

The Load of Corn

Errors and Ingenuity

by Alan Harris

IT'S ALL IN THE WAY that cheap wagon was made, I kept telling him. Clyde never could understand mechanical things like I could. He was always asking dumb questions about how a bearing worked or maybe why you needed rings in pistons or where a spark plug got its electricity. Dumb things any guy should know no matter what he's interested in.

He stood there looking at the spilled load of corn like if he looked at it long enough it would all hustle back into the wagon and the wagon box would hustle back up on the running gear and he could just climb back on the tractor and head on into town.

"Wait a minute, didn't you even bring a shovel?" I asked him.

And he said how he never thought he'd need a shovel hauling corn to the elevator. Yah, as long as you don't dump it on the road, I says to myself.

"Well," I said, "we gotta get this corn out of the road, or cars will be running over it, and that costs us money."

Clyde started thinking about that like as if thinking might get the corn out of the road. I never seen a guy so full of brains that acted so stupid when it come to sensible things. I guess he thinks ESP'll do everything for him.

"Well," I said after a bit, "why don't I go back home and get a shovel and a jack and some tools, and maybe we can get this mess cleaned up. You stay here and keep the gophers and cars away from it. And if you can think of any way to start getting the corn out of the road before I get back, then you can get started on that."

He said okay, and I got in the truck and started back home. Man, what a dumb trick. Turning a corner at full throttle pulling a full wagon of corn. I guess he never thought inertia worked anywhere besides in his head. On paper he could have figured the whole thing out--how much force would be pushing sideways on the wagon with 110 bushels of dry corn in it, going around a 90-degree corner at 18 miles per hour. He could have figured the whole problem out on paper, and figured out how the right front brace on the running gear was going to break off and how the whole wagon box was going to slide off to the right and dump about 58 and seven-tenths bushels of dry shelled corn onto the gravel road. He could have figured that whole problem out on paper.

And there he is in the rear view mirror, just sitting there by the pile of corn in the road wondering why it went and did that when all he was doing was turning a corner. Of course I was nice enough about it. After all, he's a man, or supposed to be. I said how it was the wagon was made weak. Said how you couldn't buy things anymore that lasted more than a couple seasons. So then he said how maybe he was going

too fast cause he didn't pull back any on the throttle cause he found out he never had to before when he was driving the old John Deere around the corner. How it always took corners like a Jaguar.

Well. Who could ever think going around a corner with a tractor pulling nothing and a tractor pulling 110 bushels of dry shelled corn was going to be the same thing? He could, I guess.

So I got the jack and tools and shovel and put them in the truck and drove back down there where he was still sitting by the dumped corn at the corner. Then I got out of the truck and looked at the wagon. I see it was never going to be the same again. The box was twisted all funny and the running gear was twisted too. And the tongue was all kind of bent. Lucky he didn't tip the whole tractor over on himself. A really dumb trick.

And then I see the box was split at one of the corner seams so even if you shoveled all that corn back in, you'd never get the wagon anywhere before corn was all strewed out on the road again. So I looked at it and swore a little.

Then we tried putting the jack under the dipped right front corner of the box and seeing if we couldn't kind of lift it back up on the running gear. Well, you just don't lift wagon boxes like you do cardboard boxes. And he couldn't figure out why the twisted box didn't just snap back in place on the running gear after we lifted it up, I guess. Guess he never figured anything could be bent permanent, and everything just snapped back like watch springs. Or else he never knew watches had springs. Well, that wasn't going to work, so we thought about it awhile, about how we were going to even get all this gear back home, the way it was so bent up.

So I said, "Why don't you get on the tractor and see if it'll pull the wagon along like it is without busting anything else? And if that works, we'll bring our other wagon out here and shovel some corn into it. We sure can't carry much corn in this pretzel."

So he gets on the tractor and starts it up and pulls the whole mess about a mile down the road before I can get him stopped, and corn strews out all along the road and the box cuts down into the wagon's right front tire and pops it, and then even more corn spills out cause that corner of the wagon is lower now. Well, not a mile, but it seemed like it. Clutch stuck, he said. Couldn't pull it out of gear. What else can go wrong? Minds well chalk this whole load of corn up to the county for graveling the road and forget it. Mighty expensive gravel, I'd say. And how can you shovel it up when it's all in a stream like this? Unbelievable.

So after I was done cussing some more he said well we could load that pile of corn back by the corner into the back of the truck and just forget about this other stream of corn on the road since it wasn't much. Well, I'd been getting ready to think of that, so I said all right and he got to shoveling corn into the truck while I was thinking about some way to get the wagon back home without losing any more corn out of it. And where I was going to find an extra tire with this one all cut to shreds. And the John Deere still popping away.

So I shut the tractor off and thought awhile about how I was going to get that wagon back home and what I was going to do with it after I got it there. You couldn't weld

that broken box back together. It was worse than Humpty Dumpty. But I didn't want to lose all the corn either. A dollar a bushel ain't much, but it don't come free either.

And the John Deere's engine was clicking like it always does after you shut it off, like it was relaxing its muscles and cracking its knuckles back in place. And then some fool hillbilly roared by and raised about forty bushels of dust while I was sitting there thinking how we were going to get that wagon back home.

So Clyde comes over and he says how we can unhitch the tractor and bring it around to the side of the wagon and hook a chain on the back of it and pull the wagon box sideways to the left after we get it up on the jack again and if that won't do it.

So I said yah that's what I was thinking we could do, and so we tried that and what a bunch of cracking and popping and moaning, but the box was back on the running gear enough to ride that way. And then he says how we can get the spare tire out of the pickup truck and put it on the wagon just to get it back home. And I said yah we sure couldn't pull it back on that busted tire or we'd end up needing a new wheel too. So we did that, put the spare tire out of the truck on it.

Then I said maybe I'd drive the tractor back home and he could drive the truck, and how I'd take it nice and easy going back and he could drive along behind me and honk if anything happened. So I drove the tractor and wagon on up the road and got to Jack's farm and turned around in his barnyard. And of course Jack was there and I had to tell him all about how my kid dumped the wagon over by the corner and he laughed and I sorta laughed and then went back toward where Clyde was waiting for me in the truck by the corner.

So I goes around the corner nice and easy to show him how he should of done it the first time, and heads on home. Then I look back and see how Clyde's gotten the truck stuck in the ditch trying to turn it around.