

"Owner's Report" On Caterpillar Challengers

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the radial tires on them tend to "power hop". It's hard on the tires and on the tractor drive train components. The problem is especially bad when pulling tillage implements in dry, hard ground. The company says this problem can be solved by varying the amount of air pressure in the tires according to the soil type, but we often have different soil types in each field. However, the 85C's list price of \$180,000 is about \$40,000 higher than a new 4-WD tractor with comparable horsepower.

"The cab and air conditioner controls on the Challenger aren't as nice as on the new Deere or Case-IH 4-WD tractors. However, the cab is built tough and will probably last just as long. The cab windows can't be opened. A hammer is supplied so that the driver can break the glass in case of a rollover."

"It does a good job for us and lets us get more work done with roughly the same horsepower. We really like it," says Lloyd Riedesel, Brookings, S. Dak., who has a 270 hp Challenger 65 with 3,500 hours. "We use it primarily for heavy tillage. We pull a 32-ft. tandem disk and 31-ft. chisel plow and may buy a 50-ft. field cultivator. It's a small size tractor for its power and doesn't take up nearly as much room in the shed as a big 4-WD with duals. The company souped the engine up to 285 hp by

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installing a redesigned muffler and changing the pump setting. I can use the extra power because lowering the chisel plow just 1/2 inch requires another 10 hp. The 285 hp rating on the Challenger compares well with a 325 hp wheeled tractor because of reduced slippage.

"The company installed heavier springs on each side of the front axle and rebuilt the rear end and front wheel bearings to withstand the extra pull. They also installed new seals on the bogey wheels. We haven't had any problems with the tracks themselves except for a bearing that went out on the front spindles. The company replaced it immediately. We have to change the oil on the bearings every year. The tracks should last 1 1/2 to 2 times as long as the tires on a 4-WD tractor. We'll have no problem putting 6,000 hours on them. One thing we like about the Challenger is that it doesn't leave deep tracks. We bought a disk for our Case-IH Magnum 95 195 hp tractor after we rented more ground and found that the tractor leaves tracks. We notice them when we plant.

"I'm interested in the row crop Challenger because we're thinking about switching to minimum tillage. Our dealer recently demonstrated a big new row crop model that won't be on the market for another year. One problem is that corn stalks tend to stick between the track and frame. The company installed steel plates to keep stalks out. The new tracks are wider than the wheels so they don't dig in as much when turning. Though we've never had a

problem turning.

"The dual fuel tanks are built into fenders out of the way. However, they don't fill up very fast because fuel has to flow from one tank to the other. We can't fill both tanks at the same time. Also, the fuel gauge doesn't work well because the tanks are long. The new models have a square tank behind the cab."

"It has good power, performs well, and is durable," says Albert Wollman, Warden, Wash., who nevertheless has had some problems with the Challenger he bought in May, 1987. He put 5,000 hours on the original model before trading it in for a 65. He also bought a 75 which now has about 4,000 hours on it. "The company has modified our tractor several times. The air conditioning system is marginal at best - on a hot day it doesn't have enough cooling capacity. We also had a lot of problems with the starter on the 65 in dusty conditions. The starter won't engage because dust gets in the bendix. The accumulator for the brakes wears out - we're on our fifth or sixth one. Each time it cost about \$1,200 to repair. We had to install new air cleaners because the filters kept plugging up, equipped with spouts to take in cleaner air above the cab. We had to clean them twice a day. The fan is noisy. The reason they have it is because the air conditioner is lousy.

"We use our new Challenger with our 3-pt. potato planter. We hooked two 4-row planters together to make an 8-row model. It's an excellent tractor for pulling rod weedeaters and for other drawbar work. It's a good 3-pt. tractor, too, except for the electronic control on the 3-pt. It's the worst I've ever seen on any tractor. The problem is that it goes up or down in jerky 1-in. increments instead of moving smoothly. When I move the control lever a little, nothing happens until the 3-pt. suddenly moves about 1 in. Makes it difficult to plant potatoes at the proper depth. To solve the problem I mounted a Senstek I automatic depth control system on the planter. It uses a computer to keep the implement working at the proper depth.

"The tracks have held up well although we get an occasional flat tire - the front idlers are actually a rubber tire and the sidewall blows out for some reason. It's a major job to change the inside one and requires a boom truck. We also had problems with bearings on the front wheel.

"What convinced us to buy the Challenger was that we borrowed our neighbor's Challenger because our 4-WD tractor didn't have a 3-pt. The wheel tractor sank in the ground, but the 265 hp Challenger ran off like it didn't even have a load. I'd buy another one. They cost a lot, but the rubber tracks allow the speed of a wheeled tractor and the traction of a crawler. The new 75 is built heavier and weighs more, but it doesn't turn a lot better. We rented a new 75 last spring equipped with 36-in. wide tracks. The wide tracks hang about 1 ft. over the outside of the wheel. They band up and slide over the ground instead of plowing. The belt has enough 'give' so that it curls up and slides over the soil."

• Thomas A. Harper, Simpson, Sask., bought a 355 hp 1993 Challenger 75 last winter that the company had used as a demonstrator model at farm shows. It had been updated to a 1994 machine. The update included new 30-in. wide tracks (the old ones

were 27 in. wide). "I didn't want a tractor this big but it was the only model I could get at the time. It cost \$174,800 equipped with a 12-ft. blade. However, I live in a deep valley where, in certain conditions, it takes crawler equipment to get out. The Challenger rides smoother than a wheeled tractor and is safer to use in the winter. I used the blade to clear snow from my neighbor's grain bins and to grade a road. I even used it to pull my neighbors out when their tractors got stuck. I bought a 45-ft. field cultivator which it handles easily. It's supposed to handle a 75 to 80-ft. air drill. My only complaint is with the blower fan. It's designed to pressurize the cab and comes on automatically whenever you start the tractor. However, there's no way to shut it off so it blows cold air over you until the cab warms up. In cold weather I really shiver inside the cab. I solved the problem by installing a switch so I can shut off the fan independently."

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pected in almost every situation. We get more work done with roughly the same horsepower," say Gerald and Brian Lacey, Wendell, Minn., about their 325 hp Challenger 75 which they bought two years ago. "With the Challenger we don't slip. It also rides smooth. If it's not too rough for the implement, it's not too rough for the Challenger. We use it a lot to pull a scraper for making drainage ditches. It's the first tractor we use in the spring because we can go across wet spots with less compaction and slippage. My only complaint is that it digs small furrows on headlands. We've learned to do the headlands last so that we don't have to work them twice. It's easy to service. They redesigned the fuel tank to go wrap around the back of the tractor instead

of going over the fenders. We had problems with the fuel gauge caused by metal filings in the bottom of the tank. Now they make better seam welds and have tanks with fewer chambers which seems to have solved the problem.

"We use it in the fall to pull a 58-ft. anhydrous ammonia applicator at 7 mph over very rough ground and to pull a 23-ft. chisel plow. We use it in the spring to get beet ground ready. We pull a 54-ft. field cultivator and a 30-ft. disk. It hardly leaves a track. My other complaint is that it costs about 25% more than a wheeled tractor for the same horsepower. The extra cost made the difference in our decision to buy a new Case-IH 9280 tractor instead of buying a new Challenger 85. We'd like to have it closer to 10% more expensive.

"I used it like a snowmobile last winter, following a river bank to some beaver dams which we blew up. It didn't sink into the snow at all. It has 1,300 hours but there still isn't much wear on the tracks."

• David Steritz, Hillsboro, Ohio, owns two model 65's that he bought in the late 1980's and a model 85 that he bought 1 1/2 years ago. "We use the 355 hp model 85C for primary tillage, pulling a 32-ft. Rome disk, 28-ft. field cultivator, 45-ft. field cultivator, and 12-bottom plow. We plan to buy a bigger field cultivator for it. We use the 65's for planting, sidedressing anhydrous ammonia, and pulling a grain cart and lime spreader that can be mounted interchangeably on rubber tracks. We used Kinze row units to build a pair of 3-pt. mounted, 13-row skip row corn planters. The 65's perform well and we really like the reduced soil compaction. The rubber tracks have held up well. When these tractors first came out they had some problems, but updates provided by the company have solved most of the problems. For example, bushings on the mid rollers tended to wear out prematurely and were replaced with bearings. The company also installed an oil cooler on the hydraulic system, improved the steering, and widened the tracks out. The new models are much improved. For example, the 85C has inboard brakes instead of outboard brakes and the tracks are on 90-in. centers."

"Stalk Bar" Saves Tractor, Combine Tires

Some North Dakota farmers have found a simple but effective way to save wear and tear on tractor and combine tires that run in sunflower fields where tough stalks can often spear tires and remove large chunks of rubber.

Oriska, N. Dak., neighbors Maynard Satrom and Steve Winters say they've only had to change tractor or combine tires once in the nearly 15 years since they started protecting their tires from sunflower stalks, which they cut short.

"I've seen tires that have grooves cut in them after five years," says Winters. "We haven't had anything like that. With our invention, it's just like going through a small grains field as far as stalk damage is concerned."

Satrom figures he's saved at least one set of tires every five years.

Satrom and Winters simply hang a pipe in front of tractor and combine tires, suspended by brackets on front of the machines.

"There's not much to it, really," says Winters, "other than that it works great." The men hang thick, heavy chains, from the brackets to support 4 to 5-in. dia. well pipe running the width of the tractor and tires - duals or triples.

The pipe can be filled with sand or gravel for extra weight. It runs 3 to 5 in.



off the ground. Because it hangs from a chain it's flexible enough to bump up if a tractor enters a low spot and the pipe hits the ground.

Satrom and the Winters take the pipe off tractors when not tilling or seeding into standing sunflower stubble.

On combines, the pipes are shorter than the ones used on tractors, but still hang 3 to 5 in. off the ground.

In either case, the farmers say they've seen nothing but usual tire wear in the last 10 or 15 years.

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