Celebrates 60 Years

Pigs can't fly, ducks can't talk, and cows can't dance, but a hefty 4-WD tractor built by County Commercial Cars, Ltd. of the U.K. celebrated its 60th anniversary of driving (aka swimming) across the English Channel in 2023. The 1963 publicity stunt was dreamed up by David Tapp, son of a company founder, to prove the amazing capabilities of County's "Super-4" tractor.

Before its swimming escapade, the Super-4 was known as a capable "1-in-1" farm tractor. It could pull equipment up, down and around sloping fields because of its low center of gravity and large wheels. Tapp wanted to prove it was even more extraordinary, so he devised the swimming stunt. Company management dismissed the idea as foolish, but Tapp was "family" to the owner, so a plan emerged. He would reconfigure an assembly line model to plow a field in France, drive (swim) across the English Channel, and plow a different field in the U.K. while audiences cheered and cameras rolled.

The assembly-line tractor had all its electronics removed and bearings waterproofed.

The air intake and exhaust stacks were raised high above the hood. Large buoyancy tanks were installed on the front and back. Deep-tread Goodyear cane and rice tires replaced the originals to create "paddles" that would move the tractor through the water.

Testing the concept tractor in an English lake revealed poor buoyancy and little forward movement. Adding larger tires and super-sized air tanks brought better results. Now satisfied that the bright yellow tractor could make a splash in the media, Tapp shipped the County Sea Horse to France. He parked it near a Normandy hotel for two days of pre-publicity, of which plenty existed. On July 28, 1963, Tapp hooked the tractor to a plow and worked a small field near the English Channel. Two days later, Tapp drove to the beach at Cap Gris Nez and into the Channel at dawn. With wheels spinning sea foam and accompanied by a pilot boat and a support boat, Tapp was on his way. The pace was slow, close to a fast walk, about 4 mph. Just under 8 hrs. later, Tapp drove the tractor ashore about 7 1/2 miles northeast

of Dover, England. He was met by a large crowd and a bystander with a pint of beer, which Tapp gladly accepted. Tapp recalled that the crossing was smooth even though the water was slightly rough. He said his biggest concern was running out of diesel fuel.

He drove the tractor up from the water to a nearby field, hitched it to a tillage tool, and started working the field. A few minutes later, the tractor ran out of fuel, but Tapp had accomplished his mission.

The swimming County Sea Horse became an instant media legend, with requests from other countries for demonstrations. Tapp shipped it to Russia for a 1964 show. Viewers thought it would sink into a lake, but it didn't. A demonstration in The Netherlands produced an order for three Sea Horses to be used for sea exploration and seismic studies. Those models had cabs and compartments to hold equipment. A different Sea Horse was equipped with four dual wheels for a U.S. demonstration on the Mississippi River near

New Orleans. The Coast Guard scuttled that event. The demo was later held on Lake Pontchartrain. The 8-wheeled demo tractor was eventually sold by County dealer M & L Tractors.

The original Sea Horse languished in the production yards outside the County's U.K. plant for years, lost in time with its paint cracking from salt water and sun exposure. Preserving it wasn't important until Billy and Jas Wilson built a replica on the frame of a different Super-4. That model was eventually sold to Martin Fernihough of Worcestershire, who did a complete rebuild to the original tractor's specifications. In 2009, he brought it to shows and demonstrated its seaworthiness in several lakes. To commemorate the 60th anniversary of David Tapp's publicity tractor, Martin's nephew Ollie drove the replica in the 2023 Fleet Carnival parade.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Martin Fernihough, Worcestershire, U.K.



Replica of 4-WD Sea Horse tractor.



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