

Family Tractors: Used...Abused...Renewed

Johnny Burger's seventy-eight year old 1936 John Deere B has an interesting history. Our knowledge of the history of the tractor began when a man named Oscar "Kitten" Osborn from Watts, Oklahoma, was working in Calumet, Oklahoma, in the early 1960s and decided to move back to his home between Watts and Chewey, Oklahoma. He purchased the unstyled John Deere B and a four-wheel, wooden wagon in Calumet. He loaded all his possessions, his wife, and his children on the wagon, hitched it to the tractor, and started for Watts. At about five or six miles per hour, it took them three full days from daylight to dark to make it home, a distance of about 230 miles.

Bob Wiley of West Siloam, Oklahoma, bought or traded for the tractor from Kitten Osborn in the 1970s. Bob kept and used the tractor for about three years. Johnny Burger's family ties to the tractor came when his sister Odie Burger Howell and her husband Elmer traded for the tractor. Bob traded the tractor to the Howells in return for a flat-bottom, wooden boat, an automatic 22 rifle, and \$200. At the time the Howells lived on property located south of Siloam Springs on Arkansas Highway 59. Odie's son, Terry "Pudd" Howell, and others rebuilt and repainted the tractor. At the time, the engine was rebuilt along with the magneto. They used the tractor to put in a garden, but soon had a broader purpose for it.

In 1979 the Howells bought an 80-acre, mountain-side property near Chester, Arkansas. When Odie and her family began building a home and developing the property, they made good use of the tractor. The main use was to pull logs to their sawmill as part of the clearing of the land. It was also used to plow and maintain a large garden and, with the attached blade, to keep up the gravel road leading to her home.

About 1995 the JD was pretty much retired when the Howells began using a little larger MF 35 and a Farmall F 12. A neighbor continually asked to purchase the tractor and finally Odie consented. After a time, the tractor sat long enough for the engine to be "stuck," as the saying goes. When this owner passed away owing a neighbor for bulldozer work, the owner's family offered the JD B for payment. This is when the "abused" label became applicable. The piston was indeed stuck, which should not have been too much of a problem. However, this owner used a much larger tractor to pull the JD while in gear to supposedly free the piston. It didn't work. He dragged the stuck tractor on several occasions until even the treads on the previously good rear tires were severely damaged.

It was during this time that Johnny asked if the fellow would sell the tractor. The guy said he would but asked an exorbitant price for it. Of course, Johnny didn't buy it. Apparently the owner continued attempting to free the piston with no luck. In the meantime Odie had passed away and Pudd, Johnny's nephew, asked if Johnny might still be interested in the tractor for a fair price. Since this had been his sister's tractor, he still wanted to get it and restore it. A short time later Pudd called and mentioned a price Johnny could accept. About April 2008, Johnny and Larry Morrison went to Chester to get the tractor. Loading the tractor was a bit of a problem, but Pudd owns, operates, and mechanics on all types of heavy equipment and had equipment to use. He had a backhoe which lifted the tractor while Johnny winched it on the trailer. The tractor was unloaded with the assistance of Johnny's Mahindra and loader.

Then the "renewed" part began. Early on, 36x12 inch rear tires were purchased from Shumaker Tire in Golden, Missouri. Now the restoration began. Johnny completely disassembled the engine to survey the damage. It was as bad as he imagined. The engine head and block were taken to Osborn's (no relation to Kitten Osborn) Engine Machine Shop in Siloam Springs to be placed in a heated vat

with chemicals to be thoroughly cleaned. The parts were closely checked for any damage. Johnny had to purchase an entire rebuild kit with new rings, gaskets, etc. The tractor was completely disassembled and the individual components were cleaned, primed, and painted. With all the other activities he was engaged in, the rebuild took several months. Finally, in late 2011 the tractor was up and running. Its first parade was on October 1, 2011, at a festival in Jay, Oklahoma, with club member Everett Howell, Odie's brother in law, driving. The classic 1936 John Deere B was now back in the family in all its former glory. The tractor was also one of those pictured on the cover of the November 25, 2013, issue of Ozark Farm & Neighbor magazine, which contained a nice article about Johnny and his Tired Iron membership.



Unrestored



Engine Block Ready for Paint



Johnny Burger



Everett Howell Parading in Jay, OK