



HOBBY FARM

DAIRY FARMER JEFF WADSWORTH'S LOVE OF VINTAGE FARM MACHINERY IS TURNING AN OLD TIN SHED ON HIS PROPERTY INTO A VERITABLE MUSEUM. BY DEBBIE KRUGER. PHOTOGRAPHY BY STUART OWEN FOX.

“With cars, you’ve got upholstery and the paintwork has got to be so much better ... whereas tractors are so much simpler and you don’t have to pay registration.”

Cows will wait for no man’s hobby, so it is just as well that Jeff Wadsworth, dairy farmer and collector of vintage farm machinery, has his priorities straight.

Jeff’s 117 Friesians and Jerseys rule the working day; milking takes place at dawn and again at 3pm. In between there are electric fences to fix, water to pump, paddocks to tend and other general chores on the 100-hectare Wadsworth farm at Coorabell, a quaint NSW settlement on the southern ridge of Australia’s largest extinct volcano, Mount Warning.

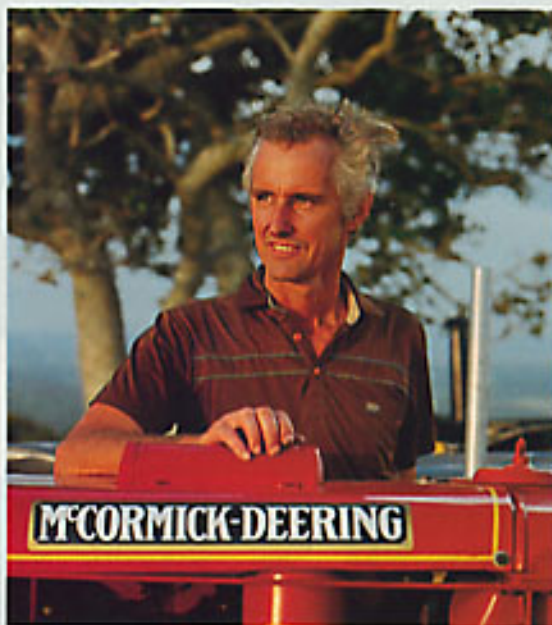
An hour here or there in the workshop, before or after the evening meal, seems sufficient to keep Jeff’s love of vintage farm machinery constantly evolving.

The Wadsworths have lived in this part of the world for generations and are identities in Coorabell. In the past decade, however, Jeff’s reputation has extended beyond local boundaries through his hobby, which is resulting in one of the country’s most interesting collections of vintage farm machinery. His large tin shed next to the farmhouse is a museum of industrial antiquity.

“I started collecting 13 years ago, I suppose — found my first engine and went from there,” says Jeff. “Now I have about 40 tractors — 10 are finished — plus over a 100 stationary engines.”

There is an art to acquiring and restoring and, in that way, Jeff has the perfect combination of the artistic creativity and rural subsistence which exist side by side in the Byron Bay

district. While the richer pastures of the northern rivers have served local farmers well, the drought-stricken conditions of most of NSW have meant people are invariably leaving the land. But that doesn’t mean there is a plethora of disused tractors out there. “They’re harder to get now,” says Jeff, “because there are more collectors after them.”



Above: Tractor bowerbird Jeff Wadsworth with a 1936 USA McCormick-Deering. Opposite page: Jeff’s CASE tractor, finally fully restored.

“It’s a supply and demand thing now. I was lucky — I started early, before people got interested. Most people used to collect cars, vintage cars, and no-one was interested in these, so I used to pick them up pretty cheap, for next to nothing, and I collected a fair few. I’m sort of going through them all now, trying to get them all restored.”

Jeff usually works on one tractor at a time, although, occasionally, a small engine will be undergoing restoration simultaneously. A cross-motor Case 1220 tractor, made in Wisconsin, USA, would take him about four months to bring back to its original working condition. Sometimes a tractor can take more than one year to complete.

“It depends how much work’s got to be done on it. I’ve got one out there that I’ve restored, it’s a Hart Par 1224 tractor built in 1927, from America, and that took me nearly two years because there were a lot of parts missing.” Some of the unrestored tractors look beyond redemption; a 1948 Field Marshall from England appears to be a rust-bucket that’s had its day. But rust is the last of Jeff’s problems. “When you’ve got sandblasting gear it’s easy; once you blow it you’ve got it back to base metal and if there are holes in there you use a bit of filler or you weld it up, or whatever needs to be done.”

Jeff says there never is a dead end in the restoration process. “You come to a point where broken or worn-out parts are the biggest problem and if they’re too difficult to fix up, then you go looking for parts.”

An extensive collectors’ network and a wealth of experience in this field mean solutions are never far away, even if Jeff has to drive thousands of miles to find them. He keeps in touch with fellow collectors through the magazine *The Old Machinery Mart* and, because he has been in the game longer than most, he learns of a good find before others.





Jeff's two 1930s Lanz Bulldogs from Germany provide fascinating insights into the development of industry under the Nazi regime.

Jeff's enthusiasm for tractors and engines isn't so much shared as respected and supported by his wife Eleanor and their four children. "The two boys are a little bit interested in it and Eleanor doesn't mind either. She does some sign-writing work for me — she's got a steady hand." His 74-year-old father also is on standby to help with the milking when Jeff travels on expeditions into the countryside to "chase gear".

The appeal of tractors and stationary engines is their relative ease to restore. "With cars, you've got upholstery and the paint-work has to be so much better, the tail work's got to be so much better, whereas tractors are so much simpler and you don't even have to pay registration. You can have an endless supply, so long as you've got a shed to put them in."

Even the most indifferent onlooker cannot fail to be impressed by the meticulous care Jeff takes with the renewal of these machines and historical value and the diversity of the collection. While Jeff's oldest tractor is an unrestored 1919 International Titan from the USA, the oldest engine is a small and silent 1880 Nein Ricci hot air engine which runs purely on heat.

The engines were used mainly for driving sawmills, milking machines or water pumps and were made by companies such as Tangey, Hornsby and Reading, a manufacturer in Bangalow, only five minutes from Coorabell. The dozens Jeff already has restored are

displayed on shelves along the wall of his tin shed, with interesting hand-written plaques explaining the engine's date, origin and place of discovery.

Most of Jeff's tractors hail from the USA, home of the biggest manufacturers. Early models of John Deere, McCormick Deering, Case and International sit side by side with English models such as President, Vivian Lloyd and the OTA, "A

provide fascinating insights into the development of industry under the Nazi regime. "They're going back to Germany by the container load," says Jeff, referring to the huge collectors' market overseas. "There's a guy in Brisbane buying up all he can get, taking them back to Germany. But he's not going to get mine, that's for sure."

Jeff doesn't like to dwell on the expense of his hobby. "I spend it before I get it, that's my trouble," he says. "Let the bank worry about that." Then he laughs, and adds, "No, I'm not that bad, really."

Some of Jeff's restored pieces are worth several thousand dollars, but he doesn't tally up the value because, he says, he really doesn't care.

Needless to say, Jeff is a mine of information on farm machinery and often speaks on local radio on the subject.

"I get phone calls from all over the country from people wanting information. They find a tractor or an engine and they want to know how to start it. The phone never stops here at night time with people wanting to know things."

Despite a rather daunting stock of pieces yet to be restored, Jeff can't resist picking up a new machine, no matter how much in disrepair. "Just one more" is his favourite catchery.

And is he looking for any particular piece to add to his collection?

"Just one more. It doesn't matter what — just one more."



Above: Reporter Debbie Kruger takes the wheel of a Lanz Bulldog. Opposite (clockwise from left): Jeff starts the F12. The restored wheel of the 1937 McCormick-Deering. A 1927 Wallis tractor from the USA.

stupid little bloody tractor — three wheels and goes like buggery".

He has a few European tractors, imported after World War II when ex-servicemen rushed to take up settlement on the land, causing a shortage of farm machinery. A 1948 Hofherr-Schranz Clayton Shuttleworth from Hungary is a rare collectors' item, while Jeff's two 1930s Lanz Bulldogs from Germany

