

# STEIGER

## A Legacy Born In a Barn

by Sherry Schaefer



Doug Steiger



John Steiger



Maurice Steiger

**H**ow do a couple of farm boys, who just needed a bigger tractor, become a household word? It takes teamwork by a father who provides encouragement, a brother who can design, a brother who can build, and a banker who says to “go for it.” Although the familiar Steiger green is not used on the production line anymore, the name remains as a testament of its success and a living legacy to the family.

John Steiger homesteaded in Montana in 1917. After several failed crops he took up work in Minneapolis. In 1928 he started farming his father-in-law’s land outside of Red Lake Falls, MN. In ten years’ time, he was farming 640 acres with a Rumely and

operating a blacksmith shop where he did repairs.

John had two sons, Maurice and Douglass, who also had the desire to farm. At the age of 17, Doug purchased land of his own. Together the two brothers were farming a couple thousand acres by the 1950s. Each owned their own land, but they shared the use of equipment. Maurice was a fan of crawler tractors while Doug preferred rubber tires.

The three men went to visit a farmer near Grand Forks, North Dakota, to look at the farmer’s Wagner tractor; they were considering the possibility of buying a Wagner for their own tillage. In a discussion with their banker, they tossed around the option of building their own tractor out of used parts for 1/2 the cost. The banker told them to do it and he would finance it.

Over the winter of 1957, Doug and Maurice started work on a project that would forever change their lives. The cows were sold to bring in more startup money, and the barn was converted to a shop. Doug drew up and designed the tractor while Maurice did the fabrication work. Using planetary axles from under junked Dart ore trucks, a

10-speed Fuller transmission, and a 6.71 Detroit engine, No. 1, now known as Barney, was born. A transfer case was designed by Douglass and built by the Steigers. Two control cylinders were used to articulate/steer the machine. There was no steering wheel in No. 1. Direction was changed using a lever on a hydraulic control. The color, which would become known as Steiger green, was actually a color close to that used on the Euclid. Doug thought this color would help it stand out in the field.

Meanwhile, John and his sons continued grow their individual farming operations. In 1960 a hail storm went through the area. The storm spread over several miles. It hit a small portion of John’s land, jumped over all of Doug’s fields, but hit virtually every one of Maurice’s crops. At that time, they did not carry hail insurance. Doug couldn’t envision a future without Maurice, so he suggested they incorporate their farm operations to become one larger farm that would become a smoother, more efficient operation. John, Maurice, and Douglass each put in their share of the crop from 1960 and created Steiger Farms, Incorporated. Doug dreamed of it becoming a large corporate farm, and over the next 15 years,

Steiger Farms, Inc. grew to more than 3,000 acres.

Steiger #1 was used by the Steigers to pull heavy tillage equipment (cultivators, plows) and logged 10,000 hours before being retired. They soon realized they could use a smaller tractor for lighter-pulling equipment (harrows, grain drills) and still get the same swath coverage in the fields as with Steiger #1. Thus, they then designed and built a smaller tractor for themselves: the first Model 105.

Nearby farmers took interest in the Model 105 as they observed the Steigers using the new Model 105 as part of their farming operations. The size of the Model 105 was better suited to the operations of these neighboring farmers, and they asked the Steigers to build the smaller tractor for them.

The neighbors all attentively watched the brothers as they built this first machine. Soon the Steigers were getting requests for a smaller machine of the same setup.

In 1961, three more tractors were built using a 3.71 Detroit engine, a 5-speed Spicer transmission, 2-speed Steiger-built transfer case and modified WC Allis rear ends, all with used parts. This tractor, the model 105, was 1/2 the size of No. 1.

STEIGER  
MANUFACTURING

#1, aka Barney, at the original barn of Steiger Manufacturing



First production 1700 and 2200 models



## A large **V** was cut into the grill of barn-built models that used an engine with a V configuration.

The Steigers had captured the attention of many and were approached by tractor salesman, Earl Christianson. Earl suggested they build the tractors out of new parts and he would sell them. In 1963 the Steigers became serious about building tractors and Doug, over a four-year period, went to work to draw up the plans for four more models that would all be built using new parts. These models would be the 1250, 1700, 2200 and 3300. The first three numbers represented the approximate horsepower, so for example, the 3300 was rated at 330 hp. The 1250 used a 4.53. The 1700 used a 6V53, the 2200 used a 6V71 and the 3300 used an 8V71. A large V was cut into the grill of barn-built models that used an engine with a V configuration. Steiger Manufacturing was incorporated as a subsidiary of Steiger Farms. Doug was president, Maurice was secretary-treasurer and John (father) was a director.

Christianson continued to aggressively sell the Steiger machines throughout the

US and into Canada for Steiger Manufacturing. Prior to 1967, tractors were sold directly from the factory to the customer. However, dealer networks were needed so ten dealerships were established at that time, including Christianson Implement of Elbow Lake, Minnesota.

There were several things that contributed to the next move by Steiger Manufacturing. Doug was a very shy young man. Even at the age of 20 he had to take his father to the elevator with him so he could sell his grain. Sales were definitely not his thing. In the late 1960s, they lost their top salesman, Earl Christianson, due to his father's death. Maurice wasn't a salesman so Doug was forced to go play a role he was very uncomfortable with.

The business that started out as a project in the barn was now

becoming quite a load when coupled with the farming operation. The original 32x50 barn was now 64x120 with a separate 20x40 office building. Other equipment was also being built in the barn consisting of miscellaneous farm equipment and an 850 log skidder. Since they were now building such large equipment with nothing to pull, the brothers built hitches so that multiple implements could be hooked together. The design of the tractors, using proven components from well-known manufacturers, provided exceptional parts availability. This was a big plus for the company and 126 tractors were manufactured in the barn. The Steigers were also in the position that they needed to "go big or go home".

The Steigers needed a bigger facility which was more of an investment. The stress of sales, having 20 employees, and farming was beginning to take a toll on the Steigers. The solution was to take on investors that could help guide the tractor company into the future.

Doug had the foresight to see things needed to change. Doug was a risk-taker and Maurice was not. A group of eight investors consisting of men from Farmhand,

Minneapolis-Moline, and Case and a farmer saw the value of the Steiger tractor and bought 52% of the interest in the tractor company in 1969. At that point the decision was made to move production to Fargo, ND. Bob Kelly from Farmhand became the president while Doug served as Chairman of the Board. It was obvious that if Doug was going to remain as Chairman of the Board, he would have to move to Fargo, which he didn't want to do. After serving for two years as chairman, he resigned from that position but continued on the board. Maurice served on the board from 1969-71.

During the first year, a large amount of money was put out for promotion, the establishing of a 66-dealer network, and the move to Fargo. More capital was needed. Doug suggested contacting Les Melroe, a friend of his. Les Melroe (Melroe Bobcat) stepped in as a major investor and became Chairman of the Board in late 1970. Within a year, more money was needed. Gene Dahl, who was the brother-in-law of Les Melroe, became the new Chairman of the Board and the president was Jack Johnson. At this point, the money that had been invested in promotion and expansion was beginning to pay off.

During the 1970s, foreign

sales soared as the Hungarian company, Raba, began to produce Raba-Steiger tractors based on the Series II Wildcat. VanDeelde began to build tractors based on the Series III models for distribution in Europe and North Africa. In 1975, the Fargo plant was much in need of expansion so ground was broke for a 420,000 square-foot facility. This new plant, which is still in use, had the capability of producing a new Steiger tractor every 18 minutes. Over 1,100 people worked in the factory during the 1970s. In 1976 an Australian subsidiary was established which included 50 dealers in the continent. This was done as the Series III tractors were introduced.

While Doug was still on the board, his day-to-day duties and pressures were lightened. Doug's entrepreneurial spirit didn't allow him to get bored. From the moment production moved to Fargo, he forged ahead with new ideas.

The first product to be designed was the Bell-Band Dual-Spacer. This spacer allowed different sized rims to be adapted together in a dual configuration. These were sold through distributors throughout the Midwest and Canada.

Doug teamed up with Bill Secrest, a Minneapolis businessman, to form a new corporation with Doug as president and Bill as secretary-treasurer. At Bill's suggestion,

**"Hydra" stood for hydraulics, which was Bill's field of expertise. "Mac" represented Doug's forte in mechanical design.**

the name of the corporation would be Hydra-Mac. "Hydra" stood for hydraulics, which was Bill's field of expertise. "Mac" represented Doug's forte in mechanical design. The first project of Hydra-Mac was to build large garbage compactors. The garbage would be compressed into cubes for easy handling. Due to the inability to get rid of the liquids that came from the garbage, the project was scrapped and they moved on.

In 1970, Bill Secrest contacted Bobcat to put hydrostatic drives in their 600 series skidsteers. Bobcat did not have an interest in it, so Bill suggested Hydra-Mac build skidsteers with hydrostatic drives. Doug designed the first one called Mitey Mac. Later models were designed by engineers because Doug was busy managing the company.

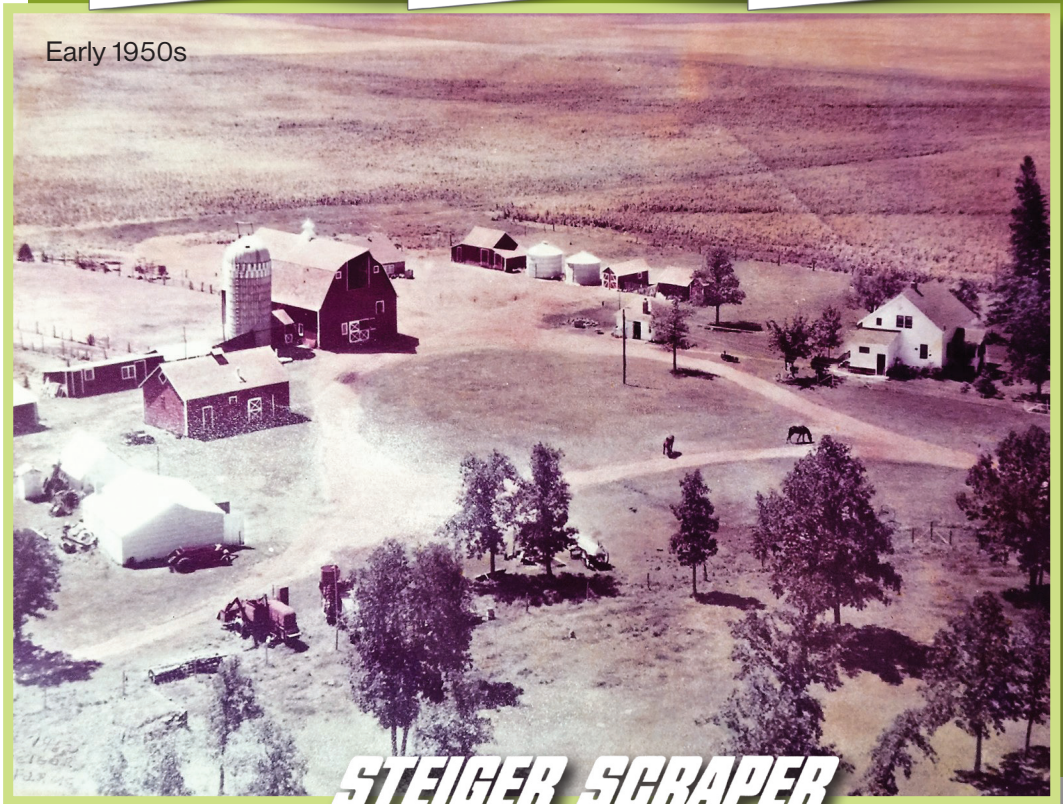
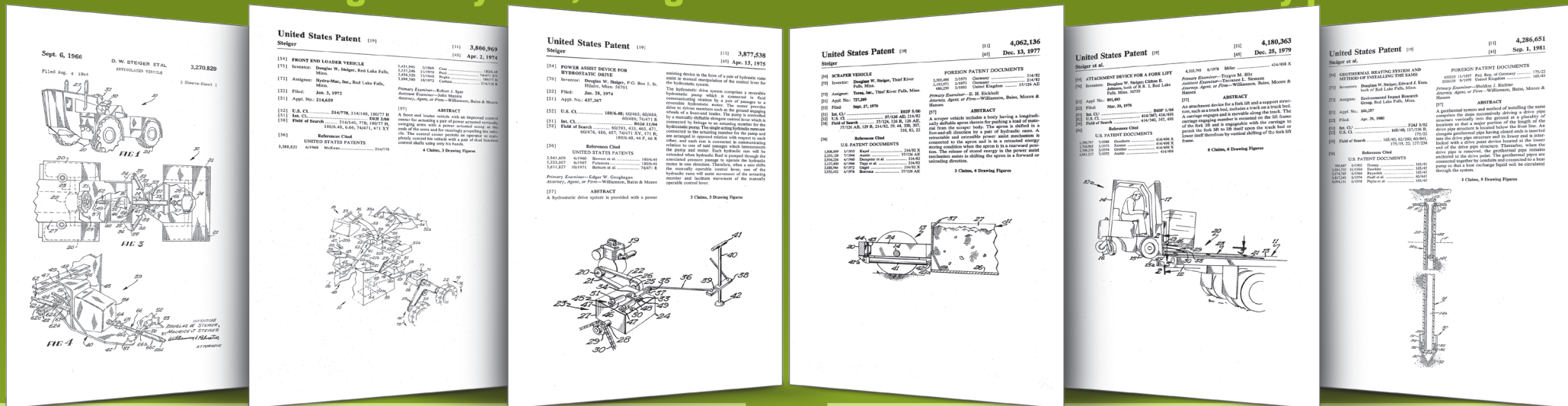
When Hydra-Mac, as a skid steer loader manufacturer, took off and grew at a rapid rate, Bill and Doug felt they needed more depth. Bill gave 50% of his shares to Ron Wiemerie and Doug gave 50% of his shares to his brother, Maurice. During the 1970s, Hydra-Mac and its subsidiaries employed more than 200 people, and the company quickly grew to the third largest producer of skidsteer loaders in the world. The companies also supplied the skid steers for Gehl and IH.



John Steiger



# Through the years, Doug has filed for and received many patents.



## STEIGER SCRAPER

**Rugged. For farm or custom use.  
Moves up to 11 cu.yds.**



The next project to come out of “the barn” was the Defender. This bullet-proof machine was designed for law enforcement purposes when encountering hazardous conditions involving gunfire or explosives. The Defender could drive either direction, had turrets mounted on the top and handle a shot from a 30/6 at 35°. It was smooth-sided so that it couldn't be turned over by mobs. It also had the ability to pierce through 11-inches of concrete with its needle attachment so that tear gas could be injected. The machine was marketed through Tacord Corporation, who provided tactical products for law enforcement. Due to the adverse pressure from the media toward the police during the college campus riots in the early 1970s, the machine was discontinued.

Meanwhile back at the barn, Toreq, Inc. was formed in 1974 with Doug Steiger as president. An 11-yard scraper was designed by Clifton Johnson for farm and industrial use. Toreq later moved into a new facility in an industrial park in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. Doug remained involved with Toreq until 1983. At that time, the Toreq line was purchased by Maurice Steiger and his three sons. They brought the product line back to the barn where it all began. Tragedy struck in 1985 when the historic barn burned to the ground. In its place a new modern facility was built. Tragedy again struck in 1991 when Maurice and two of his sons were killed in a private plane crash while attempting to land in low visibility weather. Left to carry on his family's legacy was the remaining son, Bryan. Today,

Bryan Steiger still manufactures Toreq scrapers and ditchers on the site of the old barn under the business of Steiger Manufacturing.

While Doug was still serving on the board for Steiger Tractor, running Toreq and Hydra-Mac, things were getting a little tough. It was the early 1980s and the US economy was in deep recession. Many companies went under. On top of that,

protection. With the plant operating at only 25% capacity, Steiger was sold to Tenneco, Inc., parent company of Case.

The sale to Tenneco ended all responsibilities between Doug and the company that his family started in a little dairy barn in Minnesota. Today, the Fargo factory is still operating to build the large Case IH/Steiger models.

Through the years, Doug has filed for and received many patents. The first is that for an articulated vehicle. His other patents pertained to the skid steer, hydrostatic drive, scraper, forklift attachments, and even geo-thermal heating systems. Doug and his wife, Kay, still reside in Thief River Falls where he continues to feed his entrepreneurial spirit and even occasionally makes guest appearances. Little did they realize in 1957 the legacy that was being built in that barn and that their name would one day become a household word. **HI**

*Special thanks to Doug & Kay Steiger and their daughter MaJeana for all their assistance in getting pictures and facts to me. Also a big thanks to Nate Schlieff, who set up the first of many interviews with Doug that started several years ago.*

Australia was going through a drought that devastated that country. Australia decided to pull out of the Steiger market, which represented 1/3 of Steiger Tractors sales. When the Canadian banks saw this happen, they decided to pull the plug on their investment in Steiger, too. Suddenly, in the worst of financial times, Steiger Tractor had just lost 2/3 of their market. They were forced to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy



Doug & Kay Steiger with old No. 1, which is on loan to the Bonanzville Museum in Fargo, ND.