

Walking weary miles behind a plow inspired Henry Ford to build the Fordson tractor

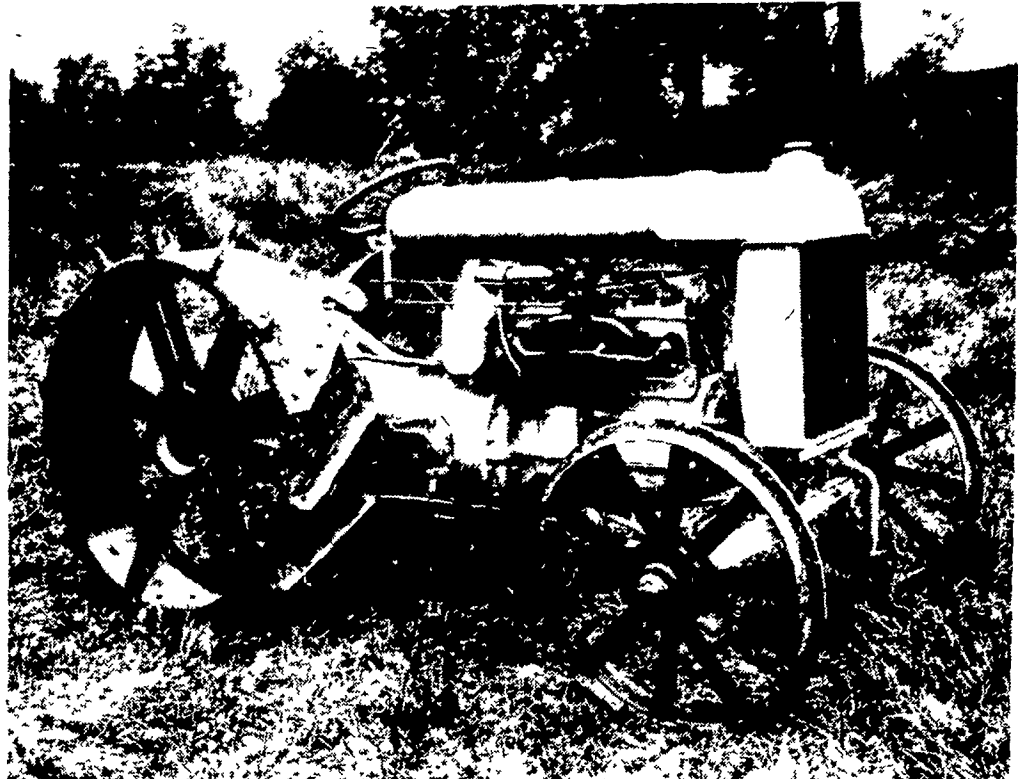
ROY, Mich. - Ford Motor Company has been in the business of building and marketing tractors for 61 years. The automotive giant,

which last year began observing its 75th year as a corporation, in 1917 formed a subsidiary, Henry Ford & Son, to market the "Fordson" tractor.


The company's founder, Henry Ford, told in his autobiography how he had experimented with tractors even before building his first car. As a farm boy, he said, he had "walked many a weary mile behind a plow...what a waste...for a human being to spend hours and days behind a slowly moving team of horses!"

Mr. Ford's difficulty was not in designing a tractor - he had built several successful heavy steam models - but in designing one the average farmer could afford. "The manufacturing of a big tractor which only a few wealthy farmers could buy did not seem to me worthwhile," he wrote.

Mr. Ford soon decided that he could do more for the farmer by enabling him to make excursions off the farm, and thus turned his attention to the automobile. Only after it was in production did he return to the tractor, turning out more



Henry Ford introduced the Fordson as the world's first mass-produced tractor October 8, 1917. The first 7000 units went to Great Britain to help increase food production during World War I. During some years in the 1920's, the Fordson represented 75 per cent of all tractors built in the U.S.

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than 50 experimental models before world events propelled him into making tractors in earnest - and in quantity.

It was early 1917, World War I, and because of the German blockade, Britain was in danger of starving. She needed to import 70 per cent of her food supply, and Allied ships headed there were being sunk in large numbers. Britain's only hope: to increase food production at home. Her only means: the tractor.

Britain's Lord Northcliffe entreated Mr. Ford: "Our farmers need tractors. We want you to build 7000 of them for us, quickly." Mr. Ford agreed. On October 8, 1917, the first Ford-produced tractor rolled off the assembly line, and within seven months the entire order was filled.

When Henry Ford brought his Fordson to the American market in 1918, he was deluged with 13,000 orders within three months. Between 1917 and 1928, U.S. Fordson production totalled 739,977. For some years during the 1920's, 75 per cent of all tractors built in the U.S. were Fordsons. Mr. Ford sold the early

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