

Don's Farmall Electric Tractor

Experimental vehicles powered by electricity have existed since the 1830s. They became practical with the invention of rechargeable batteries by the late 1800s. About the 1930s, gasoline engines, with their longer range of travel on more and more paved highways, almost made the battery powered vehicles obsolete. By the 1970s, several companies offered battery operated cars to the modern market. Today, largely because of EPA concerns automobile manufacturers, led by Tesla Motors, are seriously involved with battery powered automobiles. General Motors even has a battery powered Corvette in the works.

It is not surprising to anyone acquainted with Tired Iron charter member Don Christensen (Nov/Dec 2010 Newsletter) that he would be intrigued with electrically powered vehicles. About thirty years ago, he owned a Crosley car with a crankshaft broken in two places. Surprisingly, it still ran but fired erratically. He seriously considered replacing the gasoline engine with an electric motor. It did not happen, but he never forgot the idea. When, early in 2015, Farm Show Magazine (Vol. 39, Issue 2) featured an article detailing the conversion of a gasoline powered Farmall Cub to electric power, Don knew he had to follow his dream.

His first step was to locate a suitable Farmall Cub. Tired Iron Member Anthony Hartfield mentioned he had a spare 1949 Cub with a bad engine. Even though it was in two parts (see photo) Don bought it. Next, he searched for a motor from a battery powered golf cart. When former Tired Iron member Cleon Schirmer moved back to Indiana, he gave a golf cart to be parted out to club member Johnny Burger. Johnny gave the 2 h.p. motor to Don.

Don spent several weeks restoring and modifying the tractor. The big issue would be the conversion from a gasoline driven tractor to battery operation. He needed parts and advice to make the conversion. He lucked out when he met John Donald of A to Z Golf Cars of Bentonville. Mr. Donald helped with parts needed to connect the motor with the driveshaft and with "The Brain," as Don calls it, which controls the application of battery voltage to the motor for smooth acceleration. John Donald even loaned Don six, Trojan deep-cycle batteries to have the tractor ready for the Gentry Christmas parade. Don has ordered new batteries, and they should be installed soon after this newsletter is published.

Don did drive the "Farmall Elec" in the Gentry parade (see photo). An excellent photo of Don and the tractor also appeared in the Gentry Westside Eagle Observer newspaper, and a youtube.com video of the parade shows a brief view of the tractor about the 3 minute, 12 second mark.

Don is to be commended for all his support for Tired Iron over the years. He has worked tirelessly to restore cub tractors, to help with club building and maintenance, and to make our two yearly shows and our presence at area festivals a success. His special exhibits of working antique water pumps, and giant tricycles will now include his Farmall Elec tractor. Since many of us wonder about comparisons between a 2 h.p. battery powered Cub and a 10 h.p. gasoline powered one, Don is planning a pulling contest between the Elec and a conventional Cub he owns at the 2016 Spring Show. We may be surprised at the outcome.

