

A STORY IN EVERY TRACTOR

When more than 600 antique tractor owners get together for something as big as the inaugural Mackinac Bridge crossing, the atmosphere is festive to say the least.

Despite a light rain the morning of the Sept. 12 event, spirits were sunny and warm as proud tractor owners did some last-minute polishing and fine-tuning before the parade through Mackinac City and ultimately onto the bridge.

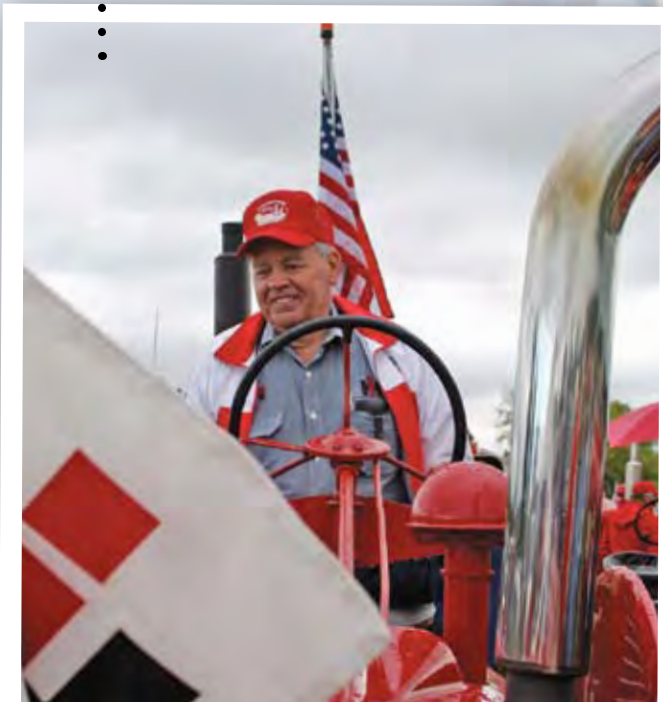
"There were no complaints at all," said Bob Baumgras, organizer of the event. "Everyone was all smiles and proud that they could be part of this."

There were a few mechanical problems that surfaced, but in the spirit of the event, ropes and chains were quickly brought out for a helping tow. But even those disappointments were quickly forgotten because the ride - and everything surrounding it - was so exhilarating.

"This is one of the neatest things I've ever done," said David Kidd of the All-Color Antique Tractor Club of Williamsburg. "It's great to get a bunch of old farmers and take some old (iron) across the bridge. We had one motor blow, and my wife's tractor died, but all in all, we all have smiles on our faces."

Those smiles likely will linger for some time, and crossers will have a grand story to tell. As Pat LaPort of the Kalamazoo Valley club said after revealing some of the history of his family's tractor ownership, all you have to do is ask, and you'll find a fascinating tale of farmers and the pleasure they take in their machines.

"Just look around and ask anybody," he said. "There's a story in every tractor here."



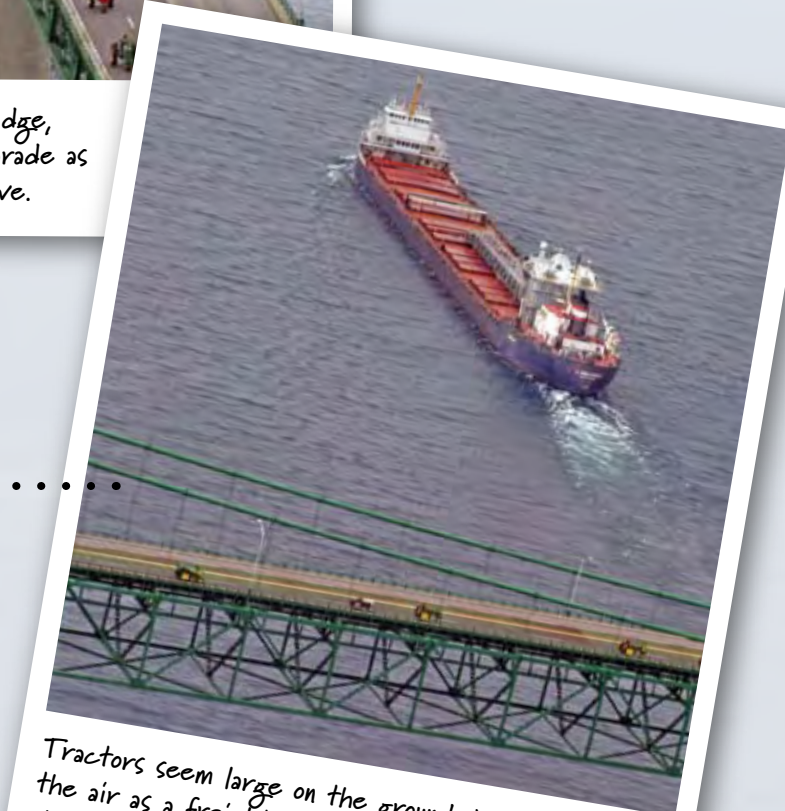
The first tractor to cross the bridge was driven by Gary Pollock of Howell.



Jim Haist of the County Line Antique Tractor Club near Flint rode his John Deere L1 across the Big Mac, with colors flying.



Across the center of the bridge, cars hurry past the bridge parade as tractor drivers smile and wave.



Tractors seem large on the ground, but a view from the air as a freighter cruises under the bridge shows an interesting perspective of scale.



American colors flew proudly on many tractors that crossed the Mackinac Bridge. Securing the pole on their tractor were Todd Joseph and father John from the EUP Tractor Association.



Proud Americans - tractor owners, anyway, always seem willing to lend a helping tow chain when needed.



A drizzly morning forced many bridge crossers to do a little last-minute polishing, but Sarah Stroup, right, and Hannah Stroup, of Corvina, took delight in the work.



Last-minute preparations sometimes includes tweaking the engine. "I could have made it across OK," said Tony Hland of Indian River, "but I have a little time, so I thought I'd blow out this carburetor."



Tractors at the beginning of the bridge crossing form a nice line as they approach the water.



Pat LaPort of the Kalamazoo Valley Antique Tractor Club prepared for the bridge ride by getting some encouragement from grandson Dustin.