



Four-bale model picks up 4 bales sitting side by side. To load bales, rear support wheels raise up hydraulically so you can back over bales, using 3-pt. to hold rig up.



Two-bale model picks up 2 side-by-side bales. Loader-mounted bale fork grabs two bales at once.

LETS YOU PICK UP 6 BALES AT A TIME WITH ONE SMALL TRACTOR

By Bill Gergen, Associate Editor

New-Style Bale Hauler Squeezes From The Top



Although they look like recreation vehicles, these "dune buggies" do a lot of work.

"THEY'RE A LOT OF FUN TO DRIVE AND WORK GREAT FOR DOING CHORES"

Nebraskans Farm With Home-Built "Dune Buggies"

A group of farmers near Davenport, Neb., have been converting old Volkswagen Beetle cars into dune buggies for over 20 years. They say they're a lot of fun to drive but also pay their way doing farm chores.

Brothers Steve and Doug Harms, along with their father Vic and Steve's son Scott, say they use the "buggies" to check furrow irrigation ditches and cattle, and also to haul supplies to the field. "We even drive them to town for parts," says Doug.

The Harms's currently use four buggies for work - and some play - and a fifth buggy for "Sunday driving."

"We put 3,500 to 4,000 miles a year on each of them," says Doug. "They work better than 4-wheel ATV's because we can build them cheap and because we can drive them on the highway. They're more fuel efficient than most pickups. We get 28 to 32 mpg even though we drive them fairly hard. Licensing and insurance is also less expensive. We don't carry collision insurance because if we ever damage a buggy we can do most of the repair work ourselves. We can get parts at any auto salvage yard. The buggies are built strong so we can drive them as hard as we want. If we abused our



Here's what the view looks like from inside home-built dune buggies.

pickups like we abuse them, we'd have to spend a lot of money on repairs."

The Harms's use the VW's front and rear axles, front and rear suspension system, air-cooled gas engine, 4-speed transmission, and speedometer, mounted on a commercially-built frame made from 1 1/2-in. sq. steel tubing. Heavy-duty torsion bars are added in back. A steel rollbar padded with

Robert Vickaryous, Porthill, Idaho, can haul six big round bales at a time using a loader tractor and his new "over-the-top" bale retriever.

The 3-pt. mounted 4-bale retriever unit works together with a 2-bale loader fork. Vickaryous uses the bale fork to set groups of 4 bales together in the field. To pick up the bales with the bale retriever, he backs the unit over the bales by raising the rear wheels and support arms up in the air. Once in position over the bales, he uses hydraulics to push the side-mounted bale spear arms into the bales. Then he lowers the rear support wheels and raises the 3-pt. to lift the bales off the ground.

To unload, he lowers the 3-pt., raises the side arms, and then lifts the rear wheels and drives ahead.

He uses the loader fork to stack bales two at a time onto trucks or inside his barn, or to place them in portable bunk feeders.

"It's a simple, cost efficient way to move bales. Works terrific," says Vickaryous, who operates a cow-calf operation. "After they're unloaded, the bales are in position to pick up with the loader fork. Hauling six bales at a

time saves a lot of wear and tear on my tractor and greatly increases my hay handling production.

"If bales are scattered out in the field, I can pick up 2 bales at a time with the retriever and drive to the next pair of bales and unload. Then I use the loader to stack the four bales together."

Vickaryous has also built a 2-bale model without rear support wheels. Two sets of hydraulic outlets are needed for the 4-bale model and one set for the 2-bale model. The arms on both models can be adjusted to handle 5 by 5 or 5 by 6-ft. round bales, or 4 by 5-ft. sq. bales.

The loader fork is equipped with two spears, one of which is hydraulically operated to "clamp" the two bales together. Another cylinder is used to tilt the bales forward or backward.

The 4-bale retriever sells for \$4,500, the 2-bale model for \$2,500, and the loader fork for \$2,500.

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foam protects the driver and also protects the rear-mounted engine. The body and rear fenders are made from sheet metal.

"We originally used the VW chassis and mounted a fiberglass body on it," says Doug. "However, we decided we wanted something safer and more durable so we switched to a sheet metal body and a steel frame."

The engine has 65 to 70 hp. A steel skid plate welded under the engine and transmission provides protection from corn stalks, rocks, etc. In order to make room for the skid plate, some "cooling tin" is removed from the bottom of the engine.

A screen mounted over the engine's air intake keeps out weed seeds, chaff, grass, leaves, etc., and helps prevent overheating of the air-cooled engine.

The buggies have 4-point harnesses on both of the dual bucket seats, emergency brakes, high-beam and low-beam headlights, turn signals, and home-built windshields. The windshield sits in a frame that comes out by removing two screws. "Removing the windshields makes it easier to see thistles in pastures," says Steve. "To comply with vehicle laws we installed windshield wipers that are operated by a handle mounted inside."

The rear tires have a deep tread for digging into muddy ground. Old used tires fenders mount on front. "We put only 12 to 15 psi in the front tires because they don't carry a lot of weight," says Doug. "To improve traction, we can lock each rear wheel individually with a hand-operated cutting brake located next to the gear shift lever. Pushing the lever forward brakes the rear left wheel, and pulling the lever back brakes the right rear wheel."

Plugs attached to the battery make it easy to use the buggy to jump-start irrigation engines or other vehicles. A tow bar on front can be used to tow the buggy to the field. When not in use, the tow bar can be folded up and stored on the bumper. A hitch on back can be used to tow equipment.

A storage compartment under the front hood is used for storing tools, rain suits, boots, etc., and also provides access to the instrument panel, foot pedals, and steering box.

The men are currently working on a propane-powered buggy.

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