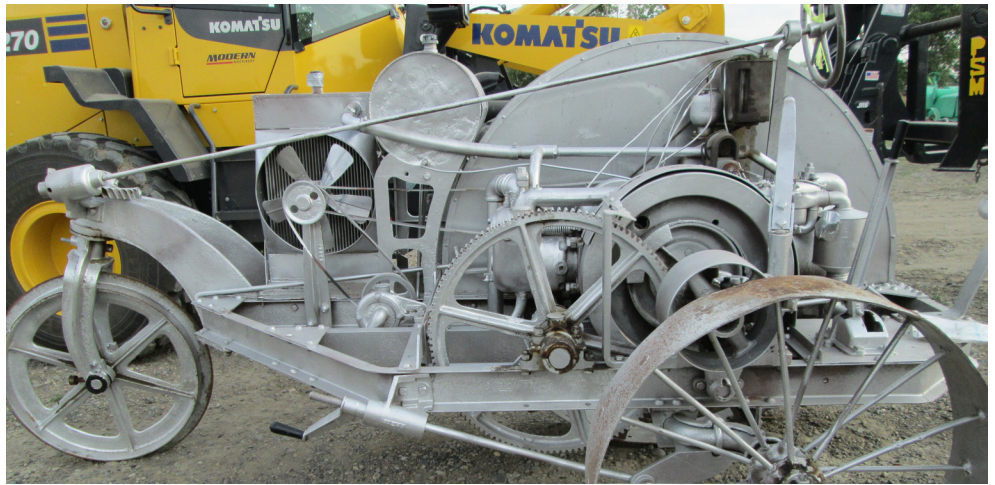


# Big Bull

## 12-20

Chicago, IL 1915



In 1915, the Bull Tractor Company proudly decreed the Big Bull was the ultimate in tractors. World War I placed many demands on society, including the need for more efficient food production. Farmers around this time were accustomed to the huge, powerful tractors being used for threshing on large farms. However, these tractors were expensive units to own and operate, and smaller farms were demanding smaller, general-purpose farm tractors, which were almost non-existent prior to that time.

Patrick J. Lyons and D.M. Hartsough, the founders of the Gas Traction Company, went from one of the largest tractors in the country, the Big Four Tractor, to the smallest when they introduced the Bull tractor. Lyons and Hartsough sold the Gas Traction Company to Emerson Brantingham in 1912 when they saw the demand for a small, affordable tractor, and, in 1913, the Bull Tractor Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota, was born. Later that year, the Bull Tractor Company put out its first tractor, the Little Bull.

By 1914, the Little Bull was number one in sales. However, with only a 5-12 horsepower engine, the Little Bull proved too weak, and sales started to plummet. In an effort to regain the confidence of the farming community, the Bull Tractor Co. brought out the Big Bull in 1915. Heavily criticized for its lack of field-testing on the Little Bull, the Bull Tractor Co. asserted that "The Big Bull has gone into the field and plowed, under the most trying and severe

conditions." The Big Bull was rated 10 HP at the drawbar and 25 HP at the belt. In later years, this rating would be raised to 12-24, it was promoted as 'The Bull with the Pull,' and initially sold for \$585.

The Bull Tractor Company published a monthly bulletin, The Bull Tractor Bulletin, which included suggestions, special information, and letters of testimonial and appreciation from satisfied owners. Yet perhaps the most entertaining account came from a report in the Minonk Illinois News:

Mr. Kriedner, a successful farmer living southwest of El Paso, Texas, owned one of the Big Bull tractors that guides itself in the furrow. He found as he plowed in a circle it was not necessary to give the tractor much attention. On the third day that he had the machine working, it grew so monotonous to be doing nothing but watching, that Mr. Kriedner went to the house for an hour. When he returned to the field the tractor was gone. Investigation showed the tractor had struck a post and deviated from its circuitous course. It stumbled through one hedge, taking the three-bottom plow behind it. At the next hedge, the plow stuck, and the tractor broke the connecting chains. Thus freed from its burden, the tractor traveled at a faster gait and tore through a barbed wire fence and into a neighbor's cornfield. Mr. Kriedner, by fast sprinting, finally overtook the runaway machine. Even

so, successful field trials, glowing advertisements, testimonials from satisfied owners, and humorous anecdotes could not change the fact that the longevity of the Bull Tractor Company was to be brief. One of the company's most serious problems was its failure to secure lasting contractual arrangements to manufacture the tractor. The result was a limited supply of new tractors for the distributors. In addition, other tractor manufacturers saw the potential market opportunities for smaller tractors and, before long, new designs and models displaced the 'Bull with the Pull.'

Although a great many changes were made to the machine, including increases in power and overall capability, the company failed to establish a strong foothold in the growing market for farm tractors. In 1917, Massey-Harris decided to export Bull tractors to Canada, yet at the same time Minneapolis Steel & Machinery canceled its production contract with Bull Tractor. Since Bull now had no tractors to deliver, the deal fell through and they were unable to find another manufacturer. By 1920, Bull Tractors was broke. Within seven years, Bull had gone from leading the pack in small tractor sales to bankruptcy. But the Toro Motor Company, the company formed to build motors for the Big Bull in 1915, is still going strong today and best known for their lawn and golf course machinery.

"The Bull  with the Pull"