



The art of tractors

By Ian M. Johnston

THE DAVID BROWN MASTERPIECE

I know this will come as a surprise to many, but way way back in the mists of time, when I was a tousle haired lad in Scotland, I actually did go to school. I was a lazy, delinquent and obnoxious pupil – according to my form master. To this was added “impertinent”, when I dared protest the validity of these assertions. A bit over the top though I thought, even although I accepted the fact that, from a master’s point of view, I was undoubtedly a real pain-in-the-wotsit.

I seemed to be hopeless at everything, apart from rugby and (remarkably) English. The reason I regularly topped the English results was because I actually enjoyed composition, parsing, analysis and even Shakespeare. In other words, it all came easy to me without having to swot and study the subject.

So what has all this totally tedious and irrelevant information got to do with old tractors – about which I am expected to write? Bear with me.

My art exam results were nearly as abysmal as those of my Latin efforts. In fact our art master (a Mr Salvesson who was a Scandinavian and resembled a cross between Alf Garnet and Saddam Hussein) consid-



The SLEEK David Brown Cropmaster. (Restored by the author).

ered my parents were wasting their hard earned savings by sending young Johnston to these particular Halls of Academia and should consider putting the exorbitant fees into an investment that would return better value – such as betting on the horses!

One particularly dark freezing winter’s day, Mr Salvesson had the central heating turned up full, so that the racks of pipes through which the searing hot water circulated, were throbbing and gurgling in protest.

The oven-like temperature in the Art Hall had the entire class sweating profusely, yet Mr Salvesson strutted up and down between the rows of desks, enveloped in a heavy greatcoat and layers of scarfs and thick gloves, exclaiming that it was “Bitter boys.”

Following a lecture on the subject of the perspective of curves and straights, he announced that in order to determine we had all been paying attention, we would each now produce a line drawing of a farm tractor.

Wow! That had me instantly alert. This was my forté. I knew little about Latin and French verbs, and even less about algebraic equations and chemistry formulae. (Well, I mean to say, eight out of 100 for chemistry, and five of these were for neatness!) But gee whiz – I knew everything about tractors!

Whilst more dedicated boys had been studying these afore mentioned unpleasant and boring subjects, I had had my nose well



The UGLY Fordson Model N. (As seen at a tractor rally at Henty).

and truly stuck in my comprehensive collection of tractor pamphlets, each of which I could practically recite from memory.

Accordingly, for the first time ever in the art class, I produced a resplendent drawing, which happened to be of a David Brown Cropmaster. I was able to sketch it perfectly to scale purely from memory and include all the levers, badges and other doo-dahs. Proudly I laid the finished masterpiece before me on the desk.

INDIGNATION

Mr Salveson meandered around the steamy room insisting that “The cold is bitter boys.” Occasionally he passed comments on the various efforts displayed for his inspection and even infrequently uttered words of approval and encouragement.

Approaching from my rear, his footsteps paused as he peered over my shoulder at my masterpiece. I leaned back so that he would be sure to have an uninterrupted view of the David Brown.

“What is this?” he barked.

“Eh? It is a tractor Sir,” I replied, perplexed by this unexpected response. I had anticipated my tractor would have been held up before the class as an inspiration.

“You are an obtuse boy, obviously with no knowledge of farm tractors” he stated, gazing heavenwards and shaking his head.

“Bbb...ut this is a David Brown Cropmaster Sir,” I endeavoured to explain.

“I instructed you to draw a tractor boy, not a vulgar American car.”

“The new David Brown is streamlined and has a bonnet a bit like an American car,” I protested, and then added insolently “Sir.”

“What rubbish – and watch your tongue young man,” he added threateningly.

“I drive one on the farm!” This with my voice raised in frustration.

“Take one hundred lines for insolence and consider yourself fortunate not to receive a severe thrashing. How dare you question me on the subject of tractors.”

Mr Salveson turned to the class. “So that we can endeavour to educate young Johnston about tractors, I shall now draw one on the blackboard.” With a menacing glance in my direction he selected a piece of chalk and commenced to draw a brilliant replica of – a Fordson Model N.

There was no doubt about Mr Salveson’s talent as an artist. Considering he was a schoolmaster and not a farmer or tractor design engineer, I could appreciate

the excellence of his drawing. My David Brown I knew was good, but Mr Salveson’s Fordson was simply amazing.

But inside I was seething! It was obvious that Mr Salveson was not abreast with the new era of tractors. The Fordson N was little different from the Fordson F, which was first released in 1927. The Dagenham Ford works had persisted with the design. It was antiquated and ugly, when compared to the sleek David Brown Cropmaster. The new range of Massey Harris, International Harvester, Case and Turner tractors, to name a few, released in the late 1940s, were also styled and indeed streamlined.

Rather than risk provoking Mr Salveson further, I knew a foolproof way of establishing my tractor credentials, which he would have to accept. The boys in the class had been mightily amused by the proceedings, as each one knew of my association with farms and my knowledge of tractors, so I had nothing to prove there.

RETRIBUTION

Each school morning Mr Salveson alighted from a number 24 tram and commenced the challenging walk up Orchard Brae Road which took him in the direction of the school. Regularly I would pass him as I weaved my way up the stiff climb on my bicycle. It was a required courtesy to say “Good morning Sir” as I laboured past. On such occasions masters were usually good humored towards the boys. A situation which alas did not generally extend into the classroom!

The day following the altercation in the Art Hall, I alighted from my bike as I drew alongside the striding Mr Salveson.

“Good morning Sir,” I greeted him and fell into step alongside, pushing the bike ahead. He turned and examined me, then a look of recognition crossed his countenance.

“Oh...er, yes. Good morning Johnston.”

“Sir, I thought you might care to have a look at these,” I said politely and handed him a photo and a tractor brochure.

The photo was of me driving a David Brown Cropmaster to which was attached a three furrow mouldboard plough. The brochure was a multi-page colour affair extolling the virtues of the new Cropmaster range from David Brown.

Mr Salveson at first merely glanced at them, and then stopped and peered intently at the evidence before him.

“Bless my soul,” he exclaimed. “I had no idea that tractors had developed to this stage.”

He searched more intently. “And I see that is you ploughing with one of these new tractors,” he acknowledged, looking at me appraisingly. “Of course, yesterday in the Art Hall I could not have been expected to know,” he rationalised.

This, I gathered was to be the nearest thing to an apology I was likely to receive. We recommenced our journey to school, this time walking side by side with me wheeling my bike, as Mr Salveson plied me with a succession of questions about modern tractor technology.

He listened intently as I explained the marvels of three point linkage and hydraulic lift.

As we passed by the lodge at the school gates, our ways parted. Mine to the bicycle sheds and Mr Salveson’s to the Art Hall.

“Thank you, Johnston. I have enjoyed our discussion about tractors. Yes, er, most informative. I am, er, grateful boy,” he concluded with just a semblance of a smile of acknowledgement.

There was no mention of the hundred lines – and I never did them! ■

IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

Question: Can you identify this tractor?

Clue: It is a USA design but manufactured in the land of Fish and Chips.

Degree of Difficulty: A degree in nuclear physics or brain surgery will not help with this one.

Answer: See page 48.

