



Steer Wrestler - This statue of a rodeo cowboy at work is one of an amazing collection of 45 life-size statues Olsen has created. Many are scattered around his farmyard.

THOUSANDS OF VISITORS FLOCK TO FARM EVERY YEAR

“Genius” Farmer Creates Western Works Of Art

FARM SHOW received a letter from Canadian farmer Harold King a while back telling us about a “genius” farmer-inventor-artist up on the prairies in Alberta.

“You’ve got to see what he’s got on his farm to believe it. There’s no place like it in the world,” said King about Murray Olsen who has put together a world class collection of rural sculptures, inventions, mini-tractors, animated characters and other creations over the past 20 years on his farm near Munson. Thousands of visitors flock to the farm every year to take a free tour.

“One time 24 buses pulled into the yard at once carrying 1,040 people. That was an accident - they were supposed to arrive in staggered groups - but we took care of them,” says Olsen, who supplies all visitors with coffee, juice or, if it’s later in the day, a “happy hour” drink. He does it all free of charge.

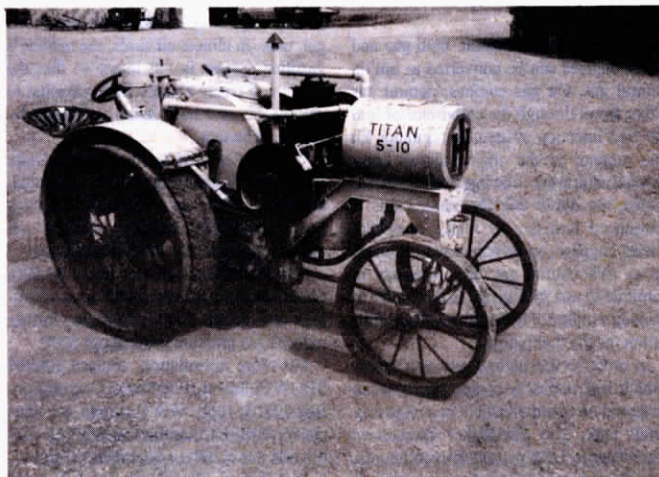
“My wife and I are trying to preserve our western heritage. We hope that the statues and other work might inspire younger people to better remember,” says Olsen, who has created 45 life-size statues, with many of them still on his farm. “I’ve never sold any of them but I’ve made some on special order for others, receiving payment only for materials.”

Visitors are welcome but Olsen has not made an effort to get on the “tourist map” for several reasons. First of all, he and his wife are gone all weekends from April to November following a regional rodeo association around the country in their motorhome. Secondly, he’s concerned about the liability policy he would have to carry if he started advertising. And thirdly, he likes the fact that when people show up by word of mouth they’re really serious and “not just looking for a place to turn their kids and dogs loose for the day”.

All statues are made out of ordinary cement and scrap iron. “They’re hard materials to work with but are reasonably cheap,” says Olsen. He puts a “time capsule” into each of the statues before sealing them up. Each capsule contains latest stamps, coins, newspapers and other goodies. Olsen notes that two neighbors, Dave Hardy and Les Jespersen, have given him a lot of help and advice over the years.

Olsen’s only training in art came at the “School of H.K. where he majored in T & E”. That’s the School of Hard Knocks where he majored in Trial and Error.

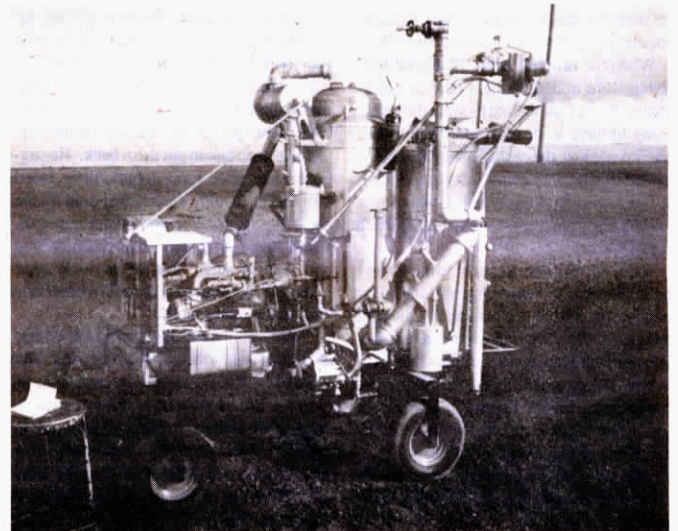
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Half-Scale Titan 10-20 - Olsen calls it a “5-10”. It runs and sounds like the real thing. Olsen also restored a full-size 1919 Titan.



John Deere “D” - Built-from-scratch 1/2-scale Deere “D” has rubber tread fastened over steel wheels. All of Olsen’s mini tractors sound like the tractors they’re modeled after. He couldn’t find a suitable 2-cyl., horizontal engine of the right size so he made his own by cutting two cylinders out of an upright block, 4-cyl. AC “B” engine and then welding the block, head, cam and crank back together. He also had to remodel the cooling system and put in a new oiling system. The result sounds just like a real “D”. But instead of a crank it has a 12-volt starter.



Wood-Smoke Engine - This is a gas engine rigged up to run on wood-smoke. According to Olsen, “It takes 1/2-hr. to get it into operation but it runs equally as well on wood gas as on gasoline. I warm the motor on gasoline and then switch to wood-smoke. Control panel has 27 controls plus 17 valves. Once it’s warmed up there’s no smoke visible. I made the final filters out of cheese cloth bags full of pine cones. They collect a lot of tar before smoke enters the motor.”



Tractor Burning Barrel - This pile of spare parts looks like a mini tractor but it’s actually a trash burning barrel rigged up to look like a tractor. Trash goes into a door just ahead of the tractor seat and smoke goes up the chimney in front.