



By Mark E. Johnson

Warren County farmer James Bouldin drives his 1945 Farmall H tractor for the first time since 1955, when he and brother Winford Bouldin traded it for a larger, three-plow tractor. The tractor was purchased by an area resident, who kept it 49 years.

The '45 Farmall "H" tractor got away from James Bouldin sometime in 1955. On a warm July morning in 2004, he got it back.

Surrounded by family members and friends who were gathered under the pretense of an informal picnic breakfast, James watched in surprise as a shiny, slate-gray 1937 International pickup truck towing the fire engine-red tractor rolled slowly down a gravel road toward the Bouldin home in Morrison.

The 74-year-old farmer, a long-time member and former board

president of Warren Farmers Cooperative, had recovered the tractor in May 2003 and enlisted the help of three good friends, Charles Stubblefield and brothers Bill and Ike Turner, to restore it. He had no idea the H

would be delivered this morning. But much to his delight, there were Charles, Bill, and Ike, alternately honking melodic horns and waving out of the windows of the antique pickup and an equally impressive purple 1951 Pontiac two-door hard-top following behind.

James' grandsons gave him congratulatory slaps on the back, and camera shutters clicked furiously as the tractor rolled back onto Bouldin land after a 49-year absence.

"In 1944,

my dad, Everett Bouldin, took a second job working at the shoe shop over at Camp

Forrest [the now-closed U.S. Army base near Tullahoma] in order to save enough money to buy a tractor," James explained later as he and son Mike sat around the kitchen table with Bill, Ike, and Charles. "At that

time, we had six mules, and by the time you fed them through the winter, you were feeding them most of your crop! So Dad decided us boys were old enough to make a crop, and he went to work making shoes to buy us a tractor."

\$1,244 and 12 promises

James explained that in 1944, the resources of the country were focused on World War II, and new tractors were not being produced for civilian use. Times were tough, he said, and most of the farm equipment trade was conducted via a black market with inferior products being sold at inflated prices.

"But Dad wanted a good tractor," said James. "Mr. Luther Crouch ran the International dealership in Viola at that time, and he told my Dad he could have the first tractor that came in after the war. Well, one day in '45, I was coming home from school and saw a new H sitting out there at the dealership. I came home and told Dad. We went back the next day, but Mr. Crouch told Dad, 'I know I promised it to you, but I've bought a place over here, and if you don't need [the tractor] real bad, I'll have another in two weeks.'"

Sure enough, said James, another new H appeared at the dealership two weeks later.

"So again, we went back the next day," he recounted. "Mr. Crouch said, 'Yeah, I promised it to you, but take it and get out of here because I bet I've promised it to 12 other people!' Dad paid \$1,244 for it."

Over the next decade, the tractor



James' father, Everett, purchased the Farmall new from an International dealership in Viola. The H was one of the more popular tractors in production at the time, with more than 28,000 manufactured in '45.

would become an integral component to the survival and success of the Bouldin family, James said.

"Well, for one thing, all of my brothers — I've got five brothers and two sisters — learned to drive on it," James explained. "Even Dad learned to drive on it. Remember, there weren't many tractors around then. Agriculture was basically mule-driven, and Dad had never owned a tractor, so it was new to him, too. As a matter of fact, I don't think he was ever totally comfortable on one. But my brother, Winford, and I ran that thing night and day."

James described his father's operation, located in Viola, as 130 acres of predominantly corn, buckwheat, crimson clover, and vegetable crops.

"I'll tell you, when we went into a field, we finished it," said James emphatically. "I know one time, I took that H and a 13-hole grain drill, and I drilled 40 acres of crimson clover in one day. I've sowed 40 acres of wheat in a day, too."



James, far right in the group, watches as a 1937 International pickup driven by friend Ike Turner pulls into the Bouldin driveway with the restored tractor in tow. Also pictured with James are, from left, grandson Justin Bouldin, daughter Charlotte Underhill, wife Christine, grandson Jameson, and sister Bessie Smithson.



Ike and fellow restorer Charles Stubblefield wave to the gathered Bouldin family as the tractor nears the Warren County farm.



ABOVE: James proudly displays a license plate made especially for the occasion. LEFT: From left are Bill Turner, who handled paint responsibilities; Charles, who focused on the electrical work; James; and Ike, who did the lion's share of the mechanical restoration.

James said he and his older brother not only kept busy with the H on their own land, but also did an enormous amount of contract work because of the rarity of tractors in the area.

"That tractor was in high demand," James laughed. "I've often said that I've plowed every garden in Viola. And it wasn't all just plowing and cultivating. For example, there was a sawmill downtown, and people would buy that slab wood. We had this feller bolt two 2-by-6s on the front of the tractor, and I'd go house-to-house, hauling and cutting that wood for folks in the wintertime. At some point, Dad bought an old hammermill attachment, and we'd crush feed for the neighbors, too."

'Mules will come back'

James said that even with the constant work provided by the tractor, some people in the area were still resistant to change.

"There was an old gentleman I worked for a lot who traded mules all the time," recalled James. "I can remember saying, 'Mr. Anderson, why don't you buy a tractor instead of feeding all these mules?' He said, 'Oh, tractors won't last. They pack the ground too hard with those wheels. It's just a fad. Mules will come back.' A lot of people felt that way."

After Winford returned from military service in the early '50s, he and James formed a partnership and purchased the H from their father. In

1955, the limitations of a two-plow tractor finally caught up with the H, and the brothers traded it for a three-plow, G-model John Deere.

"A while later, a man named Bob Spurlock came over to the house and asked me and Winford about the H," said James, who had moved to Morrison with his own family in 1954. "We told him it was a good tractor and we'd overhauled it a time or two, but the gears were getting a little loose in it. He ended up buying it, and it stayed in his family for 49 years!"

Just out of reach

James' son and farming partner, Mike, also a former director of Warren Farmers Co-op, said that for years, his father would point out the deteriorating tractor when they would drive past the Spurlock residence.

"It became somewhat of a ritual every time we'd go past that house," laughed Mike. "The tractor sat off the road a little bit, under a shed. You could just see a tail light as you passed by. Not a time went by that Dad wouldn't say something like, 'There sits that old tractor,' or 'That H is still up there.'"

James said he started thinking about getting his old tractor back in the early '70s, but the Spurlocks were not interested in selling it.

"Mr. Spurlock didn't use it for much, just a little tobacco patch and garden," said James. "After he died, probably 15 or 20 years ago, his

sister, who lived with him, apparently decided to keep it for sentimental reasons."

Mike said he approached the woman's grandson about selling the H, but was told she would keep it as long as she lived.

"He told me that every morning when 'Granny' got up, she'd look out the window to make sure that old tractor was still there," Mike said. "I guess it was like a security blanket for her, just something that reassured her that everything was OK. She lived to be nearly 100 before she passed away in 2002."

In 2003, the Spurlock family finally agreed to sell the tractor back to James, and the job of restoring the antique began. James called on life-long friends Bill, Ike, and Charles, all experienced mechanics and craftsmen, to tackle the task.

"We bought the best [rebuilding] kit we could find," said Ike, who handled the bulk of the mechanical work. "Got it from Brothers Implement over in Hillsboro. Charles and I went over there, and I mentioned who I was getting it for, and this young man said, 'Well, he doesn't have a charge account here.' Another, older man

spoke up from the back and said, 'Who'd you say it was for?' I said, 'James Bouldin.' He said, 'Sell him the whole store if you want to! I'll go along with that.' From then on, we just got what we needed."

With the help of Charles' electrical expertise, Ike said, the men rebuilt the engine.

"We reground the crankshaft and redid the head," he said, adding that new valves, seals, bearings, wiring, and hoses were also required. "Every seal in it has been replaced. The clutch, pressure plate, throw-out bearing, pilot bearing, and front wheel bearings are new, too."

And, Ike said, the men were in for a nasty surprise when they opened the gearbox.

"Oh, those gears!" moaned Ike, as he elbowed Charles in the arm. "You could tell James speed-shifted a lot as a kid!"

Ike's brother, Bill, handled the intricate paint job.

"Believe me, it's not barn paint we put on that thing," Bill pointed out. "It was the best stuff you can buy. James' pocketbook can attest to that!"

Back to stay

In the seven months that have passed since his buddies delivered the H, James says he's been "thrilled" to have the tractor home again.

"We've had it in a parade up at Viola, as well as a few other functions," James says. "There are still some people around who can recall seeing me drive it the first time around. I guess it's fun just to *have* it."

To Mike, who shares a 1,000-acre row-crop and beef cattle operation with his dad, the tractor is an important piece of his family's history.

"That tractor was the breadwinner, in many ways, for my family before I was even born," he says. "And now, with my sons growing up, it will be operated by four generations of Bouldins, hopefully more. I plan on it never leaving our family."

Mike adds that, much to his dismay, James has even mentioned using the old H to rake some hay this coming summer.

"I'm going to try to talk him out of that," Mike says with a weary smile. "I don't want to see it get messed up again!"



James enjoys a ride down Bouldin Lane toward his former home, now owned by his son and farming partner, Mike. The two operate a 1,000-acre row-crop and beef cattle operation in Morrison.