

VALUE OF ANTIQUE TOYS SKYROCKETS

Toy Hobby Became A Full-Time Business

By C.F. Marley

Kurt Aumann can't remember a time when he wasn't hooked on toy farm tractors. While he's certainly not alone in his interest, few people have been able to turn the hobby into a money-making enterprise the way he did.

Aumann first gained fame as a 12-year-old when he became one of the youngest professional auctioneers ever to work a farm sale. He started out working with his father Nelson Aumann, an auctioneer and realtor in Nokomis, Ill. At the age of 18, Aumann made news again when he started his own antique tractor magazine, THE BELT PULLEY, an "all-brand" antique tractor magazine that goes to collectors and anyone else interested in old tractors. Aumann, who is now 25, now serves thousands of subscribers all over the U.S. and Canada with his magazine.

All along Aumann has had a strong interest in toy tractors and, as an auctioneer, he has finally been able to combine his interest in toy collecting with his business of

auctioneering. Collectors from all over the country with toy collections to sell contact him. And when he has a sale coming up, he has a national mailing list of collectors which he notifies.

FARM SHOW recently attended an Aumann auction where he sold off the collection of Bill and Geneva Tichenor, Charleston, Ill. It was a large collection that was started over 30 years ago. In fact, it was such an outstanding collection, Aumann advertised it nationally in toy tractor magazines. People came from 16 states and Canada.

Aumann estimates there are probably at least 90,000 farm toy collectors in the U.S., based on the fact that TOY FARMER, the largest farm toy collecting magazine, has more than 30,000 paid subscribers.

"It's gotten to the point where many farm toys actually bring in more than their full-size counterparts," Aumann notes. "For example, at an auction last year a Farmall 'H' pedal tractor with an open grille sold



Photo shows Kurt Aumann at work. "Some toys bring more than their full-size counterparts," he notes.

for \$2,000. At the same sale, a cast iron Caterpillar, made by the Arcade company in the 1930's, brought \$1,375. At another sale, a pedal tractor umbrella alone brought in \$800. And recently, a New Idea one-row corn picker, which originally sold for \$3 new, sold for \$475.

Aumann says he's even sold toy boxes with no toys in them for as much as \$700. Toy collecting, he notes, has really come

into its own the past 10 years. "There have always been farm toy collectors but early collectors didn't want to admit it. They were 'closet collectors'."

For more information about Aumann Auctions, or subscription information for THE BELT PULLEY, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Kurt Aumann, Aumann Auctions, 107 E. State, Nokomis, Ill. 62075.

STARTED BUILDING MODELS AT AGE 12

Farmer Builds Detailed Farm Toys From Scratch

By Alice and Robert Tupper

John Hass started making detailed models of his parents' farm equipment when he was 12 years old because purchased toys were expensive and models of some of the equipment his family used didn't exist.

The retired farmer's first detailed built-from-scratch toy was a Deere D that even today compares favorably with other mini models built by adult toy enthusiasts. He followed up with a mini Allis Chalmers. Most parts on both tractors were carved out of wood.

As a boy, one of his jobs was tending the grain wagon along side the family's Case threshing machine. So, naturally, a mini thresher was his next project. He made the body out of wood covered with tin, and cut pulleys out of wood. Transport wheels are rollers taken from the chain carrier of a junked manure spreader.

When his family bought its first combine in 1946, Hass had to construct a mini copy of it - a Case pull-type. Several years later when they bought a Deere 45 self-propelled combine, Hass built one of his most detailed and authentic looking models. He put 365 hrs. into building the Deere 45, which is authentic in every detail.

Hass notes that some items on his mini models that don't look very difficult to do, actually often provide the biggest challenge. For example, fitting spring teeth to the Deere 45 combine's reel was not easy. When he would solder one of the small tines to the metal reel, the others would fall off. He finally discovered that if he clamped a vice grips to the reel next to the tine he was soldering, it would deflect enough heat so the others would stay cool.

In addition to farm toys, Hass has also made revolvers using a metal lathe. And he creates sculptures out of junk metal that



Hass built this self-propelled Deere combine from scratch.

dot the landscape around his Rock Rapids home. His latest project is a full-size ostrich family sitting along the road in the Hass front yard. He was able to observe real ostriches closely because his son-in-law raises them. The tall male ostrich has a full size standard mailbox hidden inside its breast. One of the feathers on the birds back is pivoted to swing up as the postman's flag.

One toy Hass built that kids enjoy is his push-pull 3-wheel cart. With their feet resting on the front wheel supports, and their hands on the "T" handle which connects to the rear axle, they can push or pull on the T-bar to propel the cart. One rear wheel is fastened solid to the crank handle, which rides around the wheel as the T handle is pumped. Hass has plans available for the push-pull cart.

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BUILT EXTRA HEAVY TO LAST

Farm Toys That Really Work

The pair of threshing machines really works. So do the silo filler, the corn and grain binders.

Nothing's so unusual about old farm machinery still humming along like the day it came off the assembly line, you say? Not until you consider that this "machinery" and more like it is all hand-crafted, scale models of the originals.

The farm toys are the handiwork of Al Van Beek, a St. Lawrence, Wis., priest who's become something of a celebrity after recent magazine articles in "Toy Farmer" and Wisconsin's "Agri-View."

"I have a big stack of cards and letters to answer," says Van Beek. "I guess a lot of other people are as fascinated with farm toys as I am."

What's remarkable about Van Beek's farm toys is they all work, thanks to painstaking study of the original implements they're patterned after. Study - including exhaustive measurement - of every inch of the original implements takes place on the farms of Van Beek's father and brothers. Further study of operator's manuals takes place at the parish rectory.

"I haven't built anything I haven't been able to examine first-hand," Van Beek says.

So far, that includes horse-drawn as well as power equipment.

A couple of Van Beek's more elaborate creations:

- A 1/12 scale model of a McCormick-Deering thresher, with 28-in. cylinder and 48-in. separator, manufactured by IHC between about 1925 and 1935. It was Van Beek's first made-from-scratch toy, taking four or five months to complete in 1982, and was patterned after a thresher his family had.

- A 1/16 scale model of a McCormick-Deering grain binder IHC manufactured from the 1920's into the early 1950's. Bind-



Half-scale McCormick-Deering thresher can actually be used to thresh grain.

ing and tying mechanisms as well as all levers and adjusting mechanisms work. It took Van Beek 6 months to build and was his most challenging project because of the large number of moving parts.

- A yet-to-be completed 1/16 scale model of a Belle City thresher manufactured in Racine, Wis., up until the 1950's.

Van Beek says his hobby sprang partly out of sibling rivalry between he and his eight brothers in trying to outdo each other building model farms when they were boys. "My brothers and I were making these kinds of things ever since I can remember," he says.

Van Beek also always liked to fix broken store-bought toys and is a collector, too.

The hardest part of building a working model, he says, is the brush or spray paint job at the end. First, the toys have to be taken almost completely apart to do so, he says. Then extra care has to be taken so paint doesn't clog tiny bearings, gears, chains, etc.

The best part of making the toys is in getting to play with them occasionally, he says. "I can 'thresh' right in my living room all year around," he says.

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