Tractor myths versus facts

Ten claims, set beside the record.

Some of the best tractor stories are true. Some of the ones that travel furthest are not quite. Each reply below is drawn from a museum, an official history, Parliament, or a contemporaneous report.

The claim	What the sources actually say
The Ivel was the world's first tractor.	The Science Museum Group describes the 1902 Ivel as the first British internal-combustion light agricultural tractor, and as believed to be the first production tractor Ivel built — not "the world's first tractor."
TE on a grey Fergie stood for something technical, or Tractor Europe.	MERL's Model Farming gallery guide, writing about object 80/68, says: "TE stood for Tractor England."
Hillary's party drove Massey Ferguson tractors to the South Pole.	A short NZ History page does use that later name. The more detailed official page says "three converted Ferguson tractors." Period photographs show the Ferguson name.
The South Pole journey was a planned highlight of the expedition.	NZ History says Hillary went on without the express permission of the TAE, and against the instructions of the committee co-ordinating New Zealand's contribution.
Fuchs and Hillary met as enemies at the Pole.	NZ History records speculation of a rift, then quotes Fuchs's first words: "Damned glad to see you, Ed."
The Ford–Ferguson lawsuit was settled for hundreds of millions, or was the largest in corporate history.	A United Press report of 10 April 1952 said a $42,000,000 damage suit was settled for $9,250,000. That contemporaneous figure is the one to keep.
The Allis-Chalmers fuel-cell tractor is on display at the Smithsonian.	The Smithsonian does hold it (AG.76A8). When the catalogue was checked for this sheet, the object was listed as currently not on view.
A Lanz Bulldog could only run on diesel.	The Science Museum Group says a Bulldog would run on crude oil, tar oil, spirit, vegetable oil and other fuels, using hot-bulb ignition.
Nebraska Test 392 can be quoted from unofficial horsepower tables as if they were the test.	Test 392 exists (January 1948, Ferguson Model TE-20). The official abstract describes method, not unofficial later figures. The official PDF was not available to this project (it returned 403).
One official tractor total can be subtracted from another as if they were the same count.	A 1937 inquiry "indicated" about 43,000 tractors on farms in England and Wales. A 1950 UK statement gave about 55,000 (1939 estimate), about 245,000 (January 1948 census) and about 300,000 (March 1950 estimate). Different places, different kinds of record.

ReallyByte — Fun. Educational. Useless. typographic sheet, no photographs. Sources and the longer wording are at tractors.farmyard.im/myths/. Checked 17 November 2026.