

"Owner's Report" On Best, Worst Skid Steer Loaders

Are you satisfied with your newest skid steer loader? How could it be improved? Have you modified your skid loader in any way? What accessories have you bought for it?

These are some of the questions we asked randomly selected farmers and ranchers in an effort to highlight those loaders that perform with flying colors, and to pinpoint the "lemons" that fail because of poor performance, or failure of the dealer or company to provide service.

Here's how the survey shaped up:

"If I ever quit farming I'll be more than qualified to be a **Ford New Holland** skid steer mechanic," says Port Perry, Ontario, farmer David Bacon. "All hell broke loose," Bacon says, soon after the 1,000-hour warranty on his 1990 Ford New Holland 781 expired, eventually costing him over \$6,500 in repairs and countless hours of down time. "Altogether I've had five drive chains and five hydraulic pumps replaced. The big problem is its hydraulic system, which I - and every professional I've ever talked to - believe is a factory design problem. I've complained to the company verbally but, like most things, once the warranty has ended they could care less." Despite all the other problems, Bacon has had "absolutely no problem" with the vehicle's 3-cyl. Deutz engine.

"On a scale of one to 10, I'd rate it a seven," says Dennis Wacker, Osmond, Neb., of his 1980 **Deere** 90 built by Owatonna Manufacturing Co. "Maintenance on the engine and hydraulics is rather difficult, since it's a compact machine. In 1987, the timing gears needed replacing, and the labor was more than double the parts cost. To me, that indicates the design could be improved. If I had it to do over again, I'd probably check out the a Melroe Co.'s Bobcat."

"It has been a very good machine," reports David Miller, Kalona, Iowa, on his 1968 **Bobcat** 610. "It has needed some repairs along the way but we've put on countless hours and use it every day. It's done some really tough jobs and is built like a ton of bricks. The Wisconsin gas engine is its weak point, but they've made some improvements in that along the way."

"We have over 2,500 hours on our 1970 **Bobcat** 610 and it still runs great with little upkeep," says Larry Richards, Ellendale, Minn. "The only thing it needs is a parking brake."

"I sold Bobcats for a while and I particularly loved the 743," says Charles Hypes, Riner, Va. "I drove a **Case-IH** not too long ago and it's a pretty good copy of a Bobcat."

"I had a Bobcat before and the **Mustang** is a lot better," says Marvin Ballmann,

tough to work on," says Lance Johnson, Alcester, S. Dak., of his 1976 **Rounder** L600. "This model of Rounder is very hard to do any type of hydraulic work on," he says. "Replacing a hose or drive belt is difficult at best."

"It does the job," says Raymond Jerz, Decatur, Mich., of his late 1980's **Case-IH** 1835C. However, Jerz wishes the manufacturer would have equipped it with sliding counter weights to help balance the machine for loading on inclines.

•Donald Lehnert, Sand Lake, Mich., says his 1978 **Case** 1845B has run for 15,000 nearly trouble-free hours. "The only engine work I've ever done to it was when I broke through a frozen pond I was scraping to make into a skating rink," Lehnert says. "I drained the water from the cylinders and it started right back up. My only complaint is that I wish it was easier to work on the drive sprockets - I've had to rebuild them twice - and chains. The sprockets and chains have to be removed through very small cover holes."

•Shawn McKay, Creighton, S. Dak., likes his 1978 550 **Bobcat** for its "handleability" and low maintenance costs. But "the cost of parts and accessories is getting out of hand," he he notes.

"It's easy to operate," says Mahlon Nepp, Lake Wilson, Minn., who's happy with his 1992 **Bobcat** 440B. "We've got 500 hours on it and use it daily."

"Fuel economy is good and its two big oil filters keep the engine oil cleaner than any I've ever seen," says A.S. Tucker, Jr., Powhatan, Va., of his 1990 **Hesston** 90-100. "The tractor starts easily and still has the original battery. It also has an air conditioned cab, a comfortable seat and the sound-proofing is excellent," he says.

•Clinton Johnson, Eagle Bend, Minn., is generally well pleased with his 1994 **Bobcat** 743 with Kubota engine. However, this is the third Bobcat Johnson's owned, and it has the same aggravating problem as the first two. "It's very hard to put oil back in when you change oil," he says. "I put a nipple and coupling on to make it easier to pour it in."

•Dale Emerson's 1994 **Ford New Holland** LX 665 Turbo "performs well under all conditions and gets great fuel economy," according to the Franklinville, N.C., farmer. However, the sides of the cab should be padded to protect elbows which have a tendency to bump in rough terrain, he adds.

"It's a pleasure to operate, with plenty of power and good fuel efficiency," says John Neuman, Baraboo, Wis., of his 1991 **Case-IH** 1825 DSL. However, along with a few other things, Neuman doesn't like having to pound pins out of mountings every time he changes buckets. Instead, he'd prefer a lever like Ford New Holland's to use to change buckets.

•Ray Tuchscherer's 1975 **Bobcat** M610 has "an amazing amount of power for its

size," says the Langley, B. C., farmer. If he were in the market for another skid loader, Tuchscherer says he'd probably buy a **Bobcat** 753 for its balance of power, size and lift capacity.

•Kenny Corman, Superior, Neb., has had two **Gehl** skid steers, including his 1990 3510, and says they're easy to handle and control. Nevertheless, "I wish the engine oil dip stick and oil port, which are hard to get at, were located more conveniently."

"Our 1981 **Bobcat** 642 has been an excellent performer," says Robert Gould, Swift Current, Sask. "We had a little trouble with the hydraulic pump, but that's to be expected with age and considering how much we use it."

•Even with over 4,400 hours on it,

Leander Maus, Albany, Minn., says his 1983 **Bobcat** 743 with diesel engine remains "almost trouble-free". However, Maus notes that the single hydraulic cylinder on the bucket seems a bit weak, and would prefer two cylinders.

•Quick and nimble but with a "troublesome" Onan engine. That's how Paul Nolte describes his 1984 **Lahman** L20. "The engine didn't stand up well at 1,000 hours and now needs a complete overhaul or replacement," says the Sebeka, Minn., farmer. "Along with a better engine, the vehicle should have less steel pipe in its hydraulic system since vibration causes the pipes to break."

•"I'm real satisfied with my 1978 **Bobcat** 610. We've had no extraordinary problems



Farm-Built Skid Steer "Good As Factory-Built"

When John Thiessen put up a new farrow-to-finish barn five years ago, he started looking at new skid steer loaders to use for cleaning it out. Problem was, he couldn't justify the price of anything on the market.

"If I could have justified the price of a Bobcat or Case, I would have bought one," says Thiessen, Glenville, Manitoba. "But I didn't want to pay \$20,000 for one."

So Thiessen built his own 4-WD skid steer with hydrostatic transmission for a fraction of what commercial loaders cost. He built the unit for about \$3,000.

"We used mostly new materials - engine, wheels, sprockets, chains, etc. - and hydrostatic drives out of 400 Versatile swathers. We put a new 18 hp Briggs & Stratton motor in the rear to drive it," says Thiessen. "I started with the wheels and built it from the ground up."

He used new 14 in.-diameter by 4-in. wide wheel rims on 4 ft. axles he made himself. The axles are 1 3/8-in. diameter steel shafts with 5/8-in. metal plates on each end for wheel hubs.

The loader is 4 ft. wide by 6 ft. long by about 5 ft. high at the highest point of its rollover bar, which is made out of 2 by 3-in. steel tubing. The skid steer's main frame is made of 3 by 5-in. steel tubing. The loader frame itself is made out of 2 by 3 in.-tubing, as are the loader arms.

Hydraulics for the arms are supplied by the same cylinders used on Allied tractor front end loaders, Thiessen says.

Thiessen elected to use infinitely



variable hydrostatic transmission to eliminate the need to shift gears, a feature he didn't like on some of the commercial models he looked at.

The hydraulic pump is driven by two V-belts off the engine. There's a clutch on the belts so the pump can be disengaged for easier cold weather starts. Maximum speed of the loader is 8 mph, and one of Thiessen's neighbors who drove it told him it "drives better than a Bobcat," he says.

"We use it nearly every day," says Thiessen.

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"I'd like to see sliding weights that could be operated electronically or hydraulically from the operator's seat."

Massville, Ark., about his 1986 **Mustang** 440 from Owatonna Manufacturing Co. Although Ballmann says he'd buy another Mustang, he would like to see sliding weights that could be operated electronically or hydraulically from the driver's seat to increase the machine's stability.

•It's been extremely dependable but