

**Agriculture:**

# Heavy horses make come-back



The big Dobbins and Nellies who broke the sod on Canadian farmland are regaining popularity — partly for special jobs at which they have been found more efficient than mechanical transport, but mainly in the parading, advertising and public relations business.

In 1906 there were two million horses in Canada, many of them heavy draught animals which farmers used in teams to plough, cultivate, sow and harvest their fields. Their numbers declined rapidly with the advent of tractors and mechanisation, with which the slow-plodding horse could not compete. But now they are no longer a common sight they have acquired rarity value. People in the publicity business have come to recognise that they are a big attraction at shows and fairs.

Ralph Henry, horse trainer for Agriculture Canada's three teams of Clydesdales on their Central Experimental Farm outside Ottawa, speaks of a "growing

demand" for these beautiful great animals — "and there just aren't enough good show horses in Canada to meet the demand."

This has pushed up prices, he says, so that a good Clydesdale or Belgian gelding ready to show would sell for about C\$3,000 these days.

A team of quite ordinary draught horses for farm work would cost C\$2,000, according to Mr. Henry. Add to that C\$600 — 700 for a set of harness and about C\$1,000 a year to feed them, and work horses are not cheap for practical purposes. Even with fuel costs going up, it would be premature to speak of draught horses returning to the farm in large numbers.

However, farmers do use heavy horses for certain special jobs. For example, many cattlemen in the west use a team of horses to haul feed to their cattle during the winter because they can get through more snow than a tractor, and you don't have to worry about them not starting on a cold morning.

Most of the new work done by heavy horses is in parading, advertising and public relations. The brewing industry was one of the first to rediscover the heavy horse, with which it has a long traditional association; draught teams were used away back to haul wagons of beer barrels between the factory and the retailer. One American company used teams of horses for promotion up to 10 years ago, when the heavy horse was at its lowest ebb. When they discontinued the practice, their beer sales slumped. They decided to bring back the horses and today have three eight-horse hitches criss-crossing the United States to shows and parades.

Mr. Henry himself is unsure why heavy horses have become so popular recently. "People, especially children, are impressed with their size; most mature show animals weigh more than a ton. And a good show team has snappy footwork which will really please a crowd."

The fundamental reason for their