

Why Buy a Traction Engine?

By James A. King

By traction engine I mean something more than the old threshing engine. I mean a general purpose engine for doing all kinds of farm work which is now being done with horses. This kind of an engine is here, and here to stay. It is a natural result of farm conditions especially in the great small grain fields of the Canadian and American northwest. The conditions have created it. It has not created the conditions. In these small grain regions it has been found necessary to be able to operate a vast acreage with a small number of men doing the work in a comparatively short time. These vast prairies which were once the home of the roving game and later of immense bands of cattle and sheep would not now be the great grain producing sections they are were it not for the advent of the traction engine.

These general purpose field tractors were first built for use on extensive farms only. But now they are being built in sizes adapted to farms of 400 acres or more and smaller designs are just coming on to the market which are adapted to farms of 160 or 200 acres. Throughout the United States and Canada there are immense numbers of farms where a good general purpose traction engine should prove to be a good investment. Only a comparative few of these farms have made that investment.

What the Engine Must Do

But no man wants to buy an engine unless he has thoroughly assured himself that the money he spends in this way will bring larger returns than if spent in any other way on his farm. In order to do this the engine must reduce the expense of the farm without reducing its income. It ought also to increase his income without increasing the expense. If an engine is going to be such a paying investment it must reduce the number of horses needed on the farm to three or four at the most. It must not only do their work but must do it quicker, better and cheaper than they can do it. It must do their work without the need of as many men as were required when working the horses. It must not only do this one year, but it must do it for a number of years. The fuel, the lubricating oil and the repairs of this engine must cost less than feed, doctoring, shoeing and harness repair bills for the number of horses required to do the work if one did not own an engine. A good general purpose field tractor will

meet these requirements. Consequently when a man owns a farm adapted to the use of an engine it would be a good paying investment for him to buy a good engine if he does not already own one.

I have been operating a 760 acre farm in northern Iowa for two years where such an engine has been used for everything possible. In the light of these two years' experience I see a number of reasons why such an engine is preferable to horses. In these two years I have got an average of about 200 days field service from my engine in the year. In other words I have been able to use it at something or other practically continuously from the first of April to the first of December. I have used it successfully for practically every field operation except for planting and cultivating corn and hauling mowers and hay rakes. I have known of instances in the southwest where some men have used their engines successfully in listing corn. In every instance where I have used my engine I have found it preferable to horses.

Engine Plowing

Let us consider for a moment the problem of plowing. With a 45 BHP. engine, two men will average from 15 to 20 acres when breaking sod and from 20 to 25 acres when plowing stubble. If the plowing season is short the engine can be worked day and night so that four men with one equipment will do double this amount in every 24 hours. To do this with horses one would not only have to double the men but would also have to double the power equipment. Because of this large acreage which can be plowed in one day one is able to do the work when the ground is in the best condition for it. If one is plowing ground to be sowed or planted that same season he can plow, disc and harrow it all at once. If the ground has been worked while fresh and moist it has not been traveled over after being plowed, there are no clods and the field is in good condition. Because of this fact he gets a much better job of plowing done than he would if he had depended on horses. More than this the work has cost him much less with the engine than with the horses. I find that I can plow at a cost of from 30 to 50c. an acre. This expense includes fuel and oil for the engine, wages and board for the men, depreciation and interest on the investment.

And for Seeding

Consider now the problem of seeding. Seed time is one of the crises of the farmer's entire year. It is of great importance to push the work as rapidly as possible. With horses one must be careful at this time or he will injure or possibly kill one or more of them. They have been comparatively idle during the winter. They are soft and out of condition. Not so with a tractor. Though it has stood idle all winter it is "just as hard as iron" and just as able to stand the long hours of a rush season as it was at the close of the previous season's work. Its wind is not short, its muscles are not soft and flabby. It does not need to be rested every half hour or so at the end of the field.

When using horses the different operations of seeding are generally done one at a time. The seed bed is prepared, the ground is drilled and then the field is cross harrowed. Often heavy rains come while the ground is being fitted or after this work has been finished and before the seeding has been done. Many times it is even necessary to do the fitting all over again. This means lost work. Here is where the engine owner has a great advantage over his less fortunate neighbor who still depends on horses for his work. With an engine one can prepare the seed bed and drill in the grain all at one operation. Once over the ground with such an equipment and the work is all finished except for cross harrowing. And if necessary this can be omitted and still a very good job of seeding has been done.

No work has been lost if a rain storm stops one. What ground has been traveled over once is finished. When the ground is again in condition to be worked one goes on with the fields that have not yet been touched. His other grain is in the ground doing business. His only concern is to put in that which still

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