



Farm Talk

by
Jerry Webb

Agricultural competition at rural gatherings is a tradition. And over the years it has taken some very unusual forms. There are the traditional horse races, tractor pulls, hoeing contests, corn husking and cow milkings. Add to that the more unusual cow chip throwing, Bessie bingo, watermelon seed spitting, and on down the list of interesting, exciting, ridiculous agricultural contests.

But today's story beats them all - a demolition derby for farm combines. That's right, one was held this summer at the Kansas State Fair and it was a sell out. Ten thousand people packed the

grandstand to watch those monstrous grain harvesters ram into each other.

If you've ever been to an automobile demolition derby - I went to one - then you know the ground rules. A bunch of vehicles are trapped in an arena before a screaming, blood thirsty crowd. The object is to bang into other cars and knock them out of commission without suffering any fatal damage yourself.

The typical demolition derby is a gathering of twenty or thirty old clunkers able to run with a value of no more than \$200 dollars each. The participants are

required to remove the glass and make certain other safety alterations. In competition they usually drive backwards so as not to mess up their motors. The most skilled or perhaps the luckiest avoids any kind of a hit that puts him out of action while in turn causing great damage to other vehicles. This sport is considered great fun by many and draws huge crowds at the Delaware State Fair and other gatherings.

But imagine if you will, ten or twenty combines. Those gigantic multi-thousand dollar machines that are used to harvest corn and soybeans here on the Delmarva peninsula. Obviously, in Kansas they would have lots of combines and they would surely know how to operate them. And although my information doesn't says so I also assume the competition was limited to old worn out and otherwise outdated machines that were no longer suitable for field operations. Agricultural clunkers if you will.

Having never seen such a mess, I can only imagine the mayhem that would be caused by an arena full of roaring combines and crazed farmers doing their best to destroy

the other guy's machine. Of course, speeds would be reduced considerably from the automotive type demolition derbies but the power and the ability to keep going would be awesome with large tractor size tires and motors mounted way up high as they are on combines. It might take quite a blow to disable one. But that's the object. The last one still able to maneuver around the arena was declared the winner. And ten thousand spectators, their hearts pounding wildly went home to wait till next year's combine demolition derby.

Only in Kansas you say? Don't bet on it. Offer some prize money and the proper arena and you can be sure Delmarva combines would be there to complete. What a natural for the Delaware State Fair. An agricultural contest with the drawing power of a tractor pull

but without the tremendous expense.

There are plenty of old combines setting out behind barns and otherwise rusting away that could be awakened for one last try. Many of those old machines run, they just don't pick corn very well. Otherwise they are worth only a few bucks for scrap metal and spare parts. And even after the competition is over there is probably still some salvage value in terms of tires, motors, belts, pulleys and other usable parts.

My enthusiasm for automotive demolition derbies lasted about an hour and maybe I would feel the same way about a combine demolition derby. But I'll bet if one were held at the Delaware State Fair or some other rural gathering, it would draw a large and appreciative crowd. At least once.



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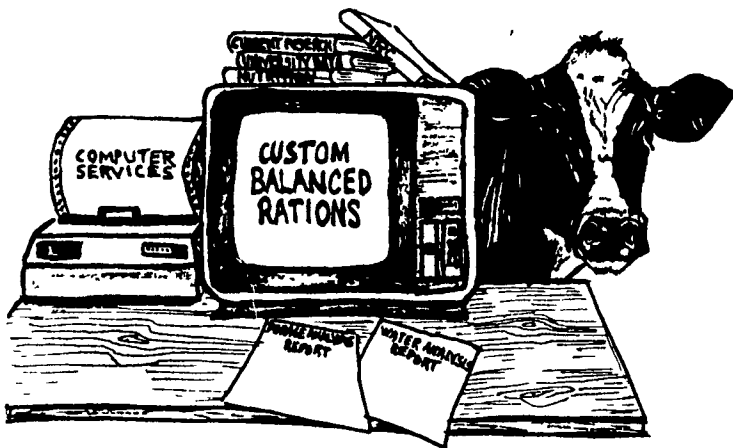
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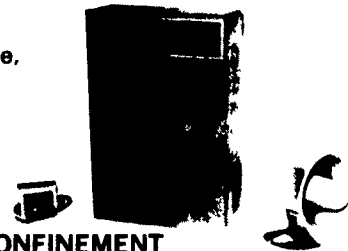
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