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40th Anniversary



Gathering of *Electrak*

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BELOW:

A collection of electric New Idea tractors.

OPPOSITE TOP:

An exquisite set of wood model toys made by 13-year old Jeremy Zimmerman.

OPPOSITE MIDDLE:

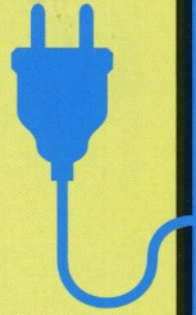
G.E. Elec-Trak dealer tool kit and battery tester.

On July 28th, the Elec-Trak Owners Club Show held their 2012 Annual Show & Swap Meet in Bennington, Vermont, and combined this year's event with a "40th Anniversary Gathering" of the General Electric employees who designed, built, and sold the machines back in the early 1970s. The event was hosted by Mr. Bruce Laumeister, the general manager of the Elec-Trak operation from 1969 until it was sold to Cecil Pond and Wheel Horse in 1974. It was held at a unique setting: the Bennington Center for the Arts, a 35,000 square-foot art museum that Bruce and his wife Elizabeth have been building and adding onto over the last few years.

The activities started the afternoon before with a tour of the old Elec-Trak plant located about an hour and a half away in Schenectady, New York. The tour was given by Ellis Blood, one of the first employees hired into the Elec-Trak operation, and Marlin Stanley, one of the original Elec-Trak engineers. Although the plant has certainly changed (it's now a distribution warehouse), for the collectors who attended it was like going to "Graceland."

The show kicked-off in the museum's auditorium where Mr. Laumeister recounted the history of the machine having actually been a spin-off from an experimental electric car project he had headed up for G.E. He pretty much kept the





crowd mesmerized with stories from the past and answered questions from the audience. One by one, managers and plant production people alike took the stage and recounted their days at G.E. Many said it was the best job they had ever had in their entire careers. Several “Skype” sessions were projected on a large screen for employees who were not able to travel to the event. People who had not seen each other in 40 years came together as though they had just seen each other yesterday. It was really an amazing time for them and also for us collectors. It was priceless to hear all their stories!



A large display of virtually every piece of literature produced, vintage Elec-Trak tools, dealer signs, and promotional items was available as well as a large number of the attachments and accessories that were manufactured for the machines. Some of the more rare attachments such as the York electric rake, Haban sickle mower, and Sweepster rotary broom were on display as well as the “golfing” attachments, chain saw, welder, and electric hand tools that were sold for the machines. For many collectors, this was the first time they were ever able to see some of these rare items.



One of the museum’s galleries was dedicated to photographs from the plant that had been enlarged into posters. Almost every model of the G.E. Elec-Trak as well as the rebranded New Idea Electric garden tractors was on hand. Even one of the Wheel Horse Elec-Trak models made it to the show.

Mark Frerking of Nixa, Missouri, also displayed his customized, “40th Anniversary Special Edition” Elec-Trak that he had been working on for almost a year. The tractor had been fitted with a modern controller and battery charger, upgraded drive motor and transmission, electric shifting, and several other enhancements, making it a true 21st-Century example of what the Elec-Trak would have look like today had it survived in

BELOW:
Some of the many original G.E. employees.



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the market. It sported a transparent red and silver powder coated paint job, LED running lights, and even special stitching on the seat to commemorate the occasion!

Also on hand was an Elec-Trak that had been converted into a small fire engine by a 92-year-old local collector. It is housed at a local firehouse, and the firemen there were gracious enough to lend it out for the show. The owner did an amazing job outfitting it with a working siren and bell, flashing lights, real fire hoses, extinguisher, and ladders—the works! Finally, a local Hustler Lawn Equipment dealer brought a modern, all electric, zero-turn “Zeon” model tractor to the show and allowed club members to get their first experience with an electric lawn tractor that wasn’t 40 years old! Starting at \$5,000.00 they are not for everyone, but they sure are cool!

Perhaps one of the most welcomed additions this year was a series of tech classes for restorers. Classes were conducted on basic electric tractor trouble-shooting, electronic controller enhancement, electric motor rebuilding, and PV Array charging. Every class was well attended, and suggestions for additional tech topics for next year were already pouring in.

Not only did the event host one of the largest and most diverse swap meets for electric tractors this year, but the big news this year was 13-year-old Jeremy Zimmerman’s scale-model Elec-Trak



toys. Let’s face it, electric tractors do not get near the attention as their ICE-based cousins do, and with fewer collectors, scale-model toy tractors are pretty much out of reach. Jeremy has been able to build some incredibly detailed toy models out of wood, and I might add that he did quite well with them at the cash register, too.

Although rain moved in at the end of the day, cutting some outdoor activities short, an impromptu repeat of the classic “tug-of-war” between a modern Cub Cadet and a 40-year-old New Idea electric tractor was hastily arranged. G.E. used this technique to build its dealer channel back in the ’70s by challenging dealers to tugs of war between an Elec-Trak and the model tractor they were currently selling. This worked extremely well in the 1970s, and in 2012 history repeated itself. The Elec-Trak easily out-pulled the Cub but not to fear, minutes later Mark Frerking’s Special Edition, proving there is always room for improvement, out pulled the Elec-Trak! For more information on G.E. Elec-Trak and other electric garden tractors, visit my web site at www.myelec-traks.com. 🚗

TOP:

The tug-of-war event.

BOTTOM LEFT:

The crowd rolls in at the Elec-Trak owners club show.

BOTTOM RIGHT:

The Elec-Trak 40th Anniversary Special Edition tractor.

