

John Lapp is A-C fan in for the long haul

Written by Heidi Clausen, Old Allis News editor

As John Lapp's 90th birthday approached last summer, he could think of nothing he'd rather do to celebrate it than drive an Allis-Chalmers D-21 along the Pacific Coast in the tractor caravan that was part of the Gathering of the Orange.

"Let's just go to Washington and drive tractors, and that would be great," John said he told his family. "I can eat ice cream and cake any time."

John and his family, who hail from Holyoke, didn't just bring one D-21 to the GOTO last summer in Lynden, Wash.; they brought a whole string of them.

It's not hard to see that the D-21 is the Lapps' favorite tractor. After all, they have 15 of them, including nine restored. Eight were displayed at the Washington GOTO.

John made the three-day, 1,600-mile trip through mountainous terrain to northwestern Washington with his five children, five grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren and family friend Rodney Olivas.



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Part of the large Lapp family entourage that attended the Gathering of the Orange last summer in Washington are pictured from left, front row, Curt Lapp, John Lapp, Justin Muilenburg, Jim Lapp and Rodney Olivas; and back row, Linda and Todd Vaughn.

—Photo by Heidi Clausen

“This is the furthest we’ve gone,” said John’s son, Jim. “We were quite a spectacle going through the little towns.”

With numerous over-the-road truckers in the family, the Lapps know what it takes to prepare for and pull off a long-distance road trip of this magnitude.

Their caravan to Washington included eight D-21s, as well as a D-19, WC and 716H garden tractor, all loaded onto three flatbed semi-trailers. One trailer carried four tractors, while the others totes three. They hauled the garden tractor on a trailer towed behind the pickup that also transported all their luggage, plus two golf carts. They booked hotel rooms for the trip more than a year in advance, Jim said.

The Lapps have a system for loading and unloading all their tractors, which typically takes two to three hours. Curt usually drives the tractors, while John, whom family members call “the boss,” gives directions.

The Lapps don’t deny that it’s a lot of work gearing up for a trip like this, but it’s work they enjoy, and the fun-loving bunch shares a lot of laughs across the many miles.

“We work hard to have fun,” Jim said.

First D-21 worked sugar beet fields

John purchased the family's first A-C tractor—a D-21, of course—in 1968. He paid \$7,500 for the tractor and a four-bottom plow. The Lapps farmed with that tractor for quite a few years, mostly in their sugar beet fields, and competed in pulls with it at county fairs throughout their home region before retiring it.

The tractor then sat about 20 years, as the family expanded their acreage and switched over to more corn production. They bought bigger tractors so they could more efficiently farm their growing land base.

“One day, I said we ought to trade the D-21. I thought I was gonna have to pack my suitcase,” John said. “It was part of the family.”

They cleaned up the tractor and, as Jim puts it, it wasn't long before their obsession with collecting D-21s “got carried away.”

John and his late wife, Marjorie, thought each of their five children should have a restored D-21. They completed that goal just three months before Marjorie died in a tractor rollover accident in November 2008.

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John Lapp is a fan of the Allis-Chalmers D 21 tractor for the long haul. He has a fleet of these tractors and is a member of the Allis-Chalmers Club. He has been driving these tractors for many years and has a deep appreciation for the brand. He has also been involved in the restoration of several Allis-Chalmers tractors and has shared his knowledge with others in the community. He is a dedicated fan of the brand and is always looking for ways to improve his fleet and share his passion with others.