

Agriculture

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By **Marcene Heeren**
Staff writer

When Ray Hoffman Jr. wants to step back in time, he goes for a drive on one of his antique tractors.

The rural Westfield man began collecting old tractors five years ago. Hoffman says the machines remind him of simpler times.

"Back then we didn't have to farm thousands of acres to buy a tractor," he explains.

Hoffman was a young man when he purchased his first tractor. He farmed with his father and also worked for others. The day that he purchased his first tractor remains vivid in his mind.

His new U Minneapolis Moline was purchased on Sept. 4, 1950, for \$2,000 plus

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trade for an F12 Farmall. He was 19 years old.

"I can still remember driving it home from Kerr Motor Company (in Akron) at four o'clock in the afternoon," he says with a grin.

Hoffman has a special fondness for tractors of that era. That's why he hates to see them mangled and thrown away.

He had thought about buying an antique tractor for some time, but the time never seemed right. Then he saw a 1949 U Minneapolis Moline advertised for sale, and he took the plunge.

"It's about the same as what I had," he explains in reference to his 1950 purchase.

Dave Sheveland, Akron, helped him restore his first two tractors. Since then Hoffman has hired Jerry's Repair, Brunsville, to repair the wiring and mechanical works. Ken Taylor, rural Le Mars, does the main restoration work.

The antique tractor bug has struck Hoffman frequently during the past five years. He now owns 25

Ray Hoffman Jr. has no favorites when it comes to antique tractors. The rural Westfield man's colorful collection of 25 antique tractors includes three different lines.

(Sentinel photo by Marcene Heeren)

tractors that were produced between 1945 and 1968.

Hoffman says he can usually buy an old tractor for around \$1,500. Then he pays another \$2,000 to have it painted and put in running order.

"It's not a cheap hobby," he admits. Still, he says he's earned the right to have some fun.

"I never drank much, and I never smoked," he explains. "About all I've ever done in my life is work."

Hoffman scans newspapers and trade publications, looking for tractors that would be good additions to his collection. His colorful collection currently includes 12 Minneapolis Molines, 8 Internationals, and 5 John Deeres.

Hoffman's oldest tractor is a 1945 Z Minneapolis. His newest is a 1968 Minneapolis Moline G1000 Vista.

The G1000 Vistas are few in numbers, Hoffman says. He sent a picture of his restored G1000 Vista to FastLine, a trade magazine that deals in antique machin-

ery. The bright yellow tractor was featured on the front page of FastLine's October issue.

Hoffman displayed his tractor at Westfield's Pioneer Day tractor show last month. He recruited friends, neighbors and relatives - including one of his four daughters - to drive the tractors in the Westfield parade. Then they drove the machines back to the sheds for storage.

You can ask Hoffman which tractor he prefers, but don't expect an answer. "They're all my favorites," he insists.

He has more time to pursue his hobby these days, he explains. He's semi-retired from farming, and rents most of his land out.

Now, when the spirit strikes, he has time to select a favorite tractor and go for a ride around the section.

Hoffman says he's done buying tractors now, but don't bet on it. His most recent purchase was two months ago.

"I say I'm not going to buy anymore," he says. And then he smiles.