

Roar Goes the Tractor

by John Hosh

I was in my early twenties, on a summer break from university, when I was battered and bruised upon using for the first time my farmer father's new John Deere tractor. I was using the tractor to do some cultivating.

The purpose of cultivating is to kill weeds. Cultivating is done with a cultivator, a machine that has a heavy, rectangular metal frame sitting over and above wheels. Hanging from the frame are sturdy metal arms. At the ground-end of each arm is a shovel (\$25.00 each at that time), which is a sharp, pointed blade that uproots weeds.

Inside the tractor's cab, at the right of the operator's seat, was a console with a lever about one hand tall. The tractor's operator pushed or pulled that lever to operate the hydraulic system. If the tractor was towing a cultivator, pushing the lever lowered the cultivator's shovels and made



them plow into the earth. Pulling the lever caused the shovels to lift off the ground or to rise out of the earth. While cultivating, the tractor's operator had to adjust the hydraulic lever constantly. Raising or lowering the shovels from one moment to the next was necessary because a field would have patches of soft ground where the shovels might dig too deeply and patches of hard ground where the shovels might not dig at all.

I soon learned the lever was extremely sensitive. Pushing it too much — which was very



easy to do when I was bouncing across a field — would cause the lever to lock in the forward position. Locked forward, the lever would cause the cultivator to shove its shovels deep into the earth, jolting the tractor to a stop. Sometimes the jolt would break some shovels or wrench them away from the cultivator.

In the same way, pulling the lever too much would cause it to snap rearward. Locked in the rearward position, the hydraulic system would lift the cultivator's shovels abruptly. If the shovels

came out of the earth abruptly, the tractor — if it was at full throttle — would roar and surge. The tractor's sudden stops and surges put its operator at risk of injury to shins, knees and neck.

As soon as I finished my first attempt at cultivating with the new tractor, I asked my father if the hydraulic lever's sensitivity could be adjusted. He asked me why I would want to adjust the sensitivity. I said the lever was causing the tractor to stall and to surge. My father said I did not know what I was talking about. He said, if I was not so bull-headed stubborn and dumb, I would understand that the lever was made to operate as it did because that was the best way for it to operate. My father said he did not find the lever troublesome in the least. The snapping did not happen, he said, if one paid attention to what one was doing and operated the lever properly, as he did. In any case, he said, the snapping was easily counteracted by staying alert and by reacting quickly, as he did, when the tractor surged or stalled. He said he would put more spare cultivator-shovels on the tractor; so it did not matter if the new tractor broke more shovels than the old tractor had done. Breaking a few more shovels than was usual was not a reason to think something was wrong with the tractor, my father said. All I needed to do, he claimed, was to use my head as he did; then everything would be fine.



I realized my father was not going to be helpful so, when he was absent, I went looking for the John Deere Owner's Manual. I found it in a plastic bag under some old machinery parts, high up at the back of a shelf that was dark under a thick layer of dust. In the manual was a photograph of the tractor's hydraulic lever. The photograph showed the lever with plastic stops that kept it from snapping into either the forward-position or into the rearward-position. Under the photograph was the information that it could be dangerous to operate the tractor without using the plastic stops because, without the stops, the lever could lock abruptly either forward or rearward. The manual advised that the stops were optional equipment which could be purchased at my local John Deere dealer. I showed the manual to my father. I suggested he buy the stops.

My father asked if I knew how much those tiny, cheap plastic stops — that were probably made in Japan — cost. He asked if I knew what he would have to shell out if he wanted to fritter away his money on foolishness. He asked me if I had any idea in my silly head how much the robber barons wanted to take him down. He asked me if I understood how some fat, lazy tycoon in New York was trying to gouge him. I confessed I did not understand. It was very difficult to understand my father's thoughts.

My father told me he almost fell over when the guy at the dealership told him what the price of the plastic stops was. My father said he could not believe it. My father said the price was crazy. The guy at the dealership, my father said, wanted \$6.00 for the stops — \$6.00 for plastic that probably came from Japan. My father said he told the guy to keep the stops. My father said he was not a sucker. My father said he was not going to spend \$6.00 so some fat tycoon could stuff his fat face. My father said, if I was not so bull-headed stubborn and dumb, I would know that money did not grow on trees — that he worked hard for what was his — that to waste not was to want not — that a penny saved was a penny earned. I realized that, even if I had had \$6.00, it would have been unwise for me to buy the stops.



When I was returning the Owner's Manual to its place under the machinery-parts and dust, I noticed a rubber block that was about the size of a fist. My father said the block was something that should be thrown away. It occurred to me I could carve some stops out of the block. I grabbed a knife and within twenty minutes I had two stops that were much like the stops manufactured by John Deere.

When next it was my turn to do some cultivating, I used the rubber stops. They were perfect. They fit snugly into the slot where the hydraulic lever was. I could shove the hydraulic lever or yank it with all my strength without having the mechanism lock suddenly. The tractor's sudden stops and surges were eliminated. I could drive up and down a field without any whiplash or any bruising. At no cost, I had rendered the tractor harmless and efficient.

When my turn to cultivate was at an end, I left the stops in place. I left the stops where they

were because no good purpose was served by removing the stops. No useful purpose is served by having a tractor that makes unexpected stops or surges. It is not reasonable for a tractor's operator to choose to spend his days giving himself a sore neck or sore knees.

The next day, when my father gave me a turn on the tractor, I noticed the stops were not in the slot where the hydraulic lever was. I found the stops in the tractor's ashtray. I reinstalled the stops to do some cultivating. Every time my father used the tractor before I did, I found the stops in the ashtray.

I guess my father thought the *pseudologoi* were watching him. By not using the stops, it seems, he thought he was endearing himself to the gods and goddesses. I suppose he feared the gods would not invite him to Olympus if he ever showed any good sense. It is sad so many people use their head as my father did. It is sad so many people believe that, by being insulting and obnoxious, they can goad the gods into making the world congenial.