

Appear in many parades

Rupert father-son restore wagons, buggies

BY RALPH MAUGHAN
SUPREMACY — Ray Johnson and his son Alton probably have more fun than anybody with their hobby of restoring old wagons and buggies. Starting with what many would call a pile of junk, the Johnsons eventually come up with a complete, restored vehicle which many would have trouble differentiating from the original. Ray, who does most of the building, uses original iron parts almost exclusively, but many of the wooden parts, deteriorated beyond salvage, he makes himself. Usually the running gear is restored, but if some component is missing, he makes one to fit. If part of a wheel is missing, he simply turns out a new section in his shop where he has all sorts of wood-working equipment including a fine lathe. If the wheel needs a new rim, he makes one.

Ray has restored old buggies, wagons from pioneer days, a Kansas "prairie schooner", an authentic stage coach from the early days of the West and even has a buggy he can convert to a sleigh by taking off the wheels and clamping on runners. One of his most prized possessions is a buggy he purchased from a local man who had acquired it years ago from a man in Utah. One there had been plans to restore the buggy, but now until Ray got his hands on it was anything done. It was in relatively good condition, but with dents straightened out, the shafts repaired, wheels resplined and a new paint job, the buggy looks as sharp as the day it was built.

It has probably been in 50 parades since then, pulled by a team of fine horses, usually with Ray and his wife Lillian proudly guiding the team down the streets and around the squares. They have ridden in parades all over the valley for most of the last ten years, from Rupert to Harley, Paul, Oakley, Murfreesboro and the Wagon Days parades in Ketchikan.

Usually Alton will be driving another restored buggy or wagon in the parade and the Johnsons have had as many as five entries in parades with the three other children of Alton and Terri driving other wagons. The 11 Ranch club is always an eye-catcher to people lining the streets for annual parades

and fairs. In the Independence Day parade in Rupert this month, Alton led the entry with the restored stage coach, his daughter Karla, 9, followed in a small buckboard. Tom, 12, was next with a team of ponies pulling a 2-wheeled buggy. 14-year-old James had a team of ponies on a buckboard coach and Ray followed in his buggy.

"One man's trash is another man's treasure," Ray quips, pointing to a pile of wheels, shafts, broken frames and assorted pieces beneath his hands. One of these days another restored buggy will emerge from the pile.

Like a boy with a new toy, he relates that he has found a number of his own team piled high with old buggy parts that someone was going to land in the dump. He has made a deal to haul the trailer away to his back yard, where other visitors will eventually take shape from the lumber. A former veterinarian, the parts were picked up many years ago along the old Oregon Trail.

Ray talks of visiting with old time Oakley residents Kelly Paulson last fall of July and hearing he had an old wagon which his wife many years ago had pulled up into the hills above Oakley just to get rid of it. It lay abandoned in trails from a pair of sunglasses and a neck yoke for the wagon. The deal accepted, he went to the hills in search of the wagon. Sure enough, there it was, but in a bad state of deterioration. But he thought it home and today the wagon looks as good as new. He had to replace almost all the outer wooden trim of one wheel and parts of others, as well as rebuilding the box, seat and trim with hardwood. He built a new coach "connecting frame and rear axle" and made a new tongue. The dashboards and neck yoke he made in his shop.

Today the restored wagon and buggies are stored in a covered shed and barn at Ray's home northwest of Rupert, but he and Alton are constructing a new display building where they plan to assemble all the wagons.

Ray says, "restored, restored, and restored. It may take restoring all or give it away, but I never cannot



Popular parade entry

Alton Johnson, accompanied by a son, leads an entry of five units from 11 Ranch in the Independence Day parade in Rupert. The team of Percheron geldings he is

driving have appeared in some 30 parades since the Johnsons acquired them four years ago, according to Ray Johnson, Alton's father, who built the stage coach. (SIP Photos by Mike Keller)



Scale model stage coach

This miniature stage coach was built by Ray Johnson using a full sized coach as a model. It has back wheels from a

Model T Ford and front wheels from an old Studebaker automobile. (SIP Photos)

This fine team of 3-year-old Percheron geldings Ray purchased at a two-falls sale four years ago. He and Alton break the team and they have since appeared in a least 30 parades, according to Ray. (SIP Photos)



"One man's trash..."

This rest-decor job of wheels, frames and other old buggy parts was a thriving feed for Ray Johnson. A

SIP Photos by Ralph Maughan

former owner says the parts were picked up many years ago along the Old Oregon Trail. (SIP Photos)

restoring for restoration was used as a man for himself.

In the vehicles with Ray and Alton was in progress a neighbor drove up with a small horse collar wanting to find another to match. It was just possible that Ray had one in his ample collection of equipment for horses and horse-drawn machinery.

In his barn, Ray has a number of beautifully equipped harnesses, leashes and other horse equipment which he has made or restored. He makes his own harnesses and has a collection of spurs he has fashioned in his shop.

Though Ray has only been restoring old wagons and buggies for about the past ten years, his interest probably a "throw-back" to his great grandfather, he says, who helped build many of the wagons used by early Shoshone pioneers to travel to Utah in the middle of the last century. Reading about the life and work of Robert Lewis Johnson stirred an interest in vehicles of pioneer days and got him started restoring them, he says.

He does the work because he enjoys it, "doing something I like to do," he says, and when he is finished he has "something to look at."

The project is a family pastime

which began many years ago helping his people and other woodworkers and all the family helping with the repairs at fairs and parades.

Occasionally Ray has taken one or more of his well-restored young people on campaigns or for other occasions. He had some of his horses at the Cyo Scout Jay Camp at the "Calf-Calf" last month and plans to take his outfit to Wolcott Park the last of July for the Camp Fire Girls picnic.

Last month he loaded a team of horses and a wagon onto trailers and hauled them to the mouth of Bigler Canyon where he met 27 young women and their leaders from the Ruppel LDS Pith Ward. Loading the girls' bedding, tents and other equipment aboard the several wagons, he accompanied the group on a 3-day, 21-mile pioneer trek over the hills to Summit, Senaviv. At night the girls camped out in their tents while Ray and a grandson slept in the wagon. It was a most enjoyable outing for all concerned, according to reports.

One of Ray's great problems is to solve one of the 3-day drivers through the mountains of Central Idaho open only to groups with horse-drawn vehicles. The figures this would be just about the ultimate pleasure.