



# Field day frivolity

■ By Ian M. Johnston

**A few weeks ago I drove over the hills to that magnificent city of Orange. Its elevation results in oft chilly weather, which to an old Scotsman raised in Fife, actually has a certain appeal. But it is not just the attraction of the climate which lures me to Orange. It is the anticipation of visiting Australia's longest running annual agricultural field event – The Orange Field Days. This magnificent spectacle is truly a shop window featuring the latest and greatest variety of every conceivable item for folk on the land, ranging from giant high-tech tractors to horse rugs and everything in between.**

I confess to having fond memories of the field days. During the second half of the 1950s, during my period as the Factory Field Representative employed by Lanz Australia, I was a regular exhibitor at the Borenore site. It was often stated that when I fired up a Lanz Bulldog, its thumping could be heard all around the ground and the resulting smoke, belching from its semi diesel two stroke single cylinder engine, for a while blotted out the sun. Well, that's what the Fordson guys said anyway. I guess they might have felt a bit peeved, owing to the fact that farmers often kept walking past the Fordson stand on their way to stare goggle eyed at the unconventional Bulldogs.

## The frightfully decent chap

Back in the 1950s the site was actually a short distance from its present location. Tractor exhibitors were encouraged to enter

their machines in side by side tractor ploughing demonstrations. Thankfully this was actually a test of the tractors, rather than the ability of the operators to plough a geometrically perfect furrow. Plus the tractors involved were all similarly powered, averaging 50 hp and typical of the volume selling examples of the era.

I lined up one of the recently introduced Model H Bulldogs in preparation for the commencement of the ploughing. On one side was a David Brown Cropmaster being driven by a senior executive type, who was the epitome of a frightfully 'decent' posh English chap, attired as if he was on his way to a cocktail party at Buckingham Palace. Apparently the demonstrator had failed to materialise and he had no alternative but to drive the Cropmaster.

I noted he was furiously perusing the operator manual. Probably endeavouring to comprehend the intricacies of firstly starting the engine and then the perplexities of how to coax the tractor into proceeding.

It occurred to me he possibly spent most of his time in a glitzy office (and likely had the key to the executive toilet and partook of luncheon in the executive dining room) but had never had to soil his immaculate Armani suit by actually sitting on an actual tractor. (Okay, so I was being a bit bitchy!)

To give him his due, despite his shaking hands and sweat pouring from his upper class brow, he successfully started the engine. But when the official waved his flag, indicating the demonstration should begin, the David Brown Cropmaster shot off in reverse, causing a group of observing farmers to flee for their lives!

## A fraud?

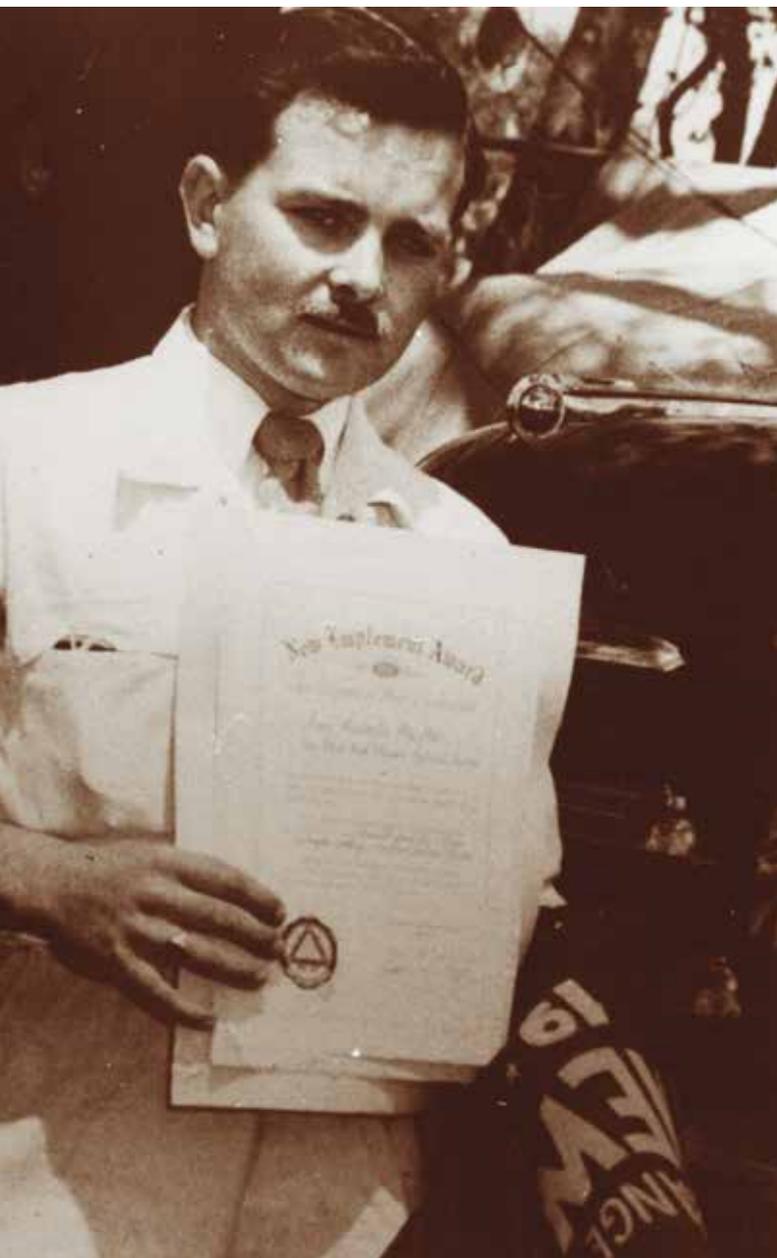
Predictably to me, but probably no one else, the Lanz with its three furrow Harvey plough, trounced the other dozen or so tractors by being an easy winner back to the finishing line. This was particularly surprising and upsetting for the Ferguson team and at the conclusion of the demonstration, was no doubt



**I demonstrate the Model H to a farmer at Porters Retreat, before the tractor was transported to Orange. Despite being rated at 24 hp, owing to the amazing torque characteristics of the single cylinder two stroke semi diesel engine, its draw bar pull exceeded that of any other tractor rated up to 50 hp.**



**Being presented with The Award of Merit by The Honourable Edgar Graham, MLA, Minister for Agriculture.**



The photo which appeared in *Country Life* of me holding the award certificate.

responsible for the mass exodus of their senior sales types in the direction of the refreshment tent, in order to comfort their bruised egos.

A while later, back at the Lanz stand, I was summoned to report immediately to the official administration tent. Crikey, what on earth had I done? Had the firm overlooked paying the fee for our site? Had I behaved improperly to the curvaceous young thing at the John Deere stand? Had the smoke emitting from the exhaust stack of the Model H exceeded the standards of The Clean Air Act? I was about to find out!

But no. None of these. Instead I was warmly greeted by the Field Day president and hustled towards a microphone set up on a dais. There I was introduced to The Honourable Edgar Graham, MLA, Minister for Agriculture, who shook my hand and congratulated me on being that year's recipient of the Award of Merit. Bulbs flashed from the sea of unwieldy Speed Graphic cameras pointing at me by enthusiastic press reporters from *The Land*, *Country Life* and local newspapers.

They obviously had the wrong bloke. They were making a



Bill O'Conner does his circus act with the JCB 3C loader/backhoe. Note the Morris Mini Moke below the tractor.

monumental mistake! My feeble protests were silenced by the Minister, who announced over the microphone that Mr (always very formal in these days) Ian M. Johnston had been chosen by a panel of judges to have won the award on account of the innovative design of his Lanz Bulldog Mode H.

"Bbbbut," I tried to explain that I only sold the thing on behalf of Lanz Australia Pty Ltd and if an award was to be presented then it should go the design team back at the Mannheim factory in Germany. No one paid any attention to my protests. So I decided the best policy was to simply shut up and gracefully accept the certificate. Which I did. But my conscience bothered me and to be honest, I felt a fraud.

## The JCB

Fast forward to 1966. I was again exhibiting at Orange, but this time in my capacity as Sales Manager for Lough Equipment Pty Ltd. The Artarmon based firm had recently been appointed as Australian importers of the highly desirable JCB extensive range of loader/backhoes and excavators, which were returning previously unheard of sales figures throughout many countries of the world.

Joseph Cyril Bamford was an entrepreneur extraordinaire and in 1966 was well on his way to creating the world's richest private manufacturing company. When the JCB dealership was offered to Eric Lough, he found the opportunity too attractive to overlook, even although it meant having to relinquish his firm's long established association with the Whitlock range of earthmovers.

So there I was again at Orange, but this time with a range of JCB machines and a team of enthusiastic sales and technical personnel – including a brilliant but slightly ebullient Irish demonstrator named Bill O'Conner.

On the second day, a rather objectionable and indeed belligerent unshaven fellow approached a few of us, who were engaged in discussing the merits of a JCB 3C with an interested Shire engineer. The fellow somewhat rudely elbowed his way into the conversation and smirked as he stated he "had heard" the JCB hydraulics were "pretty weak".

Bill reacted as if he personally had been defamed. "Yeah! Well just you watch this" he retorted, mercifully keeping his fists under control.

Without any comment to the rest of us, he swung round

to the slandered 3C, scrambled on board and fired up its BMC diesel engine. With bucket inverted and positioned on the ground, the front of the lengthy machine was raised by the loader arm hydraulics. This was followed by the backhoe bucket placed solidly on the ground and the rear portion of the 3C being raised aloft using the power of the boom and dipper rams.

Within seconds the loader backhoe appeared practically airborne, with sufficient clearance for a vehicle to be driven underneath the tractor. And that is exactly what occurred. With the engine stopped, from his lofty height Bill beckoned to a chap on a neighbouring BMC stand to drive and park a Morris Mini Moke under the JCB. Rather daringly (but foolishly I thought) the chap did just that!

The whole reckless exercise took only a couple of minutes and the rest of us just stood and gaped. In all my years of involvement with tractors and earthmoving equipment, I had never seen the like! Here was a four tonne machine high in the sky, totally dependant upon the integrity of its hydraulics to prevent it from crashing to the ground and on its way squashing a poor little innocent car into oblivion.

Bill glared down from his lofty height and yelled at the unshaven (and probably unwashed) fellow "Now what do you reckon about the hydraulics"? The malodorous individual promptly disappeared into the crowd.

A short while later, a Boy Scout messenger approached and handed me a written note. It was a request from the Field Day administration office for he who is responsible for the Lough Equipment stand to kindly report to the office.

I could not believe it! What – another Award of Merit! So with a spring in my step I fronted up at the office, only to be greeted by a very large safety officer, who castigated me for

what he termed the irresponsible and dangerous episode with the JCB, "which must never be repeated."

Thoroughly chastened, I followed the example of the Ferguson characters all these years ago, and headed for the refreshment stand. ■

## IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

**Question:** Okay – what is it?

**Clue:** Note the location of the radiator (probably doesn't help).

**Degree of difficulty:** This is a real stinker!

**Answer:** See page 28.



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