

There are other tractors, but only I has his heart

After spending a day tilling a soybean field, a retired farmer said his biggest concern was avoiding falling asleep. "It was just so comfortable," he said.

The tractor, he went on to say, was equipped with a quiet cab, a swivel chair, and a toasty warm cab.

"Basically, all I had to do was turn it around on the headlands," he said.

His experience did not remind me in any way of plowing with a WC Allis Chalmers and a two-bottom, 16-inch Oliver plow. I would not have been on a WC, but a mostly earned reputation as a mechanical jinx placed me in the WC seat when the rush was on to plow before the ground froze.

Despite a heat houser, which may have been state-of-the-art



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in the 1950s, it was a constant struggle to stay warm despite two pairs of trousers and socks, a heavy winter coat, gloves, and a hunter's cap with long ear flaps.

The gloves were too soon caked with mud after the plow repeatedly plugged with stalks despite the wire dad attached to prevent the problem.

My brother, who didn't like plowing and hated to be cold, had an alternative approach to

keeping warm. He kept a pint of schnapps in the toolbox and said it helped ward off the cold. He was kind enough to leave a pint behind along with two full gasoline containers when I was left to plow in a distant rented field.

It was important to get the field done because the weather forecast called for more snow and cold. If plowing was delayed until spring, the ground would be lumpy and yield reduced.

The sun disappeared and stars filled the sky, but round after round made little dent in the field. The spiteful WC handled like a bucking bronco. Its narrow front end rose to such a height it seemed possible that it might tip over. The front wheels crashed back to earth when the foot clutch was pushed in, but the tractor never quit pushing

forward until the midnight hour when at last my brother's pickup lights appeared.

The WC, which was manufactured shortly before World War II and not cheapened because of the shortage of raw materials, was as dependable as the sunrise.

It even did duty hooked to the manure spreader in winter because it could sit outside and be crank started. It may have started, but the oil pressure was near zero. Twine and empty feedbags affixed to a three-tined fork warmed the oil that was as thick as molasses, but did not prevent the engine from eventual ruin.

WCs are among the cheapest and most common of antique tractors these days. Few people hold them in high regard for reasons that escape me.

A high school chum who thought John Deere Bs were the be-all and end-all teased me about the WC.

I responded that a tractor that was started with a flywheel and a petcock was certainly not the best in modern engineering.

The WC and I kept chugging along until one day when a John Deere B appeared in the yard. My brother said he purchased it at auction for an incredibly low price and it could and should be used to haul manure.

I never used it for that purpose because this farm boy knew, to the best of his prejudiced opinion, that nothing could match the sheer willpower of the WC.

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