

The Avery steam-driven tractor is 100

By Linda Schneider

This will be the 56th annual Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Show held in Bird City, and on display will be the 100-year old, 1909 Avery Undermount steam driven tractor.

The Avery was acquired by Roy Kite along with other steam engines and restored during the winter of 1954/1955. It was one of the first steam engines to be on display when the Show began back in the early 1950s.

At one point, Haldon Nelsen purchased the Avery from the Roy Kite Estate. When Mr. Nelsen died in 1984, the Thresher Association, and the Bird City Century II Development Foundation purchased the steam engine together.

However, Century II became concerned about liable issues and the engine did not run in the show for a couple of years. It was at this time Century II donated their interest in the tractor to the association, who owns it presently.

But, the Avery is not an orphan tractor. Every year Mike Levin and several other helpers; Brenden Haack of Bird City, Lee Brown and Lynn Brown both of Denver, Colo., Norm Hayes of Vernon, Colo., and many others work on the Avery to keep it running year after year.

"Yes, this steam engine still runs," said Mike. "It has taken 10 years of work to get it to its current condition and at eight days a year, it will take another 10 years to finish it!"

All though Mr. Levin does not own the century-old Avery, he has grown rather fond of it, even naming a dog "Avery."

The Avery does not look like any of the other steam engines at the Show. It is because it is based on a different design called an "Under-mounted Avery" due to all the running gear being mounted under the boiler.

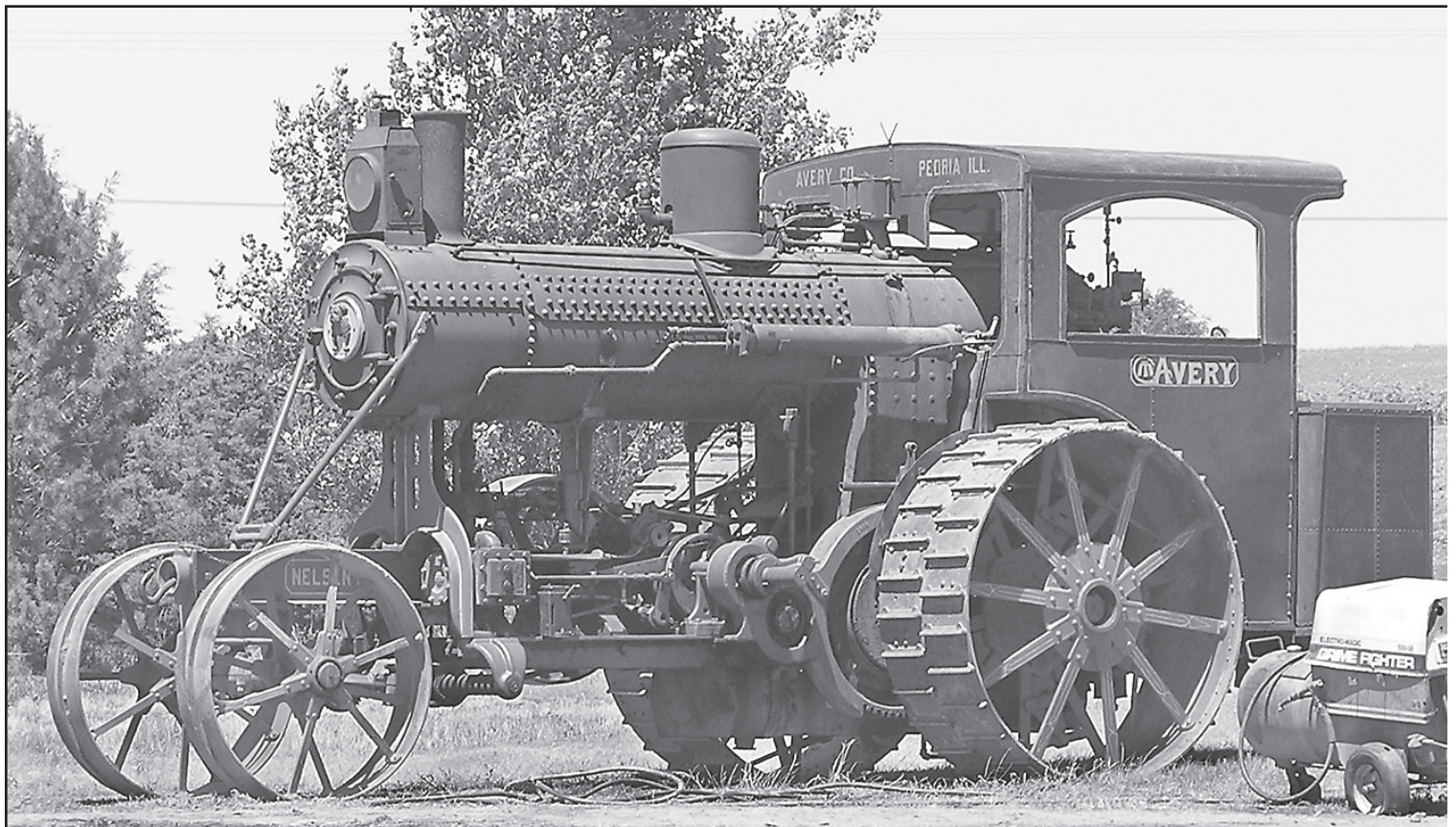
Another term used is a "Road Locomotive." This is also due to the design. The Avery company's idea was, by placing the running gear below the boiler, if a problem occurred, it would be easier to work on for maintenance.

Traditional-style steam engines have the running gear located on top of the boiler. If there's a problem with the running gear, the person would have to climb on top of a hot boiler to fix the problem. With the Avery, all he had to do is dismount from the cab, walk over to the problem, and fix it at normal height while standing on the ground.

Unfortunately, one major flaw in the design of the Undermounts was that by placing the running gear low to the ground, all the dust, dirt, etc., would get into the gears and moving parts, causing quicker wear and more breakdowns.

Due to the design flaw, the Undermounts were not as numerous as the traditional style Steam Engines. The Show is very fortunate to have an Undermounted Avery. The Under-mounted is a locomotive on wheels and is always a crowd pleaser!

Mr. Levin said another important part of the Avery team is his father, Barry, who has flown in from Arizona every year for the past nine years. He will arrive on the Sunday



100-YEARS-OLD — The Avery tractor is 100 years old and will be featured at the Thresher Show. The massive tractor is run by steam. To the right, some of those who keep the Avery running every year stopped long enough for a photo. They are (l to r) (the name of the first man is unknown) Barry Levin, Topock, Ariz.; Brenden Haack, Bird City; Michael Levin, Olathe; Gerald Wright, Bird City; and Lynn Osburn, Denver.

Photo courtesy of Mike Levin



before the show opens and begin working on the Avery. Typically, they will complete one project on the Undermounted Avery during the show, as well as fix any problems that may come up.

Mr. Levin lives in the Kansas City metro area and there are several shows closer that he could attend instead of Bird City. In addition, he tows a 33-foot travel trailer 425 miles each way to Bird City and with the gas prices reaching as high as \$4.99 at times, it can put a strain on the wallet.

"What keeps bringing me back are the people," said Mr. Levin. "There is a great camaraderie among all the volunteers who run and work on the Steam Engines. I have been blessed to have traveled significantly in my life and have never met nicer people."

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