A Brief Ferguson History

Henry Ferguson was born in 1884 to Scottish parents in a village in County Down, Northern Ireland. He was, however, called “Harry” throughout his life. He founded what was to become a worldwide tractor empire. He was a rare combination of engineer, businessman and visionary. He designed his own lightweight tractor and developed the “Ferguson System” which has become the universal 3-point tractor hydraulic system for use with farm implements throughout the world.

Harry Ferguson has been given many descriptions in the past, including that of humanitarian, self-publicist, canny negotiator, disciplinarian, and above all, a brilliant inventor.

His parents were farmers. He was a 15 year old when he saw his first car being driven on the roads.

Determined to work in engineering, when he left school he went to work with a brother who had a garage in Belfast, studied at night school, and before long had established his own garage business.

He gained publicity for his work with his daring exploits. At the age of 24 he built and flew his own plane after being inspired by Bleriot's channel flight in 1909. He was also a first-class motor racing driver.

Harry didn't like manual farm labor and was determined to find ways to mechanize farming. This inspired him to develop more modern and efficient plowing methods.

By the time of World War One, he was a leading businessman, and was appointed by the government to review the efficiency of farm machinery and tractors in Ireland to ensure continued food production.

His first tractor model was the Ferguson Black. In 1936 his first production tractor, the Ferguson Brown, went into production in Huddersfield.

In 1938 he struck a deal with Henry Ford in the US to produce Ferguson tractors, known as the 9N and 2N, when Henry Ford retired after the war, a new board of directors cancelled the agreement, and told Ferguson they would build no tractors for him after 1947.

In 1948 Ferguson began production of the TO-20 tractor at a new factory in Detroit Michigan.

Ferguson sued Ford and won $9.25 million compensation in 1952. He returned to Britain and came to Coventry, making Banner Lane his center of tractor production in 1946. The first model off the line was the TE-20, affectionately known as the "little grey Fergie".

In 1953 he sold his world-wide holdings to Massey Harris. He retired from M-H-F after the new company refused to build his secretly-designed TE-60 tractor.

He suffered from insomnia and depression and, when he died from a drugs overdose on 25 October 1960, a coroner's jury returned an open verdict.

Ferguson Facts

Ferguson helped explorer Edmund Hilary reach the South Pole by supplying three TE-20 tractors.

He piloted the first airplane flight in Ireland in a plane he designed and made.

He was known as the "mad mechanic of Belfast" because of his daring driving in early car and motorcycle races.

His research into four-wheel drive cars using transmission systems based on his original design.

He once drove a tractor around the ballroom of Claridge's Hotel in what was described as the "greatest publicity stunt of the 1940s" when he decided to give a large cocktail party to promote export sales.

Ferguson turned down the offer of a knighthood.