



After working for several years to acquire this Best Tracklayer from a Nebraska rancher, Ted and Doug Shultz restored it to "like-new" condition.

## They Restored A Century Old Best Tracklayer

Doug Shultz says that old crawler tractors were once prominent in Western Nebraska hay country, but acquiring them from owners who hold them close to the vest can be difficult. That was the case when he and his father, Ted, were on a "junking" trip in the late 1990s. They stopped to visit grassland farmer Gilbert Fox, who collected gas engines and owned a C.L. Best Model 30 Tracklayer. Ted says it was a rusted

relic, but he and Doug saw it as a definite restoration project.

Doug peeled back the canvas covering the Tracklayer to reveal an engine without a head cover. Water collected in the exposed pistons. Parts were missing, and the tracks were thoroughly rusted. The Shultzes asked about buying it, but Fox declined. In the next few years, Doug and his dad made several trips to the Fox farm, and he promptly declined to sell

them the Best. Ted Shultz eventually offered to trade Fox single-cylinder gas engines for the Best, and Fox accepted.

Doug says it was one of the happiest days of his life and one of the cleverest deals his dad ever made. It was also the start of a long and strenuous process to bring the 30 back to working condition. The engine was locked up, and several small parts were missing, including the air cleaner and the intake expansion tube. The valve cover, spark plug cover and magneto were broken but in good enough condition to provide a template for new castings.

Doug honed the cylinders, installed new rings and cleaned up the connecting rods and bearings to bring the engine back to life. Some valves had to be replaced, and others were refurbished. Most of the radiator fins were wavy and bent, so rather than buying a replacement radiator, Ted meticulously straightened every crooked fin over two days, one at a time.

Despite its weathered condition, the Best's transmission only required minor adjustments. Ted removed and disassembled the tracks, then sandblasted the pads one at a time and painted them bright red. New pins and rollers brought the tracks back to like-new condition. Other mechanical work included casting a new air cleaner expansion tube and making a weed guard to protect the radiator. Jerry Gast of Wapello, Iowa, made the new metal canopy and side curtains.

Ted sandblasted the entire machine, then primed and finished it with black paint. He

hand-painted the gold BEST raised letters on each side and had special decals made for the gas tank, grease cups and other attachments.

Ted says the restoration took him and Doug nearly a year to complete, but the time and effort were definitely worthwhile. Doug says their century-old 1923 model 30 is a scaled-down version of the Best 60, both primarily used in construction and forestry. They eventually saw duty on ranches because their excellent traction and flotation made them ideal for pulling large stacks of loose hay from fields to stockyards.

The Shultz's 1923 Best weighs about 8,100 lbs. Its 4-cyl. engine produces 32 1/2 maximum brake hp. and 26 hp. on the drawbar. The carburetor is an Ensign Model GT, and the ignition is a model ZR4 Bosch Magneto. Doug says the engine usually starts on the second crank, and both Shultzes agree it's one of their favorite projects.

If the restored Best appears to be a relative of early Caterpillar models, there's an easy explanation. C. L. Best and Holt Mfg. Co. merged in April 1925 to form the Caterpillar Tractor Company. Early Caterpillar models were based on Best's tracklayer designs. C.L. Best was CAT's first chairman, and manufacturing was done at Holt's East Peoria, Ill., plant.

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"Most of these tractors are paired with volunteer adopters who take care of them and run them at shows and reunions," says Alex Campbell, museum volunteer.

## Museum Specializes In Hart-Parr Tractors

In 1903, Hart-Parr began manufacturing what became known as the first successful farm tractor powered by an internal combustion engine. By the 1920s, they had built a strong export division and began casting the destination country name into their tractor's radiators.

A shortcoming of the early Hart-Parrs was brands like I.H. used three forward speeds while they only had two. In 1927, Hart-Parr introduced their first 3-speed model, sending a few to New Zealand labeled as "Specials."

The New Zealand Specials began with the 12-24 designation but carried over into the 18-36 and 28-50 models. Differences between the U.S. and New Zealand versions were the front axles, the rear spokes, and the wheel band thickness. The 12-24H featured upgraded pistons designed for higher compression. It was also a 3-fuel machine that could burn kerosene, distillate or gasoline. It would start on gasoline before switching to one of the other options once warm. An interesting component of the U.S. tractors was a winch drive perfect for oil field work, usually mounted under the fuel tank.

The Manitoba Agricultural Museum is

home to numerous Hart-Parr tractors, many in running condition.

"Most of these tractors are paired with volunteer adopters who take care of them

and run them at shows and reunions," says Alex Campbell, museum volunteer. "All the Hart-Parr models were good, simple tractors that the average farmer could repair without having detailed knowledge."

Campbell says a valuable component of Hart-Parr's reputation on the prairies was a widespread dealership network of parts and services.

"This network was crucial for their longevity," Campbell says. "Manufacturers without parts and service outlets suffered and quickly

became unserviceable. The parts and service network was the main reason Oliver bought Hart-Parr in 1929."

Campbell invites anyone interested in learning more about these unique and "Special" tractors to stop at the Museum for a friendly visit.

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The "New Hart Parr" was a tractor equipped with a two-cylinder, slow-speed, water-cooled engine with force-feed lubrication and open gears used to drive the rear wheels.

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