



Dufner's "830 Special" is a 6-WD powerhouse that uses three 830 engines to produce 300 hp.

## Deere Tractor Imagineer Rolls On

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

Don Dufner, Buxton, N.D., reminisces back to 1958 when he says, "I had a lot of time to think while spending 10 days on the seat of a 720 Deere, pulling a four-bottom plow over 320 acres. It was time-consuming and tedious, and I knew I had to be more productive."

In 1960, the energetic Dufner bought a Deere D for \$65, removed its front axle, and built a sub-frame to hook to the drawbar of a 720 Deere. He rode the front tractor while the rear tractor pushed. The setup nearly doubled his plowing efficiency. The coupled-together rig worked so well that a neighbor suggested, "If two are better than one, Don, I bet three will be better than two." With that suggestion, Dufner bought two more Ds for \$60 and \$55, and in 1965, put all three together in a triple-hitch. Again, his farming efficiency improved.

A few years later, he bought two Deere 830s, took them apart bolt by bolt and then, with engineering cleverness and a lot of head-scratching over three years, coupled them together into an articulated four-wheel drive. His sons and a neighbor helped. A 1994 story in FARM SHOW (Vol. 18, No. 6) described the build in great detail.

"I had both tractors, and they were tired and worn out, so we rebuilt them into a 180-hp. 4-WD tractor that only burns 7 gal. of fuel an hour. It has two 75-gal. fuel tanks. Both tractors have six-speed transmissions, so that I can work in third or fourth gear." The first winter, they reworked the engines; the second, they spent designing and building the coupling mechanism and mounting the cab from a Deere 8630. They refined the cab the third winter, hooking up all the controls and testing its operation.

Two decades later, in 2004, FARM SHOW featured Dufner again (Vol. 28, No. 1), describing his 830 Special, featuring three 830s coupled in line. The 6-wheel-drive masterpiece produced 300 hp. "My sons and I used that for probably 1,300 hrs. over the years," Dufner says. "It easily pulled a 12-bottom 3700 Deere plow, which we've demonstrated at farm shows in the Dakotas, Minnesota and Illinois." It's also been a favorite at tractor pulls, often dragging the sled well past the finish line.

"I like the 830 because, from 1958 to 1961, it had an excellent 7.7L 470-cu. in. diesel engine. It was rated at 69 drawbar hp. and 75 belt. It was a six-bottom plow tractor that sold new for \$5,774. The 830s I used for the triple had been worked hard, and I bought them for just a few hundred dollars each."

The front engine of his setup is over the front wheels, complete with a hood. The middle engine is under the Sound Guard cab over the middle wheels, and the rear engine with a hood is over the rear wheels. The gear shifter for the front tractor is at the base of the steering console inside the Sound Guard

cab. The middle and rear shifters are at the base of the seat. The three hydraulic levers in the cab are repurposed for three throttles. "I can work them together or independently, whatever the load requires," Dufner says.

A self-taught mechanic who isn't afraid to tackle any project, Dufner was just out of high school when he worked on his first two-cylinder, a beat-up old Deere B that he bought for \$35. "Everything that could've been wrong definitely was," he says. "After I fixed it, we farmed with it for several years, and it ran great."

That first dip into home shop mechanics has continued for 70 years. "I've always liked the two-cylinders because they're easy to work on and efficient," Dufner says. "In 1982, I was visiting with a fellow from Minot who liked that I had about 30 of them. He said, 'We should start a two-cylinder club.' I told him to get it going, and I'll be the first to sign on." Dufner did that soon after; today, the organization has several thousand members worldwide. Over the same time, Dufner bought and refurbished or restored nearly 200 two-cylinder tractors. He and his family used several of them in their farming

operation, matching the tractor horsepower to the respective equipment.

"I never bought a new tractor and never bought a 4-WD," Dufner says. "Since I could work on the two cylinders, we always had plenty of power on hand." He still owns several collectible Deeres, including some very rare and one-of-a-kind models. Several older Deere combines are in his sheds, along with a large stock of parts for two-cylinder models purchased from dealers when Deere switched to four and six-cylinder engines.

In addition to farming up to 3,000 acres for many years, Dufner has been a lifelong tractor-pulling enthusiast. In 1964, he "pepped up" a 1935 40-hp. Deere D and out pulled a new International 706. That gave him the pulling bug, and he overhauled engines on several tractors for field work and pulling.

"A few years ago, I put an Allison aircraft engine in an old two-cylinder R," Dufner says. "I had to put it in sideways, and when people saw it, they thought I was plum crazy. Here it is, a 1,500 to 1,700-hp. engine in a 45-hp. tractor. My son Dan has it in his shop now, trying to figure out why it likes to cough. Maybe it's because it uses 5 gal. of fuel a minute when under load." The pulling giant has 30.5 x 32 tires. First gear is set up for 30 mph rather than the 2.5 mph on the original R.

Now, in his eighth decade on the farm and over six decades of rebuilding, restoring



Don Dufner has become famous for his decades of unique tractor builds.

and maintaining tractors, Dufner has turned most of the farming duties over to his sons and grandsons. He enjoys maintaining his collection and attending shows and special events. "I've been at it all my life, and I'm going to keep at it as long as I can," he says with a strong note of determination.

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Dufner put an Allison aircraft engine on a Deere R frame, creating a tractor-pulling monster.



The 830 special pulling a 12-bottom plow.

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