Tractor discoveries

Eight surprising stories, each tied to a source.

The farm tractor is easy to take for granted. Look a little closer, and the official record is much stranger. These are not legends. Where sources disagree, the website keeps both wordings.

1. Farm tractors at the South Pole

On 4 January 1958, at 12.30 p.m., Edmund Hillary's New Zealand party arrived at the South Pole station in three converted Ferguson tractors with "windshields but no roofs." They were the first to reach the Pole overland since Scott in 1912, and the first in motor vehicles. The code word for having the Pole in sight, sent at 8 p.m. the evening before, was "Rhubarb." Source: NZ History, "Arrival at the Pole by tractor."

2. A handshake, then $9,250,000

Harry Ferguson and Henry Ford agreed by handshake in the autumn of 1938. A United Press report of 10 April 1952 said a $42,000,000 damage suit was later settled for $9,250,000. Ulster Transport Museum records that Ford built in excess of 306,000 tractors including the 9N and 2N before the arrangement ended. Sources: National Museums NI; United Press, 10 April 1952.

3. Two Fordsons joined in the middle

In 1959 Ernest Doe of Ulting, Essex, launched the Dual Drive, known as the Triple-D: two Fordson Super Majors with the front wheels taken off and a turntable between them. The firm's history says that at 100 horsepower it was twice as powerful as most other tractors on the market. Source: Ernest Doe, company history.

4. A tractor you start with a flame

The Science Museum Group describes a Lanz Bulldog of about 1930 as a 24-horsepower single-cylinder semi-diesel with hot-bulb ignition. A 1920 design by Fritz Huber, after a fuel shortage, it would run on crude oil, tar oil, spirit, vegetable oil and other fuels. Source: Science Museum Group, Lanz Bulldog catalogue entry.

5. A tractor that ran on fuel cells

In October 1959, near West Allis, Allis-Chalmers demonstrated a tractor with 1,008 fuel cells and a 20-horsepower DC motor. It plowed alfalfa. The Smithsonian holds it as object AG.76A8; when checked, it was not on view. Source: Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

6. Dan Albone's Ivel, 1902

The Science Museum Group holds an Ivel agricultural tractor of 1902, designed by Daniel Albone at Biggleswade. It describes the machine as believed to be the first production tractor Ivel built, and the first British internal-combustion light agricultural tractor. Source: Science Museum Group, object 1920-130.

7. The Black Tractor of 1933

Ulster Transport Museum records that the Ferguson Black, built in 1933 in Northern Ireland, was the first tractor to fully incorporate the Ferguson System. Source: National Museums NI, "Harry Ferguson: the Black Tractor."

8. Tractor England, and an engine from Detroit

A MERL gallery guide says TE stood for Tractor England. The museum's catalogue for its own TE20 (object 80/68) says it was probably made in 1948 by the Standard Motor Company at Banner Lane, Coventry, with a Continental Motors engine imported from Detroit because the plant was not then equipped to build engines. Sources: MERL Model Farming guide; MERL object 80/68.

ReallyByte — Fun. Educational. Useless. typographic sheet, no photographs. Not a workshop manual. Read the stories, and the places where sources disagree, at tractors.farmyard.im. Checked 17 November 2026.