

## DECALS

### The Rusty Acres Approach

by Dan Peterman

After it is all said and done, your tractor is mechanically complete and as new as possible; nothing overlooked as far as you can tell. It has a bright, shiny, new coat of paint, and now needs the final touch of a set of decals. It sounds logical just to open up the Parts Book, get the part numbers, and order a set of decals from your dealer. After all, it is a John Deere — John Deere produced the tractor — so by rights they should have the correct decals. Unfortunately, you'll likely only get what they think looks correct, or good enough, which is usually not. For example, the New Generation numbers are a universal set; you have to pick out the numbers you need and, in my opinion, it looks like a house number plastered on the side of the tractor. All decals are not the same. Just because it says "John Deere" on the side of the tractor does not mean that it's the correct way.

Decals vary with model, year, make, and sometimes even the serial number of the tractor. The early tractors, up through about 1940, were originally silk-screened; not decals at all. Later on, the "20" Series Tractors came along with a yellow stripe, which was actually one long decal with the numbers and letters already on it. This is also true with the "30" Series that followed. That's why if you pay attention to a "20" or "30" Series Tractor that is in original condition, it's not unusual to see the former yellow on the hood and grille sides faded to an off-white color. That's from the large yellow sticker, not from actual yellow paint. Now, when it comes to decaling the "20" or "30" Series, you have to paint the yellow stripes and then apply the decals, because it is just not cost effective to make a large sticker for the side of the tractor. I know, it would be really authentic if you did that, but yellow paint with a correct set of decals looks just as good.

There are two types of decals; screen-printed mylar and computer-cut vinyl. The older way of doing things is definitely screen-printed mylar. Years ago, this is all that used to be available, and they are still available today. Mylar stickers are very popular with a lot of the farm stores, where you can walk up to a shelf, grab a set of decals, go home, and slap them on. The thing about those sets is that they usually come with a bunch of other stickers that you don't really need. But, people use them anyway. Even if they don't know where they go, they think that they need to use up all the stickers in the pack. My opinion is that if you don't know where it goes, don't put it on! Your tractor will look a lot better without a sticker in a spot where there shouldn't be one, than it will with one that doesn't

belong. Basically, those sets are referred to as a "universal" set; they could fit your "A" or your "LA". I regard them to be no better than bumper stickers.

The other way is the way to go; computer-cut vinyl has a much better look. With no lines between the letters, they make a lot cleaner-looking job. They cost a bunch more, but they really look sharp and are worth the difference. They are also much easier to apply than mylar. You and I both well know — if you have put on a mylar sticker — that you get fingerprints on the clear parts almost every time, even if you have clean hands. The best way to put mylar on is with a wet surface, then squeegee out the air bubbles. With vinyl, all you have to do is make sure your surface is flat and shiny, clean of all dust and dirt, measure out where they need to go, and then tape them in place. With tape on top of your decal, make a hinge, peel the back off, slide it down, rub on, then peel off the topside sticker at an angle and away from you (*very slowly*). After it's off, rub the decal again. Any air bubbles can be poked with a pin and rubbed out flat. I do this all dry; out of the wind. It takes time to put decals on correctly and in the right locations. You can tell where decals go by studying photos, literature, and the Operator's Manual. Or another way is when you get a decal set from a supplier that specializes in decals, ask for instructions that show your model of tractor and a description of what sticker goes where. If there is any doubt where a sticker goes, *don't* put it in the wrong place. Again, ask your supplier; most of the time they can tell you what you need to know.

There are quite a few decals suppliers, but I have had the best luck with Travis Jorde. I have bought decals from him since he started in the business. He does them right, and knows where they go. He can also supply industrial decals for almost any model, as well as create non-existent decals if you have a pattern, especially in the form of photos and dimensions. I've seen him supply old spreader and wagon decals from photos of what remained, and they are excellent. We all make mistakes putting on decals from time to time by messing up a letter or a number. If that's the case with vinyl, he can send you one letter or number to replace it so you don't have to peel off the entire string.

I could talk about the correct way to put on decals, but we all have a different way of doing things. Just remember, the final touch of decals is what makes a tractor complete. The larger decals, like on the side of unstyled tractors, I have even had to cut in half to put on so it would be easier. There are a lot of tricks to doing it, but have fun as well and take your time. There are few appearance details worse than a crooked decal.

Expo was a good time; I saw people I only see once a year. The quality of tractors seems to be getting better every year. I'm already looking forward to 2009. The Cattle Congress location sure makes it easy to see everything. No weather worries, no oppressive sun exposure, and right down the street from where the Waterloo two-cylinders were built! ☺