

Advance Rumely Ideal Pull

La Porte, IN 1916-18



The roots of this popular vintage tractor company can be traced back as far as 1853. Meinrad Rumely came to the U. S. from Germany in 1848 and by 1853 he was in La Porte, Indiana, where he and his brother, Jacob, formed the M. & J. Rumely Co. which mostly made steel threshers until they produced their first portable steam engine in 1872.

Meinrad was the head of the company until his death in 1904 at the age of 79. He and his wife, Theresa Fierstoss Rumely, had nine children. Their sons Joseph, William, and Aloysius were active in the business along with Joseph's son, Edward, who was a medical doctor.

From 1911-1923, M. Rumely Company purchased seven other firms in the agricultural equipment business and was renamed the Advance Rumely Company. The general financial collapse of the Great Depression, beginning in 1929 and carrying on through most of the 1930s, began to take its toll on Advance-Rumely. As early as January 1930, Rumely management began seeking a buyer for the company. Correspondence with Otto Falk, president of the Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company, proved fruitful. A-C agreed to take over the firm and did so by May 1931.

The Rumely 8-16 Ideal-Pull All-Purpose tractor also got its share of stares. This odd-looking three-wheeler sported a swiveling driver's seat and gear lever so it could be driven from either direction. Rumely claimed this tractor was an all-purpose machine, as good for belt work

as it was for drawbar use. "The Rumely will plow your truck patch as well as your hundred-acre field," promotional materials boasted. "It prepares your ground, pulls your binder, and does your hauling and belt work."

An all-purpose tractor was quite a claim for a manufacturer to make about a new offering. But the Advance-Rumely Thresher Co., La Porte, Indiana, made exactly that claim when it brought out its first small tractor in 1915-16. By 1915, many tractor manufacturers were turning toward a smaller, lightweight, easy-to-handle machine targeted to the small farmer. Henry Ford and his famous (or infamous) Fordson started the trend.



Other manufacturers followed Ford's example. Rumely brought out its all-new 8-16 tractor and named it the All-Purpose (ideal pull). In advertising, the company proclaimed the tractor was designed especially for the small farm. It was sold as a combined machine: tractor and plow. The cost in 1916 was \$750 cash.

The driver had control of the entire machine from the operator's seat. Even the plow was hitched in front of the driver. He did not have to turn around in his seat to watch the plow. Because he had a clear view of everything in front of him, he could raise and lower

the plow and adjust the depth of each moldboard. The Rumely's plow was easily detached and any variety of horse-drawn machinery could be attached to the hitch, but farmers soon learned there were a few disadvantages to a tractor with a drawbar placed in the middle. This arrangement was suitable for a mounted plow and other attachments that did not require a long tongue, but it was rather inconvenient for pulling equipment behind the tractor, such as binders, wagons, disk harrows, and other implements. The problem: The driver could not make a left turn. The steering wheel would turn against the tongue, causing extensive damage, and there was no drawbar at the rear end of the tractor for such equipment.

As for belt work, the Rumely had another quirk. The gear-driven belt pulley was mounted low on the driver's left side. One could not belt to a thresher, or any other belt-driven machine, at the front of the tractor. Instead, you had to back the tractor into position, put on the belt, and drive forward until the belt was taut. Then the operator had to turn around in the seat to observe the belt-powered machine.

To innovate, it is necessary to take risks and through experimentation and failure we learn progress. Ultimately, the Rumely All-Purpose was a short-lived concept and production of the 8-16 and 12-24 ended in 1917. Few exist today.