

ROBERTS MACHINE

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Bob Parkes - Firestone Pulling Tires

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Memo: This letter is from the paper notes and figures I kept starting in 1979 when I built my first Light Super Stock tractor, but mainly in 1995 when I decided to build a Super Stock tractor again. Then up to Feb. 2007 after stopping in at Parke's Tire Cutting and conversation with Bob Parkes when I decided to build myself a new Light Super Stock tractor. Then in 2012 I decided to put this info in the computer in letter form before I lost all these notes.

Firestone made their first pulling tires in 1978. They were the old-style 151 bar and came in 2-ply (some called wrinkle wall) and 8-ply. I bought a set of the new 2-ply Firestone Puller tires and new Drussel wheels in 1979 when I was starting to build my first John Deere 4010 LSS tractor. I bought my tires from Chuck Wheatley in Iowa for \$1922.00 and he shipped them to Drussel Precision Mfg. in Garden City, KS. I stayed at Doug Drussel's in Garden City, KS for 1 week in January and then 3 weeks in March of 1980 working on that tractor. In April I had the new pulling tires cut by John Freeburg in Galesburg, IL for \$125. Firestone made the first modern long bar/short bar pulling tire the 5th and 6th week of 1988. They had one of the new tires on display at the National Farm Machinery Show in Louisville. There were 60 tires made and they were 8 plies only and the first batch was not much better than the ag tire so they added 2 more plies of cords after these first initial tires. Since then all 8-ply Puller tires have 10 plies of cords and 10-ply Puller tires have 12 plies of cords even though the 8 PLY and 10 PLY mold letters on the outside of the Puller tires were not changed from the Ag mold. These very first 8-ply Puller tires were about 100 lbs. each lighter than all 8-ply Puller tires made after that first batch. Two plies equal about 100 lbs. This is why the 10-ply long bar/short bar ag tires are 30 lbs. lighter than the 8-ply long bar/short bar Puller tires.

In 1990 Bob ordered the minimum run order of 60 Puller tires of the newly introduced 8-ply 24.5-32, 80 tires of the 8-ply 30.5-32 and 60 tires of the newly introduced 10-ply 30.5-32. At that time Bob was the only person that bought from Firestone the Puller tires, as you had to order a minimum of 60 tires of any one size or ply. Bob said it was financially difficult for him as it would take him 3 years to cut that 200 tires, he got in 1990. Bob ran out of those tires in the fall of 1993. I ran the very first set of double cuts 24.5-32 Puller tires at Louisville in February of 1991 on my Pro Stock.

Firestone did make some more 8-ply 30.5-32 tires in 1992 as that ply was in high demand. After that they did not make any more of the Puller tires till 1995 and they were again 8-ply 30.5-32 only. This was when Firestone was still on strike which started in July of 1994. Over half the tires were bad and Bob had one tire blow out on the tire cutter, sent 11 tires back that cords were not wrapped correctly; some

tires did not have enough cords and some had air bubbles, etc. Stay away from tires made in 1995. Some of these you later found at Firestone dealers marked blemished and were used on grain carts, etc.

Bill Leischner bought 3 sets of the original 10-ply 30.5-32 Puller tires made in 1990 and ran on his 2-engine modified tractor and later with 3 engines on the Grand National circuit. He was just about unbeatable then and won Louisville 2 years (1991 & 1994) in the 5,200 lb. and 7,200 mod classes. With 3 engines he beat many 4-engine modified tractors. At the NTPA Grand National top 10 Invitational Finals pull I was at in Inwood, Ontario, Canada in 1995, Bill came by my tractor and was looking at my 10-ply Puller tires and wanted to buy them. There were no 10-ply Puller tires for sale since 1993 and at that time Firestone was still on strike.

Back then most everyone that ran the 7,500 and 9,500 lb. Super Stock class did not have enough front-end weight with the 10-ply Pullers in the 7,500 lb. class as they were about 100 lbs. each heavier than the 8-ply Puller tires. My tractor had 4560 sheet metal on it, but it was a 4010 that I had, and 4010's also pulled in the Light Super Stock class, and that is why I was one of the few tractors that could run the 10-ply Puller tires in the 7,500 lb. class. My 1990 10-ply tires and Midwest wheels came from the white John Deere of Doug Palmer called River City Sales and he ran it in the 5,500 class with 8-ply tires, and the 7,500 and 9,500 lb. classes with the 10-ply Puller tires in the early 90's. I won Tomah, WI; Bowling Green, OH; Chapel Hill, TN and 6 NTPA Grand National hooks in a row in the 1996 season. In January of 1997 at a pull in Hobbs, NM on some kind of lava like dirt I peeled all the thread off one tire and damaged the other. I thought they were damaged beyond repair, but Bob Parkes was able to cut the tire back about 1 inch and it looked new, except the thread was not quite as tall. Three weeks later I won the finals at Louisville in the 9,500 Super Stock class.

In the fall of 1996, I asked for a component variance from NTPA to remove the clutch housing and run a truck differential, drop box, aftermarket transmission, etc. inside the cast rear end just like some of my competitors had with other brands of tractors. After getting denied that variance and because of all the breakage I had the last two years in the spring of 1997 I decided to build a new tractor with these components anyway. With the help of Tim Engler we came up with a plan. Because I had to cut the transmission case into two pieces to do this and then weld it back together, I built a 1-piece frame with roll cage. I put the engine on rollers to be able to work on the clutch with the one-piece frame. Because of the truck differential I could not run the John Deere internal brakes. I then installed external hat brakes, etc. along with new John Deere 8000 sheet metal. I also needed a different offset on the wheels to clear the big Engler brake calipers so I decided to trade in my 1990 10-ply Puller tires to Parkes for a new set of 10-ply Puller tires and Midwest wheels with a different offset. Firestone was now off strike and had made another batch of the 10-ply Puller tires in 1996. The new tractor never hooked out of the hole with the new 10-ply Puller tires compared to the 1990 10-ply Puller tires. I was never so disappointed in the difference in tires. In working with NTPA I knew component tractors were coming the next year. I pulled the new tractor about 20 times that summer and sold it to Larry Kline after the Bowling Green, OH event. Later after talking to Bill Leischner he thought the same thing when he compared the 1996 tires to the 1990 tires that he had on his modified tractor.

Dennis Johnson came out with his Agco Allis the next year and he bought my old 1990 10-ply Puller tires from Parkes and ran them for 2 years till he completely ragged them out. He was the first to try the new Puller 2000 tires as experimental tires in 1999. Firestone then made the first batch called the Puller 2000 in 2000. They also made the first HP Pullers later that year in 10-ply only just like the Puller 2000. Pullers complained about the weight of the 10 ply HP Pullers so much that they were only made that one time as 10-ply and now all tires since are called HP Pullers which are 8-ply only. That is what the H stands for as it is the 8th letter in the alphabet, hence HP stands for 8-ply. Dennis said he ran the Puller 2000 and later the 10-ply HP Pullers and none of the new tires every hooked as good as the 1990 10-ply Puller tires off my old tractor, especially the 8-ply HP Pullers made the next year. Firestone did not make any more 10-ply HP Puller tires after that first year and now some sets of the Puller 2000 and 10-ply HP Pullers have sold for more than \$20,000. Now the pullers that have the original 10-ply Puller 2000 or 10-ply HP Pullers have an advantage. Pullers such as Brian Shramek, Wayne Purser, and others.

After talking to Bill Leischner, Dennis Johnson and with my own experiences, I knew something was different with the 10-ply long bar/short bar Puller tires from 1990 compared to the 10-ply long bar/short bar Puller tires made in 1996, 1998, 1999 & 2000. They made the 10-ply long bar/short bar Puller tires in 3 different batches in early 2000 before they made the Puller 2000. After the new Puller 2000 started production in the fall of 2000, no more of the long bar/short bar Puller tires were ever made. At my visit with Bob Parkes, this is what I found out. All the tires including the first batch of 60 of the 1990 10-ply 30.5-32 puller tires had a different cord used in them. He said they will actually throw sparks when he uses the tire grinder on them. Also, they used a different rubber compound on them that made them stiffer. This is why later on some tried cooking tires to make them harder, it helped some but never was as good as the 1990 rubber compound. After 1990 they switched to the different rubber and cords and also the serial number on the sidewall was changed. Bob said he tried to get Firestone to use the old cords and compound like the 1990 Puller tires had but after the strike, Firestone would never make that tire again as they discontinued that type of cords and the hard rubber compound. Mainly because of improved genetics in crops causing stubble damage on farm tires they went with a different softer rubber compound and the cost was the reason for using the different cords. When I won all these pulls, I ran 2 lbs. of air in the 7,500 lb. class and 4 lbs. in the 9,500 lb. class. I had one tire that had a slow air leak and you had to check it because that tire would not go flat and I couldn't tell any visual difference when the tractor was weighted for the 75 SS class with no air in it. I actually forgot to check it twice and ran it with no air or very little and did great. It hooked up better than the tire with air in it. I am thinking of running either none or just ½ to 1 lb. of air in my new tractor in the 6,000 lb. LSS class. Just to say I have air in them and to help keep them on the bead.

I spent two days at Parkes in 2007 as Bob and I went through his old records to see where the 30 sets (60 tires) of the 1990 10-ply puller tires that he had sold went to. Because most couldn't make weight on Unlimited mods or 7,500 Super Stock tractors, most were sold to either single industrial engine or 2-engine V-8 tractors in the mod class. Some were single cut on tractors that used them only to run the 9,500 Super Stock at Louisville. (Blagrave, Vanrieb, Goodwin, etc.) Dennis Goodwin won Louisville 3 times with the 1990 10-ply tires with the first win in 1994. The Blagrave's won Louisville three times with these

1990 10-ply tires. In 1997 when Lustik and Blackburn could not go anywhere with their double cut tires and did not make the finals, I did with the 1990 10-ply Puller tires. I then went on to win the finals as double cuts with Blagrove 2nd just 2 foot behind with single cut 1990 10-ply Puller tires. Kevin Komraus won the Saturday afternoon class and finished 3rd in the finals with the 1990 10-ply single cut Puller tires. Some pullers that year in these classes had the newer 1996 10-ply Puller tires but didn't finish as well. In 2001 at Louisville in the preliminary round with some now running the new Puller 2000 or HP Pullers Dennis Goodwin made two full pulls to win the first round of the 8,200 Super stock class with the 1990 10-ply Puller tires. Later he won the finals as the only tractor with the old-style Puller tires. When Louisville went to the double cut tire only rule in 2005 to save the track some of these 1990 single cut 10-ply Puller tires became available for sale.

In 2007 when I started gathering parts for my new John Deere "Barnyard Beast" LSS I stopped by Dennis Goodwin's shop looking for pulling tires and he had two sets of the 10-ply long bar, short bar Puller tires made in 1990. I then told Dennis Goodwin the story of the 1990 10-ply Puller tires with the speculation that I would have first chance to buy them if he sold them. The one set of single cut V's he ran at Louisville years before and also another set of single cut V's that he had took in trade from Brady Morrow for new HP tires. Brady had bought the single engine Allison mod tractor "Booger Red" that was originally Bob Harlow's from Odessa, TX. So, Dennis had them double cut and put a set on the Magnum Force. After getting beat by David Henderson and Stray Horse most of the last two years, that summer with the double cut 1990 10-ply tires he beat him 6 times in a row and won our televised event in Wisner, NE by 40 feet with Henderson 2nd with 1996 10-ply tires. That following winter at Louisville he got 3rd in the DSS finals with the only tractor in the class with the old-style 10-ply Puller tires. This is the last time a tractor in the Diesel or Unlimited Super Stock class has ran with old style long bar short bar 1990 10-ply Puller tires.

Since Dennis did not want to sell his two sets at that time, I tried to buy Blagrove's set that was at Bob Parkes for years, but Bob said they did not want to sell them. After 4 years I finally got a set in 2011 from Eugene Williams that had been on Vainrieb's 1066 International. They had been cut pretty deep as single V's by Bret Berg; I took them to Bryce VanGenderen to have double cut. He said there was not enough rubber left and could not double cut them. I then took them to Parkes and he was able to double cut them, just as he had my old tires when I ruined one tire in Hobbs, NM. With them being cut back 1 inch they are lighter now for the Light Super Stock class. After looking up info from Parke's records in 2007 on the 1990 10-ply tires that were sold from 1990 to 1993 and lots of phone calls and tracking down, about 1/3 of the tires are wore out and destroyed. Leischner went through 3 sets and Parkes does have just 1 damaged tire left from the 6 tires Leischner had. Johnson tore up my old set after 2 years. Blagrove set is now on a single engine mod in Illinois. There are still about 8 sets (16 tires) I did not locate. There are only 12 sets (24 tires) that I know the location of out of the original 60 tires made(Goodwin 2, Roberts 1, Illinois 2, New York 1, Ohio 2, Tennessee 1, Indiana 1, Iowa 1, overseas 1).

From 1996 on everybody could buy pulling tires from Firestone dealers, but only Parkes bought tires in 1990 and he cut and sold the 10-ply tires till he ran out in 1993. Everyone was waiting on new Puller tires in 1995 as Firestone was on strike. They did make some 30.5 8 ply Puller tires in 1995 while on

strike. In 1996 they were off strike and back to making pulling tires. The 1990 Puller tire has serial numbers on both the left and right side and all numbers and letters are recessed and smaller ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch tall). The tire I am looking for were made in the 13th week of 1990 and the serial number is VE00000130. The 3rd and 2nd to last number is the week made and the last number is the year made. They didn't get all 60 Puller tires made that 13th week and a few were made the 14th week and the serial number is VE00000140. I have only seen four of these tires made in the 14th week of 1990. All tires made after 1990 starting in 1992 have the same VE00000 in larger size ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch tall) on both sides but the last 3 numbers are on the right side only. The VE00000 is raised letters and the last three numbers (week & year) are recessed in an oval. Some may have 4 digits recessed if made after 2000. For example, VE00004505, which means the 45th week of 2005. Bob Parkes says there has not been a better pulling tire made since the 1990 Firestone 10-ply Puller version with that rubber compound and that type of cord and cord count. He has in the works to make a new "Parkes Puller" tire and is hoping to match that compound and cords plus also make it wider and bigger in diameter.

With new tire molds being developed for pulling tires only and not off of the Ag tire molds Larry Richwine (NTPA) contacted Jonathan Mears (PPL) and myself (Outlaws) plus other tire cutters as what the overall diameter and width that tires could be so all associations would have the same tire rule. NTPA has always been the leader on rules in pulling from safety to competition. Bob was wanting to know what he could build his new tires (height & width) and still be legal. I suggested 210 inches as most tires then were 198 to 203 inches, maybe you could occasionally find a 205 inch. I knew that 10 years earlier for some reason the 1990 10-ply tires were right at 210 inches and wanted to make sure they would still be legal. Mainly I knew this from the 10-degree drawbar rule that was passed because of the angle I ran my drawbar when I pulled. So, I started measuring tire diameters to figure out my drawbar angles. I am not sure why the 1990 10-ply Puller tires were bigger, maybe the different cords or the rubber compound didn't shrink as much when they came out of the mold. That was the same mold used from 1996 to 2000 on the 10-ply Pullers but those tires were not as tall, nor were the 8 ply tires.

When I built my 4560 John Deere SS Barnyard Beast in 1995, I wasn't for sure what air pressure and rim width I needed to run so I called the Firestone Factory in Des Moines, Iowa to ask them. I knew they did traction test on their farm tires and figured they might be able to help. They sent me to customer service and after a lengthy conversation they said someone would give me a call back. Three days later I got a call from an engineer that helped in the development of the pulling tire. That was the start of a relationship that would last for years. He told me for ultimate traction what ply, tire pressure and rim width that would be best for my tire speed and the weight of the classes I was going to hook in. At that time, it was so much less air pressure than my competitors were running. He said it would breakdown the tire quicker with these tire pressures but the tires would last for many, many passes. There were no new tires to be bought and I ended up finding a used set of the 1990 10-ply tires he recommended but they were already mounted on rims. The rims were 1 inch off of what width he recommended so he had me change the air pressure to make up the difference. The following year in 1996 he along with other representatives from Firestone came to the Iowa State Fair as my guest in the infield. Fortunately, I got the win and a good time by all that day.

I have made 4 trips to the Firestone Ag Tire factory in Des Moines, Iowa over the years. The first trip was when I became president of Outlaws looking for sponsorship in January of 1999 just 2 months after I became president. My contact told me the year before they were coming out with a new pulling tire and wanted to know if I would do some R & D for them. I told them I had sold my tractor the year before and was not pulling anymore. I recommended Dennis Johnson (Shagnasty) as he had my old tires and ran hard, and would be a good comparison of the new prototype pulling tires and my old 1990 10-ply Puller tires. I also told them I did want to help promote the new tire. They did give me some money for the Iowa State Fair but Tom McConnell and ATPA got most of the sponsorship plus new tires for points champions as they had TV to offer in the deal they proposed. On one trip to the Firestone Ag Tire factory I watched them build a pulling tire. You would not believe the amount of hand work that goes into building a tire. It is an art and some people are just better than others at doing it. I could see why some tires might be better than others and especially why there were so many bad tires when Firestone had replacement workers during the strike in 1995.

UPDATE 11/10/20: I now have 4 sets of the 30-year old 1990-10 ply long bar/short bar pulling tires. The set off Dennis Goodwin's "Magnum Force" SS tractor he ran, the set off of Bob Harlow's "Booger Red" mod tractor that Brady Harlow had, the set from Dave Vanrieb 1066 "Runnin Red" SS tractor and the set off of the Kevin Komraus IH (Land Shark) SS tractor. Danny Dean sold that tractor to Doug Sobotka, then Dennis Goodwin bought it from Doug and parted it out. One set going on the new LSS Barnyard Beast, one set going on the LSS White/V8 Cat from Scott Whitworth which will now be an Oliver 2255. With a new frame, 2 bar roll cage, reworking rear-end and new sheet metal we will have over 450 lbs. more weight to put up front on the Oliver. Two sets have been cut and mounted and are at my house. The set by Bob Parkes cut in 2012 will now go on the Oliver and the set cut by Mark Korth in 2019 for the Barnyard Beast. The other two sets are still at Korth's and may put one set on the LLM Ford tank engine tractor or another tractor I am looking at. I never did track down Blaggrave's set. I did find where 3 other sets have been destroyed. Might be 4 to 6 more set of tires out there somewhere. Did locate 1 other single tire and Parkes has 1 tire from Bill Leischner.

One of the reasons I bought the White tractor of Scott Whitworth from Cody Adjent was it had a set of 1990 8-ply Puller tires on it. These came from Rich Lustik (Silver Bullet) and were put on the White in the mid 90's when the Dunham's still had it. These tires have some cords showing but this tractor has set idle more than pulled the last 25 years. Still some good years left in them and those 1990 tires in both 8 and 10 ply hooks good even when tires are about shot. Firestone made them the 9th week of 1990 and the serial number ends in 090. They only made 80 of these and then did the 10-ply tires right after them. These have the same rubber compound and cords as the 1990 10-ply Puller tires. I have only

seen two sets of these in my lifetime as they were used on everything as the lightest tire and about all are ragged out by now. At that time, I was pulling pro stock from 1985 till 1994 so I never was interested in those tires. When I switched back to heavy Super Stock in 1995, Firestone recommended that I use the 10-ply Puller tires if I could make weight. Since I did had trouble making weight with the "Barnyard Beast" in the 7,500 Super Stock class in 1995 I started looked at 1990 8-ply Puller tires. Firestone did make some that year while on strike, but Bob was having so much trouble with them I decide to look for the 1990 tires. It was almost impossible to find them as this was when everyone was switching over from the old-style Firestone 151 Puller tires to the long bar/short bar Puller tires. You couldn't even get the 10-ply Ag tires at that time with Firestone on strike. Everyone was looking for tires! The weight was then moved up to 8000 lbs. in the Super Stock class but I still couldn't make enough front-end weight and had to run a lower drawbar. With the new 8000 series "Barnyard Beast" that I built in 1997 it gained me 250 lbs. more on the front-end even with a roll cage. After the Randy Rose accident I showed up the next day at Tomah with the very first roll cage on a tractor. Dave Schreier and Larry Richwine came by and looked at my tractor that day. I did it because of some wide rides I had took and the way these alky supers would cat walk sometimes. At the next pull I told Dave Schreier and Larry Richwine that I was going to have to cut it off as I needed that 200 lbs. on the front. They said give them a couple weeks before I did that. They then met with the NTPA board and made the class 8,200 lbs. to allow for roll cages, most opted for the 10-ply tires with the extra weight. After components and roll cages where added to the Super Stock class, front-end weight was not a problem. That took care of the front-end weight issue for years but now over 20 years later with the horsepower and tire speed these tractors are developing, plus the weight of the new pulling tires they are again running out of front-end weight.

In 2007 when I was looking for tires to build a new LSS tractor to run in the cast rear-end class with Outlaws I started looking again at the Firestone 1990 8-ply Puller tire in case I couldn't make front end weight again. Sometime after that I had a set of 1990 8-ply Puller tires that were about wore out come through the shop so we did a stiffness test on the 1990 8-ply Puller tires. For a country boy this is how I did it back then. We weighted a tractor rear-end for the LSS class and put a set on of 1996 8-ply Puller tires and at 10 lbs. air pressure measured the drawbar and then let all the air out and measured the drawbar again. We then did the same thing with the 1990 8-ply Puller tires and followed that up with the 1996 10-ply Puller tires. What we found out was the 1990 8-ply Puller tires where almost the same stiffness as the 1996 10-ply Puller tires. Way stiffer than the 1996 8-ply Puller tires. So, for someone that is hurting for front-end weight those 8-ply 1990 Puller tires

would be the best thing going than any other tire out there. That would save you about 200 lbs. over the 10-ply equivalent.

The first few pages of this letter in a little different version I have shared with a few people over the last two or three years but not the last couple of pages. This letter actually has 4 more pages that deals with all the new different types of pulling tires on the market today. Mainly tech stuff with the engineers at Firestone on the footprint, comparing round tire to flat shaped tire, air pressure, rim width, traction test and a lot of other technical stuff. At this time, I am not going to share any of that data.

In my opinion the Firestone 1990 10-ply long bar/short bar Puller tire is still the best pulling tire ever made. Maybe some of the new Firestone HP, Pro Puller or Mitas tires are or will be as good but when you look at the weight of those tires compared to the weight of the 1990 10-ply tire to get the same results, I choose the 1990 10-ply Firestone Puller. Since Firestone didn't change the 8 PLY and 10 PLY molds on the long bar/short bar Puller tires they are actually 10 and 12 ply tires. So, the Firestone Puller 2000 and the HP Puller built in 2000 that everyone wants where only 10-ply and then the HP Puller was switched back to 8-ply after that first batch. It took 30 years before another 12-ply 30.5 tire was made by Pro Puller.

All 30.5-32 Tires

Firestone 10-ply AG tires (202 inches) - 245 each = 490 lbs.

Firestone (1996-2000) 8-ply Puller tires (205 inches) - 275 each = 550 lbs.

Firestone 1990 8-ply Puller tire (208 inches) - 285 each = 570 lbs.

Firestone 10-ply (1996-2000) Puller tires (207 inches) - 375 each = 750 lbs.

Firestone 1990 10-ply Puller tire (210 inches) - 385 each = 770 lbs.

Firestone 8-ply HP Puller 2000 tire - 390 each = 780 lbs.

Firestone 10-ply Puller 2000 and HP tire - 460 each = 920 lbs.

Mitas tire = 460 each 920 lbs.

Not sure on all the weights & diameters of Mitas, Park Puller or Pro Puller tires.

