



All-steel Loegering tracks, shown here on a Gleaner, fit most combines and cost \$7,000 to \$9,000 per set.



The Piepers, of Iowa, offer a "package" for equipping tractors, combines with D-5 Caterpillar tracks.

MOVE RIGHT THROUGH MUD OR SNOW

By Ralph Watkins

Half Tracks To Keep Combines, Tractors Rolling

Too muddy to harvest? Too much snow? Crop lost for sure?

Take a look at half-tracks. They spread out the combine's weight and let you glide over the top of mud, or go through deep snow to salvage a valuable crop.

No question that they work! Drawbacks include high initial cost, and they can be hard to get when you and a lot of your neighbors are suddenly up against a gigantic mud or snow problem.

Here's a round-up of "who makes what" and comments from farmers who've either built or bought half-tracks for their combines and, in some cases, even their tractors:

Loegering Tracks

Loegering Mfg., Casselton, N.D. makes and sells tracks for combines, tractors, trucks, skid-steer loaders, jeeps and a variety of other vehicles and machines. Marvin Haugen, sales manager, told FARM SHOW that Loegering combine tracks are available to fit almost any make or model of combine, and have been sold throughout the world.

Three years ago, North Dakota farmer Tom Hoepfner, Fargo, adapted a set of Loegering tracks and snow skis to fit his Deere 4400 combine. (FARM SHOW ran a photo and story on the set-up in our Sept.-Oct., 1978 issue.)

"They worked super, just super!" reports Hoepfner. "The tracks and skis more than paid for themselves the first season."

Hoepfner's out-of-pocket cost was about \$10,000 but he harvested \$100,000 worth of his own sunflowers, operating in mud and snow. Also, Hoepfner says he worked all winter ("clear into April") doing custom work.

"We got telephone calls from all over the country after your article ap-

peared," Hoepfner told FARM SHOW two weeks ago. "Altogether, I'd say we got 300 long-distance calls, some from as far away as Texas and the southeastern states, wanting us to come and combine for them."

Hoepfner and a crew kept the combine rolling 24 hours a day. "We harvested about 3,000 acres of snow-drifted sunflowers using the tracks, at \$40 an acre just for the combining itself — no hauling. "We grossed \$120,000 and it was quite profitable," Hoepfner comments. "But it got pretty tiresome combining sunflowers all winter long! The only real problem we had was getting the combined sunflower seed out of the snow-bound field — some trucks couldn't make it."

Weather conditions haven't repeated since that first year, Hoepfner says, but he still has the tracks and skis and feels he could modify them to fit a recently-purchased combine, if necessary.

Gilbert & Riplo Tracks

Last year was a record sales year for Gilbert and Riplo, Ravenna, Mich., manufacturers of combine half-tracks. "We sold 37 sets, our best sales year in the last decade," Fred Riplo told FARM SHOW.

Gilbert and Riplo tracks are actually bulldozer-type carriage systems — the original combine wheels are removed. It takes about two hours to install the 30-in. wide tracks, says Riplo, and only 15 minutes to take them off and re-install the original tires. He claims the tracks reduce fuel use "as much as 20%".

His firm doesn't offer track systems for trucks or tractors. Gilbert and Riplo combine tracks are available for all models of combines except older John Deere machines, such as the 95 or 105, and except Massey combines. Price is right at \$12,000 per set.

"They really saved the day for us last fall," says Dave Mayer, a Wisconsin farmer-implement dealer who, in partnership with his brother John, operates Pansiewood Implement in Oshkosh. The Mayers, who sell Gilbert and Riplo tracks, also used the tracks on their own combine last fall to harvest about 500 acres of rain-drenched soybean fields.

"The big advantage was that the combine header stayed level in spite of wet fields; we could get down low and get practically all the beans. And, we didn't leave deep ruts in our fields to cause problems next spring," says Dave. "Driving with the tracks on is like driving the combine down a road. It's easy to operate and the tracks aren't hard on the combine drive train. We harvested right through spots where, if you stepped down off the combine onto the ground, you'd sink down in mud over your ankles. The combine floated right over the top. We even combined right through standing water."

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Gilbert & Riplo Co., 4865 Ravenna Road, Ravenna, Mich. 49451 (ph 616 853-6171).

Pieper Half-Tracks For Tractors

"We had a number of calls from farmers interested in putting our tracks on their tractors. Some callers were interested in using the tracks on their combines, instead of their tractors," points out Matt Pieper about the tractor half-tracks he, his brothers Mike and Bill and father William, are gearing up to sell to other farmers for increased traction and reduced soil compaction problems.

The Piepers, featured in FARM SHOW's Sept.-Oct. issue last year (Vol. 5, No. 5), removed the rear tires and wheels from an International

1586 tractor and installed a set of D-5 Caterpillar tracks. Hubs, gears and rollers were built from scratch, or modified to fit, to drive the tracks off the tractor axles.

According to Mike Pieper, the "hybridized" tractor exerts only about 2½ lbs. of weight per sq. in. of track while conventional tires exert about 50 lbs. per sq. in. Also, large flotation tires have been installed on the front of the tractor, reducing compaction there.

"When crossing a field with the cultivator raised, and riding on its wheels, the wheels press in about 2 in.," explains Mike. "The tractor half-tracks, on the other hand, ride right on top of the ground and hardly sink in at all."

"The tracks also help increase traction," Mike told FARM SHOW. "We can pull more. For example, we're pulling a 35-ft. cultivator with a 165-hp tractor. The tracks also help in fall plowing when it's slick or muddy."

Last fall, the Piepers equipped their 1480 International combine with half-tracks. "We used it for about two months and were well satisfied with performance of the track," notes Matt.

Price of the half-track assembly will be about \$10,000 per pair. For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Mike Pieper, Box 195-A, Wever, Iowa 52658 (ph 319 372-3033).

Used Combine Tracks

Cross Tractor Salvage, of Lamar, Mo., specializes in buying, rebuilding, and re-selling used combine half tracks. Operating nationwide, representatives of the firm go into areas where combine tracks aren't being used, buy them from local farmers, then repairs and repaints them before re-selling to farmers in areas where