

TRACTOR LEGACY SERIES

GARDEN TRACTORS



Deere, Cub Cadet, Wheel Horse, and All the Rest, 1930s to Current

OSCAR H. WILL III



ABOVE: The Jacobsen-built Ford 165 garden tractor had a 16-horsepower engine coupled to a hydrostatic transmission. This model came standard with hydraulic lift.

RIGHT: Dual-pedal hydrostatic control is characteristic of this later 14-horsepower Ford Model 145 tractor. This machine was also a product of the Jacobsen factory.



with hydrostatic transmissions and offered hydraulic lift. Models 100 and 120 offered the four-speed Peerless Model 2306A transaxle with belt-idler clutch and a standard manual lift. The 125, 145, and 165 all used Peerless transaxles driven with Eaton hydrostatic units. Ford also had a more powerful 19.5-horsepower two-cylinder Kohler-powered Model 195 that featured hydrostatic transmission, hydraulic lift, front and rear PTO, and power steering.

Ford continued to use Jacobsen-built garden tractors through the decade.

General Electric

By the late 1960s, General Electric had completed at least three years of testing with five different garden tractor prototypes and production models. These machines were designed in response to the growing interest in alternate fuels and the impending oil crisis that seemed to loom right along with unrest in oil-producing countries. What made them stand apart in the market is that

they were powered with electric motors fed with batteries rather than the more conventional engine and petroleum combination.

In 1969, the company offered three models of these for consumers: the Elec-Trak E12, E15, and E20. The tractors were all driven by electric motors coupled to Peerless 2300 Series multispeed transaxles. The E12 was initially offered to fill the 12-horsepower tractor niche. The E15 and E20 went head to head with 14- and 16-horsepower machines, respectively.

The high-end E20 was available with eight forward and four reverse speeds with automatic downshift and push-button cruise control. Not surprisingly, the implement lift was electric, as were the PTO outputs. The machine could be fit with a number of mowers, snow removal tools, tillers, and plug-in handheld tools, such

as a power drill, hedge trimmer, and more. The E20 had a top speed of nine miles per hour.

In the middle of the pack, the E15 offered seven forward gears with a four-speed range box for a total of 28 forward speeds and four reverse. As with the E16, power from the electric motor was fed to the transaxle through a V-belt drive. This 850-pound workhorse achieved a seven-mile-per-hour top speed. The introductory-level E12 garden tractor offered three forward speeds with a four-speed range box, which yielded 12 forward gears and three reverse. Top speed for the E12 was about six miles per hour.

For a number of years, General Electric had built tractors for Avco New Idea and Wheel Horse, but by the mid-1970s sales were well below targets. As a result, General Electric went shopping for a buyer for its



General Electric's Elec-Trak E20 was listed in the 14- to 16-horsepower class when it was first released. This machine could be equipped with mowing decks, rotary tillers, and other implements that were powered from the tractor's battery pack.



Wheel Horse's B-145 Elec-Trak was a product of the GE plant initially, but Wheel Horse owned the entire line by the end of the 1970s.



The 18-horsepower General Electric-built EGT200 was branded by agricultural implement maker Avco New Idea, a company that's better known for harvesting equipment and manure spreaders.



This 1970s vintage Speedex Model 1030 is still on the job in central Pennsylvania. Here, its owner enjoys turning some early spring ground.

Elec-Trak division. The employees tried to purchase the line, but weren't able to do so before it was sold to Wheel Horse. On July 23, 1973, Wheel Horse announced that it was purchasing the assets of General Electric's outdoor power products division and the new owner continued to produce Elec-Trak tractors with the Wheel Horse name on them until at least the late 1970s.

Elec-Trak garden tractors are particularly collectible and useful today as the global petroleum shortage again is an issue. It seems ironic that now, almost 40 years after it first went to market, electric lawn and garden equipment is on everyone's mind.

Speedex

In 1969, under General Combustion's ownership (later merging with Mechtron International), Speedex



This original-condition Speedex Model 1430 brings nothing but smiles, with its beefy 14-horsepower engine, chain reduction drive, and a ticket to hook up to the pulling sled.