

Winnipeg Free Press

Agriculture

No pressure on threshers

Record for most separating machines in one field set to be smashed at reunion

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Posted: 07/16/2016 4:00 AM



Barry Klym points out the flywheels on his McCormick-Deering 22x38 threshing machine and what it will do when hooked up to a series of drive belts powered by his 1935 tractor.

NEAR BEAUSEJOUR — The question isn't whether Manitoba will break the record for the most threshing machines in one field, currently held by Ontario.

It will. There are already 114 threshing machine owners registered to attend the 62nd Manitoba Threshermen's Reunion later this month.



The Klyms' daughters, Angie (left) and Erin, and their husbands pitch in with the family's passion for antique farm machinery.



Photos by PHIL HOSSACK / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Rosemarie Klym at the wheel of a tractor she and her husband, Barry Klym, found recently. The Klym family will take the antique on its trek to the annual Manitoba Threshermen's Reunion later this month.

"Ontario," says Angie Klym, whose family is rebuilding one of those vintage threshers, "is shaking in its boots."

No, the real question is, what the heck is a threshing machine?

It's almost prehistoric in appearance. It looks like something a Grade 3 student made in art class: a spray-painted box with wheel-shaped macaroni glued to the sides.

There are at least 10 different wheels on each side, attached by various belts, forming something akin to a Mouse Trap game.

The longest belt is attached to the tractor engine and powers all the other belts. A second belt powers the conveyor belt "feeder" where the wheat sheaves are fed into the machine. Another belt operates the elevator system that raises the cleaned kernels to the top. A fourth belt powers the fan to blow the chaff out a long duct.

The key belt, however, is the one that shakes the wheat stalks to get the grain kernels out. That's essentially what threshing means: to shake the daylight out of the stalk until it releases all its kernels.

It's a stationary machine. Teams of at least a dozen threshermen would gather sheaves and stand them upright in groups of five, called stooks. They would then stack them into a hay wagon and haul them to the threshing machine.

The Klym family is a team, too, rebuilding an 85-year-old threshing machine for the Threshermen's Reunion. Parents Barry and Rosemarie are grain farmers. Barry got the farm-equipment restoration bug about 15 years ago. Their two daughters, Angie and Erin, strategically married husbands who bought into the family hobby and now help their father-in-law by restoring farm equipment in their backyards in Winnipeg.

How did that happen?

"We tried city-slicker boyfriends, but they didn't work out," laughed Angie. "We'd say we're going to help Dad on the farm, and they'd either disappear or come with us." They wound up marrying guys who went with them.

The daughters help out in other ways. Angie, 42, helps with marketing the threshing event and is on the Harvesting Hope committee. The goal is to get 125 threshing machines on a 75-acre field — the size of four football fields — for the world's biggest pioneer harvest. The harvested wheat will go to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

The current record, held by St. Albert, Ont., is 111 threshing machines. Threshing machines are coming from as far away as Edmonton and Iowa.

Erin, 36, is in charge of research. She uses Google to track down parts for the thresher, and her dad's other antique tractors, from across North America.

"A lot of that old stuff is in the back bush" on farmyards, said Angie, 42.

For example, one of their dad's seven restored tractors was found in the bush with a tree growing through its spokes. He had to use a chainsaw to get the tractor out.

Barry rescued his threshing machine from perdition in the back corner of a machine shed. It hadn't been fired up since 1958. It's his grandfather's thresher, a McCormick-Deering 22x38, built in 1931. It starts like it did 60 years ago, he said.

"Right now, I'm just cleaning it and preparing the belts," Barry said.

In time, threshers were replaced by a self-propelled combine (pronounced COM-bine), which combine (pronounced com-BINE) both reaping and threshing.

The family is also restoring a red 1935 McCormick-Deering W-30 tractor. The family will be hauling all seven of its tractors and one thresher to the Threshermen's Reunion in two trailers. They will participate in the daily parade.

"You're just in love with doing it. That's all that matters. And our family is oriented that way, too," said Barry, 68.

The Threshermen's Reunion is one of the biggest festivals of the summer, attended by about 15,000 people and run by several hundred volunteers, including the Klym family.

It takes place just outside Austin, a little more than halfway to Brandon from Winnipeg, from July 28 to 31. The threshing event is on the last day.

City slickers are welcome, too.

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Read more by [Bill Redekop](#).