



Although he is more interested in crawlers, Warren felt that the opportunity to purchase this Model M was too good to pass up.

Mister John Deere

Roger Hamlin visits a man with a passion for green and yellow tractors.

It was 2001 when Warren Stratford left Nelson to re-establish himself on the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand. He had spent most of his working life in the forests, driving machines under contract, mostly making and maintaining forest roads.

He settled at a place near the hamlet of Karamea, which is right at the end of the road from the town of Westport, just over an hour's drive away.

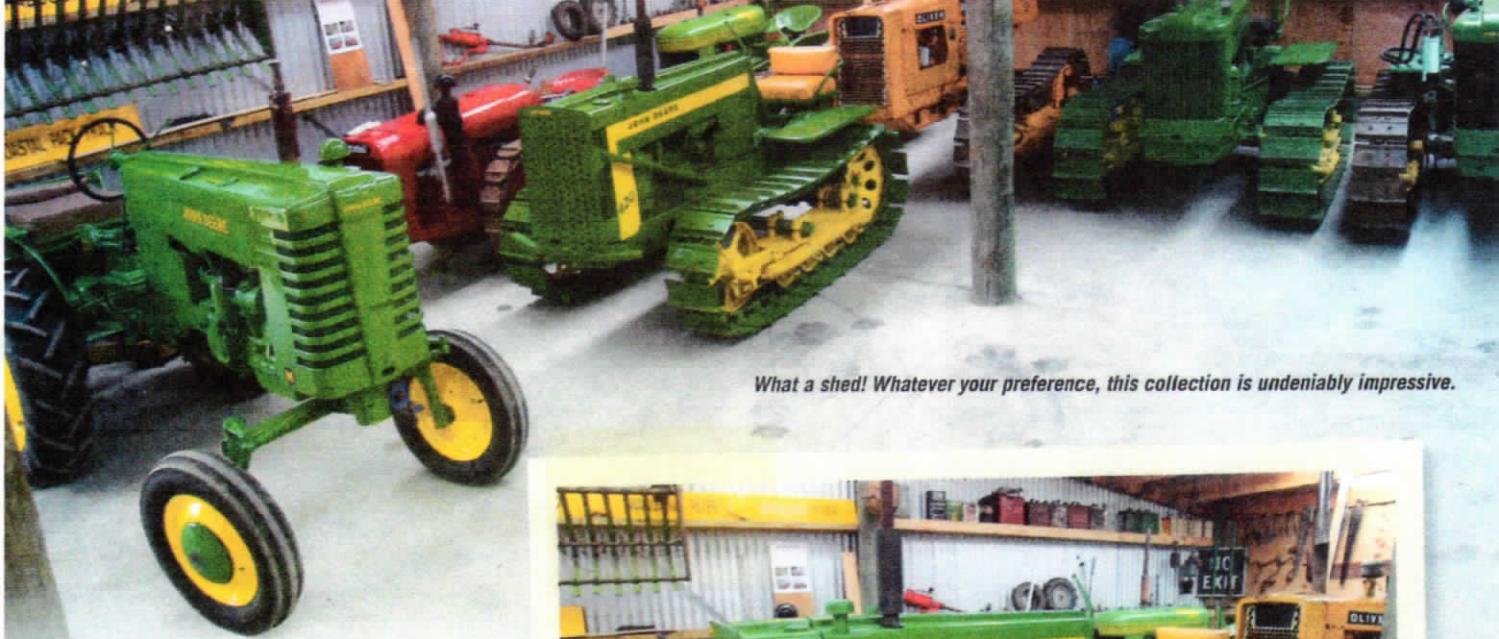
He purchased a dairy farm, broke in more land, then after three years, sold

it as a going concern, he brought a few of his excavators with him and a John Deere 750 earth-moving bulldozer that he purchased in 1980 and which he still owns.

He moved back to Westport, but felt he was too young to retire and take it easy. He started looking for a hobby that would use his time and energy. A seed had been sown a long time previously, an interest in early John Deere tractors and crawlers. The more he thought about, the more he thought he ought to seek out the vintage JD stuff while it was still around.

At the same time (2006) he purchased a property just south of the township, but up on a hill with magnificent views looking out to sea and over the whole of Westport. This also had sufficient room to put up a large shed or two.

The first shed that was built is now used as a workshop. He found a John Deere 420 crawler up in the Buller Gorge, it had been restored, but not that well. Warren had to do a small amount of work to get the tractor in running order, even though the tractor still did not look its best. ►



What a shed! Whatever your preference, this collection is undeniably impressive.

He took it to a few local shows, where he was always looking out for earlier JD crawlers that might be available.

Next was a John Deere MC, he found this in Blenheim in 2006. Vintage enthusiasts owned it and the engine was good, but the body was shabby. He sent it to a friend who did the rest of the work for him.

In 2007, he received a call from a man who was offering a Model M wheeled tractor. Warren went and saw it and found it was immaculate. Although his main interest was crawlers this one was far too good to turn down.



One of several JD 420 crawlers owned by Warren Stratford. Note the ephemera lining the shed walls.

By now he was well and truly bitten by the bug! Another 1956 JD 420 crawler came home. It had been used

for lifting potatoes. Warren gave it a complete, ground-up rebuild. He was constantly looking out for a JD 430, or a 440, but either model proved to be rather elusive.

In 2009 Warren and his partner Debbi travelled over to the USA, looking to find the rarest one of all, the John Deere 'Lindeman'. There are none in New Zealand. Jessie Lindeman, who combined John Deere motive power with his own track and transmission, built the tractors. John Deere did not build crawlers at that time, which is why the project was contracted out.

In total, about 1,600 were built. After 45 days travelling over America he eventually found a man who would sell him a 1945 model. It took very little time to realise that if you took the track off, it would take relatively little room in a 20-foot container.

He went off shopping again, soon finding a JD L and an H. These were



This particular 420 is fitted with hydraulic equipment for a bulldozer blade.



Warren Stratford on his highly-prized John Deere Lindeman crawler.

museum that now houses his collection.

In his travels, he also found a John Deere 40, which was complete but not in good order. In the museum there is a small Bristol and a couple of Olivers, for nostalgia. One of these just happened to turn up, so **was included** in the collection.

The search continues for a John Deere 430 or a 440. If anyone can help, please get in touch via the editor, as this addition will complete the collection right from the very first Lindeman.

The writer would like to thank Warren for his time and assistance. ■

in reasonable condition, so they joined the Lindeman in the container and were sent off to New Zealand.

The L and the H were repainted, as that was all that needed to be done to them. The Lindeman was a completely different story.

It had stood outside for the past 20 years, everything was full of water and on arrival it was stripped down to the last nut and bolt. The tractor was all there but required the replacement of various seals and bearings. He was pleased to be able to find all these at his supplier in Westport.

When I first visited Warren, about a year ago, the Lindeman was in bits all over the workshop floor, he was battling to get it finished in time to take it to the World Ploughing Championships at Methven.

Luckily, he achieved his goal and the crawler drew many admiring glances at the event.

Next to Warren's workshop, the builder was putting up the new building that was to become the



Warren's Model H is, like many of the other John Deere machines in his collection, beautifully restored.