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Demonstration addresses tire debate



By WILLIE VOGT

LIKE a lawyer who never asks a question to which he doesn't know the answer, companies usually don't talk about demonstrations unless they win. This is a longtime challenge for ag editors as technology providers in this industry are often touting their performance, whether it's more bushels to the acre, less fuel used per acre or some other competition-busting promise.

I came across just such a situation recently when Firestone held a media event at its Des Moines, Iowa, facility.

Called the largest ag facility of any kind in the country, the Firestone operation is where the big tires are made. While we did get a plant tour, the aim of our get-together was to discuss a demonstration the company did just before the snows of winter covered Iowa. The purpose of the demonstration was to show the tractive efficiency of Firestone 23-degree R1 tires vs. a competitor's R1W tires.

Picking a fight

A major competitor circulated a traction demonstration video to its dealers recently that got Firestone's dander up. "We wanted to deal with the claims made in that video," says Ken Allen, vice president, Firestone Agricultural Tire Co. "We feel our competitors have gone beyond good sound science."

For a company like Firestone that's celebrating

Key Points

- Company demonstrations offer buyers insight.
- Firestone demonstration shows interesting traction results.
- Challenger celebrates a track machine milestone.

100th anniversary of its name along with a 75-year history of on-farm tire testing, any claims made by competitors might be subject to further scrutiny. In Firestone's case, instrumented field tests had long shown the increased traction efficiency of the 23-degree design vs. competitors. But how to prove that in the field?

The answer was to set up a real-world test on a farm near Slater, Iowa. And what a demonstration it must have been

with more than 50 farmers and tire dealers on hand to watch.

Firestone used three tractors for the test. Two Deere 8520 tractors with mechanical front drive were set up and properly ballasted. One wore the Firestone R1 rubber with the trademark 23-degree tread pattern. The other wore the competitor's R1W rubber.

Using a single steel cable, the two tractors were tethered through a pulley to a Deere 9520 four-wheel-drive tractor that acted as an anchor. The bigger tractor was pulling a five-shank ripper set at a 15- to 18-inch depth. That anchor tractor had a driver who kept the big rig geared to provide constant pull against the two tethered pulling tractors.

The pulley assembly linking the two test tractors allowed

one to pull ahead of the other if tractive force was different.

Running the test

The two tractors ran at speed — the same gear and the same revolutions per minute — for one-quarter mile. The pulling tractors disabled their mechanical front-drive systems and ran with their differentials locked. This was a real-wheel-drive traction test.

After that first run, the difference in the distance covered was measured. The machine outfitted with Firestone tires pulled 37 feet, 4 inches farther.

To make the test fair, the two pulling tractors then got a switch. The tires were swapped out and the test rerun. "We wanted to eliminate any challenge with equipment bias

in this test," says Tom Rodgers, marketing manager, Firestone Agricultural Tire. "Farmers would ask us about the test and one of the first things they wondered was whether we ran the tires on each tractor." That second run ended with the Firestone-trod tractor pulling an additional 36 feet, 8 inches in the same quarter mile.

You can check out the video of the test yourself online at www.treadtotread.com.

Clarification

Last month, in covering www.ironplanet.com, we mentioned a fixed fee structure, and in fact the fee is governed by a lot of factors. If you're considering working with the site, your best bet is to contact them directly for more details.

Celebrating a track milestone

AGCO Corp. hit a milestone with its Challenger brand machines in March with the 20,000th track tractor to roll off the line. The company acquired the Challenger line when Caterpillar exited the ag business back in 2002 and has been successful with the brand in Cat dealerships.

The first Cat Challenger track machine hit the field in 1987 with its unique rubber track design. While track machines haven't taken the original predicted market share that some observers thought they would, they remain a substantial market segment where Challenger competes.

The latest generation "B series" machines are bigger, stronger and, believe it or not, "smarter" than past models. Agco continues to add new features to this market segment. The 20,000 milestone is worth noting for a market segment that didn't exist before 1987.



TAKING DELIVERY: Challenger celebrates the 20,000th Challenger track tractor rolling off the line at Agco's Jackson, Minn., production facility. Representatives from D'Arrigo Bros. of Salinas, Calif., who purchased the tractor from Challenger dealer Quinn Equipment Inc., Salinas, Calif., received the keys to the tractor from members of the Challenger production team.

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