

An Old Cougar Renewed – and Powered by Faith

By John Holliger

We thank John Holliger for sharing his story with us.

When we bought this tractor in the summer of 2019, I had no idea the huge impact that the purchase was going to have on our family's life. My connection to this tractor began back in 1977



when a childhood friend's dad bought it for their farming operation. I recall that at the time it was about the biggest tractor around. As sometimes happens, when we got out of school my friend and I each went our separate ways in life and kind of lost touch with one another. *Fast forward about 39 years*—I heard that my old friend's father had passed away. In due time an estate auction was scheduled, and I went out to look things over and sure enough—there was the Steiger! The old Cougar II was in rough shape. It looked as though it had spent much

of its life outside and had not been used for many years. The batteries were dead, but it did fire right up with a little pull from another tractor.

While we do not farm, we live on the edge of a small town and have a few acres that we take care of. My son, Ben, has always liked tractors and pretending to be a farmer. (*Ok, maybe I like to as well.*) We still have my grandfather's old John Deere G.* I spent many an hour on it working his farm when I was young. These days, we enjoy taking it to the local "Plow Day" when we can.

The sale was scheduled for late summer 2019 and my son and I made plans to attend. While at the sale, it was great to reconnect with my old boyhood friend and his family, relive some old times, and get caught up on current times. As the auctioneer got closer to the big green tractor, my son's elbows to my side and chants of "**Can we get it dad?!**" got more and more frequent. I told him to call his mom, hoping that she would bail me out and veto the whole idea, but no such luck; she gave it the green light. When the hammer fell, we had bought either a tractor, or a pile of scrap iron, I wasn't quite sure, but at the price I figured we could come out okay either way.

A bit about the tractor. It is a 1975 Cougar II with a Caterpillar 3306 PC engine and 3-point hitch. The hour meter was not working when we got the tractor, but the service meter on the engine shows about 6200 hours. The tractor was sold through Warner's Turbo Shop in Kewanee, Illinois.

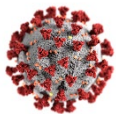
It has a Spicer 1010 transmission and Clark HD axles to which Firestone 24.5x32 tires were mounted. A very good friend of mine helped me out with a full set of used—but usable—Firestone tires off a junk tractor to replace the well-worn tires that were on the tractor when I got it. The Wil-Rich plow has been with the tractor its whole life. The story I got was that the first owner bought the tractor and the plow, but the plow proved to be a bit much for the tractor in the soil conditions that they had up near Kewanee, so he traded it back to Warner's who then sold it to my friend's dad. I was not quick enough on the draw to get the plow at the auction, however, it did show up a couple months later on Facebook Marketplace, so I was able to reunite them again.



Needless to say, Ben was pretty excited. A few days later we got out to pick it up and bring it home. As with most of these old Steigers, the brakes did not work; I didn't feel comfortable driving it the short distance home, so we had a local farmer that does some trucking on the side haul it the 4 miles or so home. Some testing showed the starter to be bad—a new starter and a couple batteries, and she came to life on her own! We really had no intention of doing a full restoration on it; we just planned on fixing some of the more pressing issues.



It was about this time that Covid and 2020 hit and all that went along with it. We were told to stay home to slow the spread. My son Ben and I are competitive rifle shooters. Weekends from May through September generally find us traveling around the Midwest competing in tournaments, and each year, we attend the National Matches at Camp Perry in Ohio. These local matches, as well as the Nationals, were cancelled due to Covid. My wife and I enjoy dining out, but all of our favorite restaurants were either closed, or the masking requirements were such that it took all the enjoyment out of dining out. Going to church was replaced with staying at home and watching it on YouTube. Ben's school switched to remote learning. Social Distancing became the buzz word so we dutifully "sheltered in place" as we watched "mostly peaceful protestors" on TV burn and loot our cities. With all this going on, the old Steiger earned its keep once again, but this time not dragging a field cultivator or plow through the field, but as our family Social Distancing project, and it performed this task flawlessly. Ben and I spent our weekends and evenings out in our shop working on the



Steiger. Countless hours were spent disassembling, rebuilding, cleaning, painting, and otherwise tinkering with the old Cougar. Not being mechanics, a lot of time was also spent reading, studying, and head scratching. It seemed that the tractor had a never-ending supply of pieces and parts that needed some attention.

With all the extra time on our hands due to Covid, we decided to go a little further with the old tractor. The cab was in bad shape, so we decided it would be much easier to work on if we pulled it off. The radiator had a leak, so it had to be pulled out. Since we had it this far, we decided we might as well put some paint on it, so I had the local painter look at it. He said it would be much easier to get a good paint job if you pull



the engine, so we did that. Well, once the engine was out, it would not make any sense to put it back in without putting in a new clutch, machining the flywheel, and putting in new main seals. The hydraulic pump had a small leak, so it got fixed while we were at it. Only makes sense while it is apart to pull a main cap and rod cap and check bearing clearances. (*They checked out fine.*) I'm not a diesel mechanic, so once the engine was out, we took it to L&K repair, a local diesel shop, and they performed that work. (More on them later.)

Once we got to this point, I figured in for a penny in for a pound, and Ben and I proceeded to pretty much strip the rest of the tractor down and replace, repair, rebuild, or re-engineer almost everything else on the tractor. With the exception of the axles, if it could be unbolted, it was. New spherical bearings on the steering cylinders, repack the steering cylinders, new u-joints, new axle seal, rebuild the 3-point hitch and cylinders, all new hydraulic hoses. Even the drawbar support got rebuilt and new oversized pin for the roller made to remove the slop. I run a small machine shop making firearm accessories. This came in very handy for making new parts for the tractor. The seat got upholstered and a new cab kit installed. New switches and a whole new wiring harness made. (My first experience doing this also.) About the only thing we did not do was new articulation bearings, but they were in very good shape somehow.



Once repairs were made, the rolling chassis and a big pile of parts were dropped off at the painter for blasting and paint. While we waited for that to get done, Ben and I started cleaning the engine and painting it. In due time the painter finished up and we got the tractor reassembled just to find out that we could not get the engine to fire. Turns out that over the year or so

that the tractor was torn apart, the old fuel in the pump gummed up and the pump would need a rebuild, so off came the pump and it got sent out for a rebuild. Once the pump was reinstalled, we got it fired up just in time to get it out and



hook up the plow and give it a test run before the crops were put in the ground in the spring of 2021. It was our goal to have it at the Half Century of Progress Show in Rantoul, IL, in August of 2021; With hundreds of people watching, I really did not want **that** to be the first time I dropped the plow in the ground behind it! As it turned out I needn't have worried, the Cougar handled the plow like a champ! Link to: [Half Century of Progress Show - Half Century of Progress Show - Rantoul, IL](#)

With the paint dry and test run completed, it was time to get started on the graphics. The painter that I used also does wraps and other graphics, so we had him make up the new stickers. Here we did take a few artistic liberties. Ben likes the "Wild about Steiger" series of toys, so we found a cool Cougar graphic and made some nose art for the old girl to kind of jazz it up a bit and make it our own.



After buying the tractor and starting to put time and money into it, I got a lot of comments from people questioning why I would spend money on the old Cougar.

"The 3306 is gutless." "The hydraulics are junk." "You should have gotten a PTA." And on and on... It was as if the tractor had to do something to deserve or earn being saved from the scrap yard.

They did not see that I was putting time and money into the tractor not because the tractor did anything to earn it, but because I wanted to. As I thought about this, it reminded me of the Gospel story. God sent his son to die on the Cross for our sins, not because of anything we did to deserve or earn it, but rather out of his love for us. For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We do not deserve, nor can we ever earn, our way to heaven. For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God. Not by works, lest any man should boast. While this was rolling around in the back of my mind, we entered the Covid pandemic. In this challenging time, I saw people putting their faith and hope in a lot of different things. People put their faith in a candidate, a President, a mask, a doctor, a movement, a vaccine, only to find that none of these things lived up to their promise. That faith proved to be misplaced because those are all men or manmade institutions or solutions. Only through Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ will we find lasting peace and comfort and love for and understanding of one another that was so needed then and is still needed now. With all this in mind, Ben and I decided that we should use the tractor to help share this message of Love, Grace, and Hope that is provided through Christ's finished work on the Cross. With the help of a young lady at our church, we designed the graphic to share the good news of Christ's saving Grace and the strength that is provided through Faith in Him.



When we started this project, I had no idea the impact this tractor would have on our family. In the process of restoring this tractor, my son and I found ourselves with a new hobby that is full of a lot of great people. We spent hundreds of hours together out in the shop enjoying each other's company and learning together. We had so much fun rebuilding this first tractor that we now have three Steigers and a Versatile* that we are in the process of rebuilding.

I mentioned L&K Repair, the company that helped bail us out when we got in over our heads on the engine work. Through this, we developed a relationship with the owner, Linus, and when Ben turned 15, he began a part-time job with them as an apprentice floor-dry application and removal specialist. He is now a fully certified floor-dry technician. He has begun training in not only diesel engine repair, but all other aspects of heavy equipment repair as well and is planning to pursue a career in diesel mechanics after he graduates high school.

The Lord truly does work in the strangest of ways.

Videos by Ben Holliger:

"Plow Day": https://youtu.be/M_JyAPwR4JA

[Ben \(@b_holliger\) TikTok | Watch Ben's Newest TikTok Videos](#)

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Additional Photos:



Above: Pins



Left: Re-mounting the cab.



Above: Steiger tractors lined up at the Half Century of Progress Show in Rantoul, IL. August 2021



Left: Steiger Green!!!!



Left: Holligers' restored Cougar II and John Deere G.*



Left: The John Deere G* with a younger version of its current owner.

***Note from the Editor:** Occasionally, the Steiger Heritage Club *does* recognize that *other green*—and *other red*—tractors exist.