

# IRON DOG TRACKS

ASCOA MEMBERS ARE DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION AND PRESENTATION OF SNOWMOBILES 1968 AND EARLIER.



ABOVE: ASCOA MEMBERS TOM ANDERSON (WORLD SNOWMOBILE HEADQUARTERS) AND DICK DECKER (EAGLE RIVER DERBY TRACK) PROMOTING "VINTAGE DRIVERS ON VINTAGE SLEDS," A NEW CLASS AT THE VINTAGE WEEKEND OF RACING AT THE DERBY TRACK IN JANUARY 2010.

## THE ARNOLD RANGER V

by Steve Pierce

The icy wind of necessity blew hard across the snow-bound frontier of Canada and the United States, challenging Bombardier and Eliason, White and Smerchinski, Ingham, Hetteen, and a hundred others who envisioned traveling over the snow.

In the winter of 1960, this wind of inspiration rattled the windows of Norbert P. Arnold on East Shore Drive of Swan Lake near Pengilly, Minnesota.

Norbert was a supervisor in an iron ore mine. Active in local politics, he was elected to the state senate in 1966. Inventor, designer, and mechanical engineer, he received a patent for a steam boiler and built a steam powered sawmill and a half-sized steam tractor.

He constructed a 24-foot steel hulled boat with the intent to sail down the Mississippi River, up the Atlantic coast, and through the St. Lawrence Seaway back to Duluth, Minnesota. This dream was never realized.

Norbert's first venture into snow travel occurred in the late 1950s when he made a tracked, powered toboggan, no doubt inspired by Eliason's creation. Not satisfied with the performance, he began working on a twin tracked, no ski vehicle. In March of 1961, he completed a prototype dubbed the Ranger V.

Similar to a tiny caterpillar,

one design essential was to fit inside a pickup box. More all season vehicle than snowmobile, it resembled later twin trackers such as the Passe Par Tout, Ben Augus Caribou, and the Cushman Trackster.

The simple design featured open access to the front mounted eight horse power Briggs and Stratton four stroke engine with rope start and adjustable fixed throttle. Later models offered Kohler engine options, electric start and head lamp. A foot clutch lever engaged the three forward, one reverse speed transmission. Steering was accomplished by left and right hand levers which applied drum braking to the desired side.

A floor of steel mesh allowed water, snow and mud to pass through. Mounted on the rigid frame, two steel tractor seats on a spring steel band provided much of the suspension.

The operator sat between dual 12-inch tracks riding on four 15-inch tires with two eight-inch center idlers. The degree of inflation supplied the rest of the suspension.

Tracks were spliced and fitted with 10-inch bolts on flat iron cleats with 90 degree welded angles, height depending on seasonal use. Serrated edges prevented sideways slippage on ice. At four foot wide, the double tracks left little foot room. Fenders were wooden 2 x 12's



Pete Hyducovich demonstrating the Arnold Ranger.

and side walls were plywood. Eighteen-inch tracks were later options, and one model with 24-inch tracks saw service at a northern Minnesota resort.

Early chain drives were replaced by a differential. Winches and blades were available with a manual lift or belt driven hydraulics.

Length was 90 inches from brush guard to trailer hitch. Height was three feet to the fender tops, and weight was about 1,200 pounds. Top speed was a herky, jerky 16 miles per hour, and color was yellow with

a green hue. Initial cost was \$3,000.

Advertising brochures highlighted the utility capabilities and all season practicality, flatly denouncing their recreational use. "They were NEVER intended to be used as toys!"

Sportsmen found them irresistible. Whatever the task, getting back to the maple sugar shack or deer camp on a muddy trail, traversing swamp or muskeg or pulling a fish house through slush, the Ranger V easily out-performed any Jeep or Power Wagon.



Flotation and towing ability was legendary. Nearly impossible to get stuck, they could travel across, over or bull their way through places where a man on foot could not. They floated easily on deep snow and were used to pull trail groomers. They proved invaluable to utility companies, loggers, the DNR and REAs across the U.S. and Canada. Alaska was by far their biggest market, serving outfitters, the pipeline and remote Native villages. They even played a role in freeing whales locked in the Arctic ice!

In 1968, a name change to the Arnold Ferret Tractor was prompted by a patent infringement. Larger clutch pressure plates, heavier frame steel and other improvements added to the package and price. In 1970, a basic Ferret would cost \$3,500.

Since 1962, Norbert had been producing machines in a quonset hut at his Swan Lake home. As business boomed, he expanded to a lot and buildings across the county road.

Always hiring local help, neighbor Irene Barta was

Norbert's housekeeper. She was soon assembling tracks, cutting steel, running metal lathes, and managing sales! Eight employees were churning out 100 units per year. By the early 1980s, a Ferret was priced just under \$5,000.

In 1983, a rollover accident and ensuing lawsuit halted production for several months, eventually forcing the sale of the company. Seat belts, roll cage and metal support fenders were improvements springing from the lawsuit. Under new management and the Otter name, a few models were produced in Pengilly before operations transferred to Minneapolis in 1984.

The new, white Otter featured an optional front end loader. Bud Grant, former coach of the Minnesota Vikings, became the company spokesman. In 1985, plagued by financial difficulties, the company again changed hands, and Otter Manufacturing, Inc. opened in Mankato, Minnesota.

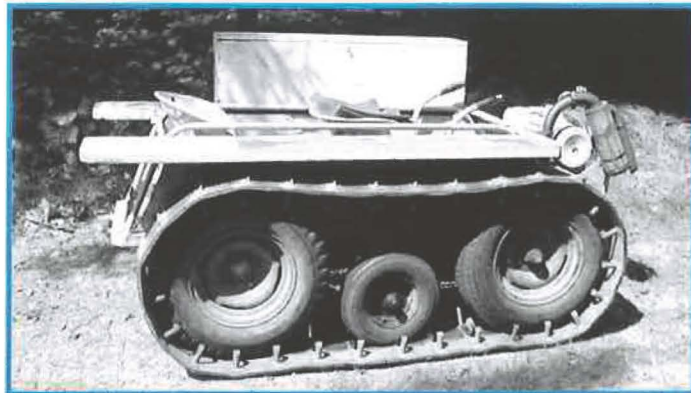
The Otter Utility I boasted a host of standard features and an extended list of options includ-

ing Kohler twin cylinder engines up to 23 horse power, closed cab, ARPS loader and backhoe, and two trailer choices. Standard models weighed 1,520 pounds, and were priced at \$8,785. Loaded with all the options, the cost topped \$20,000!

Eskimos near Nome, Alaska, fitted the tracked trailers with a cab and heater, using them as school busses. Otters were used on California beaches and in Chinese rice paddies. While farmers and those in the construction and utility fields found

the varied attachments and accessories attractive, the Otter did not realize the success enjoyed by the original N.P. Arnold units built in Pengilly. This was largely due to the development of the snowmobile and Bobcat-type utility vehicles.

After operating a skeleton service department for several years with, Ron Matski, a lone employee, Otter Manufacturing, Inc. closed its doors in 1994 and sold off its depleted inventory.



## AMSOIL World Championship Snowmobile Derby

The 47th anniversary of the AMSOIL World Championship Snowmobile Derby looks to be the best ever. Why? A bunch of reasons: #1. Arctic Cat, Polaris, Ski-Doo and Yamaha's factory snow cross racers will be here. #2. The newest snowmobile on the market, PREMIER, will be here with ten sleds running a GNSS snow cross class. #3. Seven new classes have been added to the oval show. #4. A new "over sixty" vintage class will be racing a final on Friday Night Thunder. All of that race action along with some impressive new additions to the track facility - a jumbo screen on corner three, an updated ice grinder and the acquisition of the big red barn on the north end of the track - will all spotlight the 2010 Derby. Good early attendance reports from Hay Days, our REUNION, and other summer snowmobile events give great promise to a good year.

As always, indoor space is limited. The reservation form has a firm deadline date. To guarantee your space, please respond on or before that date. Please read the reservation forms carefully for specifics on passes and Hot Seats.

### The 2010 dates are:

Jan. 8-10, 2010, Classic Vintage Championship

Jan. 14-17, 2010, 47th Annual AMSOIL World Championship Snowmobile Derby

If you do both Vintage and Derby weekends, you will receive a 50 percent discount on the Vintage Weekend. Booth materials can be left on the premises between weekends.

Hope you'll be at the 2010 Derby to take in all the fun and produce some awesome sales!

Best Regards,  
Dick Decker  
Promotions and Marketing

## Iowa Director

My name is Jon Dorman. I am the new Iowa director. Here's a little background about me.

I live in Southern Iowa with my wife and daughter.

I have been collecting snowmobiles since the early '90s, mainly Polaris. However, a few "others" have snuck into the collection as well. I specialize in the old SnoTravelers and I do ground up restorations for myself as well as others, including a lot of parts fabrication. I'm honored to be Iowa's ASCOA director and am looking forward to promoting the club the best I can.

We have been to Mt. Pleasant Old Thresher's Reunion for the past two years and have had a fantastic response to old sleds there.

In the Summer of 2011, the Hawkeye Antique Acres Tractor Club will be hosting the Summer ASCOA gathering in Waukee, Iowa. They are very excited for us to come.

I am hoping to work with the Iowa State Snowmobile Association in promoting our club.

Please feel free to email me at [jdorman@hughes.net](mailto:jdorman@hughes.net).

John Dorman, Iowa Director



Walt Pederson's wife, Arlene, passed away. Walt has been a big part of the ASCOA and of course was the mechanic for the 1968 Plaisted Polar Expedition to the North Pole.

If you would like to send a card, send to:

Walt Pederson  
4600 64 St. SE  
St. Cloud, MN 56304

I am sure he would appreciate it... Dave