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Charlie English III shares his family's passion for Deere tractors.

Family Preserves John Deere Gold

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

Gold John Deere tractors will always be a bond for the English family in Evansville, Ind. Charles English Sr., who started it all and passed away in 2024, left behind two full-size tractors, one half-size tractor, and four 1/16-scale models, all in gold.

“Dad always liked the Deere D. The first tractor he bought was a 1930 in 1968,” says Charlie English Jr., noting that was the beginning of 56 years of collecting and restoring the tractors in his Evansville, Ind., farm shop.

After Charlie Sr. learned about a gold Deere D at a toy show and purchased four golden 1/16-scale models, he began a mission to find the gold tractor Deere built in 1937 to celebrate its centennial year. An article in the September 3, 1938, “Implement & Tractor” reported that Francis Gooden won the bid to buy the gold tractor for his Kingfisher, Okla., dealership. Later, he sold it to George Hancock for the same price as a regular Deere D.

Hancock didn't coddle the tractor while working his land. He put many miles on it just traveling between his two farms, 19 miles apart, until 1955, when he traded it at a Massey-Harris dealership. William Beecher, a farmer and part-time worker at the dealership, bought it and worked the tractor (with a new coat of green paint) hard. Later, he learned about its golden history, and around 1970, he took it apart to restore it. But he never got around to it.

When Charlie Sr. traced the tractor's history, he contacted Beecher and offered to buy it. Beecher wasn't interested in selling, but the two became friends, and when Beecher died in 1997, his family honored his wishes to sell it to Charlie Sr.

“Everything was worn out. We figured it had 20,000 working hours. There were grooves under the axle from wheat stubble that rubbed against it,” Charlie Jr. recalls. But there was still gold paint under the rear

Mounted plow was from a David Bradley walk-behind tractor. His son Duane added the dual wheels.



65-Year-Old Shop-Built Tractor Wins Special Award

Duane Zuleger says that even though his father Earl, who passed away in 2022 at age 95, was an avid reader of FARM SHOW, he never submitted story ideas for some of the things he built. Zuleger says, “One of his timeless inventions was a small tractor he built over four years from 1960 to 1964. I have the tractor now and take it to tractor and car shows and drive it in parades. In 2024, I received a special award called ‘Father's Choice,’ which seems very fitting since my dad took a lot of pride in building the tractor.”

Earl Zuleger built the tractor from an unusual collection of parts, including a 1952 Crosley 44-cu. in. engine with a Volkswagen carburetor and a Ford tractor governor. He used the Crosley's three-speed transmission and added a second one with the steering gearbox. The front wheel hubs are from a 1938 DeSoto car, and the rear axle is from a 1959 Ford car. The hydraulic system is powered by a starter motor. A gas engine

on the back provides live hydraulics to lift attachments. With the governor operating correctly, the tractor will do 20 mph.

“The tractor has a steering mechanism perfectly timed for tight corners,” Zuleger says. “The front tires won't skid because he patterned it after the cross members on a Ford tractor.” The shop-built tractor is 6 ft. long, 4 ft. wide and weighs about 1,600 lbs. It's fitted with a hydraulic loader that Zuleger built a few years after completing the tractor. He also has an 8-in. moldboard plow for it.

“A few years ago, we struggled to get it started, and I realized the oil pressure was low. I located parts for the Crosley and put in rings, wrist pins, bushings, gaskets and a new oil pump,” Zuleger says. “Now it produces 45 lbs. of pressure with 30 wt. oil.”

Zuleger says his dad had a rare mechanical ability even though he only completed 8th grade. He went to tech school to learn how to read blueprints and worked for many years

fenders as proof of its origins and to help match the color to modern paint.

His dad spent 625 hours restoring it, including the engine, and buying new parts, such as the fenders, to make it look like a “showroom tractor.”

“Our idea was never to run the tractor,” Charlie Jr. says. “We're just trying to keep it showroom new.”

It always attracted attention at the 120 shows his father attended. It was recently on display at the Classic Green Show in Tennessee. The English family moves the tractor using winches, and when not on the road, it's securely stored in an enclosed trailer in a barn.

Since the tractor would never be driven, Charlie Sr. built a half-scale version for his grandson, Charlie English III. A 3 1/2-hp Briggs & Stratton engine powers the hydrostatic drive rear end of a Deere Model 316 lawn tractor. With help from family and friends, it took about 600 hrs. to complete, and by the time it was finished, Charlie III was almost too big to get in the seat, Charlie Jr. recalls.

However, the young man cherished both tractors and Charlie Sr. gave his grandson the 1937 gold tractor at the Classic Green Reunion in Grand Island, Neb., in 2019.

Charlie III, now 18, hopes to attend Purdue and earn a mechanical engineering degree in honor of his grandpa.

The English family inherited eight Deere D tractors “that we can play with,” Charlie Jr. says. One was painted gold to resemble the original, which Charlie Jr. gave to his daughter Emily.

“I would like for Charlie (III) to pass the tractor down to his kids to keep it in the family,” Charlie Jr. says. “And we'll do as many shows as we can manage.”

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at Fox Tractor Manufacturing in Appleton, Wis.

“He told me he started building things as a young adult and never stopped,” Zuleger says. “When he got out of the Army, he built a vehicle with a flipped-over Buick front car axle, a Buick engine and two transmissions. He also took the rear end and transmission from a Massey-Harris 44 tractor and built a vehicle powered with a Chevy 235-cu. in. truck engine. He built a cab for it and mounted a loader with an 80-in. wide bucket so he could plow snow at our church.”

Zuleger is now reading through his father's collection of FARM SHOW magazines, which date back several years. “That was probably his favorite publication because he enjoyed learning about other people's inventions. Not everyone has the imagination and skill to create machines and equipment out of totally different parts, but he sure did.”

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A small red engine on the back of Earl Zuleger's shop-built tractor was his way of creating live hydraulics to raise and lower attachments.