

STILL UNDER WARRANTY?

The Rusty Acres Approach

by Dan Peterman

Okay; your tractor is 50 years old and it ought to still be under warranty. Right? Yeah, that *does* sound ridiculous, but I'll bet that almost all of us have had those brief surges of temper or tight jaws over little things that are just as ridiculous. We know better, but it's a John Deere! It's as if nothing should ever fail. Mostly, it's a matter of being spoiled by almost unbelievable reliability. Count your blessings by choosing to go with vintage John Deere rather than some other direction, and yield to fixing the things that finally need your attention. Here's a couple of classics that may sound familiar to you...

A typical question: *I replaced the seals in my tractor. Not all of them, but the ones that were leaking. They were good for awhile, but now a few of them have started to leak again. What happened?*

Well, that could be the result of a couple of things. Were the seals installed correctly? If the rubber part of the seal that goes around the shaft was assembled dry, as soon as the shaft turned it probably caused some damage. A good method to prevent tearing the rubber surface is to apply lubricant before assembly. This can be as simple as a little axle grease.

Where there are sharp surfaces, such as on PTO shafts or axle shafts, wrap the sharp edge with electrical tape before sliding the seal on. Remove the tape after assembly. The tape will prevent the sharp surface from tearing or cutting the seal.

Seals are easy to install, especially with a seal driver kit. I use a regular socket to drive the oddball-sized seals into place.

When removing seals, have note paper nearby to sketch its proper position when installed. Or, if you prefer, don't take notes and instead risk putting it on backwards.

One thing to note: A seal that has been replaced may not stop all the oil all the time. How long had that seal been sitting on the shelf before you got it? If it had hardened over time, it will *not* conform as well as a fresh seal. If this happens to you, the likelihood that you'll get satisfaction by complaining to the manufacturer or seller is mighty slim. Heck... It might be a 50-year-old tractor and the warranty has plumb run out. So, live with that fact and repair it again.

I've been around tractors that have had *all* of the seals replaced, but are now sitting around with a leak or two showing up. Seals can do this without warning, even if the tractor isn't being used. In fact, some people believe — through experience — that at least occasional operation helps keep seals from "drying up." I think there's a lot of truth to that.

Another typical question: *My tractor has been sitting in the shed, and it developed a fuel leak at the carburetor. Do you know what might have gone wrong?*

When you park your tractor for an extended period, it's best to run it out of gas so the carburetor is dry. Then the gaskets won't start to develop leaks, and the needles and seats won't get all gummed up. I've determined that gas with ethanol tends to develop leaks more so than regular gas. It also causes problems with rubber sediment bowl gaskets, so I replace them with cork gaskets if ethanol is going to be used. The auto industry solved the ethanol problems over the years, but vintage tractors are still subject to the trouble it can cause.

A question just for fun: *I went out to the shed the other day and noticed a slight antifreeze leak around a gasket. Should I sue the antifreeze manufacturer, or should I have fixed the gasket when the tractor was torn apart? It wasn't leaking before I started working on the tractor.*

Most gaskets that weren't leaking antifreeze prior to restoration should get replaced anyway during restoration. When you drain the coolant out of a system that has been wet for so many years, gaskets have a tendency to dry out to smaller dimensions and irregular surfaces. Even radiator cores can start to leak after drying out, as tiny cracks that were gummed over will now be exposed. Don't forget that some two-cylinder tractors have rubber "O" rings on the water inlet, which should be changed as well. There are some commercial coatings that can be put on gaskets to help prevent leakage, so this should be considered during re-assembly.

Incidentally, I use premium antifreeze at a 50:50 mixture, which is recommended for proper operation and storage in most conditions. The coolant will not freeze with such a mixture in any reasonable climate. Rather, it just gets slushy. Owners with special needs may wish to modify the standard blend accordingly.

A detail question: *I restored my tractor and chose a glossier black than original for the lights, generator, and dash. I was trying to avoid the re-appearance of rust, which can be a problem with flat black. Was it okay to do this?*

Flat black was the original paint used in production, but even John Deere detailed some of its show tractors with a gloss black to highlight various details. On the other hand, most tractors left the factory with painted spark plugs and wires, fan belts, and hoses. Perhaps a good compromise would be to use an "eggshell" luster or semi-gloss paint, as both of these choices still cover better than flat black and are somewhat more subdued than full gloss black. For axle shafts, however, I recommend flat black; or no paint at all with a light coating of rust preventative lubricant. Some detail-oriented owners have even taken to using clear coat on perfectly cleaned-up axle shafts, which does look quite nice.

Your vintage tractors are no longer under warranty. Their future is in your hands. ☺