

IHC

8-16

Chicago, IL 1917-22



When the International Harvester Company (IHC) formed in 1902, some of the best and brightest engineers of the time were brought together. That group quickly took a leadership role in the rapidly forming tractor industry, an IHC tradition that continued until International Tractors were no more.

The first machine to showcase the talents of the IHC engineers was the International 8-16, and it was a machine ahead of its time. It was the first mass-produced tractor to be equipped with a power takeoff, but supply and manufacturing difficulties kept it from being a runaway success. It was built from 1918 to 1922 in Chicago, Illinois. It was called the 8-16 or 8-16 Kerosene in the USA and the International Junior in England.

The U.S. Government spoiled the International 8-16's reception by forcing the company to consolidate their dealership network. After the merger, IHC at times had three or four locations in one town, and the settlement required the company close up all but one.

Henry Ford would offer an even more difficult challenge. His new tractor, the Fordson, appeared in 1917 and quickly dominated the market. It was light and cheap and backed by a man who was practically a national hero. Despite increasing tractor sales, the International Harvester Company was in a life-and-death battle just to stay in business. The company's top weapon should have been the International 8-16, but

production woes kept it from reaching the dealerships in sufficient quantities to meet demand.

A variety of glitches kept the 8-16 from being produced in quantity until 1918. One of the problems was the engine, or engines. Several different engines were used in the production, resulting in three different serial number series. The International 8-16's relatively weak sales were certainly linked to the engine difficulties as well as the manufacturing glitches, price restructuring, and engineering changes. All sorts of problems kept the 8-16 from reaching the sales floor in sufficient volume, and the delays led to in-house skirmishes between manufacturing, sales, and engineering.



The "tractor wars" with Ford led to the 1921 price of \$1,150 being cut in February 1922 to \$670 with a two-furrow plow included. The most significant differences between the 8-16 and the Fordson were the retail price and the manufacturer's ability to produce enough machines to meet demand.

From the farmer's perspective, the Ford was cheaper, rated for more horsepower, and available. Factor in the Henry Ford name, and it is evident why farmers were willing to ignore the Fordson's weaknesses and sign on the dotted line.

The Fordson had several shortcomings, but the biggest problem was deadly. The short wheelbase, lightweight, and worm-gear final drive made the Fordson flip over backwards suddenly under heavy loads. Also, the work-gear final drive heated up the operator's posterior something fierce, and the exhaust note assaulted the ears. Despite this, it was cheap and Ford was set up to build more than 100,000 a year.

Part of IHC's plan for the new McCormick-Deering tractors was to build them on a production line. Creating a production line for the 8-16 wouldn't make a lot of sense because the company was in the process of phasing in new machines. It is likely the company temporarily built the 8-16 on the new production line with the intention of converting the line to produce the new McCormick-Deering machines. In this way, the teething problems of running a production line could be ironed out before trying to get a brand new model out the door as well.

When the 8-16 could have been selling exorbitantly, the production facilities did not exist. By the time it was feasible to step up production, the International 8-16's time had passed, both from a market and company standpoint, and the tractor was more or less abandoned.