

A HANDFUL OF GOLD

FORTY YEARS AGO JOCK BRYCE STARTED HIS OWN BUSINESS. HERE WE TAKE A LOOK BACK OVER THAT TIME, AND WITH 3 GOLD AWARDS IN THE BAG, AT HOW THE CURRENT BRYCE SUMA POST DRIVERS CAME TO FRUITION.



THE EARLY YEARS

35 years seems a long time but that is how long Jock Bryce has been tinkering around with post driver design. Here we look back over these years at what is a very interesting and remarkable achievement by a working man.

“In 1968, when I was 22, my family was forced to give up the tenancy of our 700 acre hill farm in the heart of the Cheviot Hills in Southern Scotland ” says Jock. “ My father suffered from severe depression and I was told by a consultant in Edinburgh that if I carried on farming where he had left off, it could kill him. There were no options. I had already started to modernise the old farm buildings by knocking out hay lofts and concreting floors and had started to plough and re-seed hill land for increased output and production and now felt as if it had all been wasted time and effort. That farm was all I’d ever known but we had to move out and sell up to pay off the overdraft. Watching the auctioneer sell off absolutely everything, right down to our last bolt, was a living hell. I went down the road that night with nothing in my pocket, to live with my father and mother and my grandmother at her house in Berwick-on-Tweed.”

Jock reveals that often when your back is against the wall it can bring the best out of you so as he walked away from the farm, he vowed that this would be the start of a new chapter. “All I’d ever wanted was to work on the land so that summer was spent helping a contractor plough and reclaim hill land at Elmscleugh Farm near Dunbar. I then took a fulltime job as a shepherd near Wooler in Northumberland , tending 1,200 mull ewes for £9 a week.”

By now married to his wife Jennifer, Jock was approached by a well-known farmer and offered the job of running an arable stock farm near Kelso that paid £13 a week so he jumped at the chance. “I was responsible for the day-to-day running of this arable/stock farm with potatoes, cereals, sheep and suckler cows , which I enjoyed. However, although it was a good job, the following year I spotted a very interesting advert in Farmers Weekly. At the time, Farmers Weekly owned six farms across the UK, which were all run differently and which all featured regularly in the pages of the magazine. A manager was needed for their 1460 acre hill farm in Perthshire. The job appealed to me because I would be getting back to hill farming. I applied but didn’t think for one moment I would get the job as there were 60 applicants, but after 3 interviews, I was bowled over when they offered me the job plus I was now on a whopping £19 a week.”

Jock enjoyed considerable success managing this farm but explains that following a change in farming policy to maintain interest in different farming enterprises and the weekly diaries published, the Farmers Weekly sold this farm. Although offered a position with them elsewhere, either with an intensive beef lot on maize or a dairy farm in South-West Scotland, neither of these appealed to him so he decided it was time to strike out on his own. He sold his beloved car, an Escort Mexico which raised £960 allowing him to buy the farm tractor, a red David Brown 990 Implematic for £270 and various workshop tools including a welder and oxy-acetylene cutter from the farm . He loaded his equipment onto a bale trailer he’d made and set off back to Kelso in search of his next challenge.



Jock Bryce

The journey took him just over 8 hours non-stop travelling at 12 miles an hour. “Jennifer and the two boys – number three came along later – piled into the ex-Post Office van I’d bought for £78 at a recent auction and followed on to Kelso, complete with collie dogs and a Simmental calf in the back!”

Once back in his beloved Border countryside, Jock started his own business trading as ‘Relief Farm Services’. He earned a living by taking on in-bye and hill lambings and shearing sheep, as well as erecting livestock pens, which led to more and more work in the local fencing industry. He also offered a bale-handling service from field to barn and because money was tight, he made his own flat eight bale grab. Also available at that time was mobile welding and hydraulic supplies. Erecting permanent electric fences quickly became a regular part of Jock’s work as he spotted a gap in the market for ultra-low cost, highly-effective electric fencing that had to

be reliable. This created a big demand for his services erecting permanent electric fencing all over the South of Scotland. He patented three of his own electric fencing products which were crucial to making permanent electric systems reliable. These electric fences were mostly 5 wire electric , 21” H/T net with 2 hot wires and single scare wires on dry stone walls and fences. Jock erected 1 million metres working on his own over this time with his contract fencing. One of his ancestors was a civil engineer and others were in ship engineering. His father also had a Patent granted to him relating to an improvement to ruck lifters and hay sweeps and he was also the first farmer to introduce a tractor and install electricity in the locality. Jock hated school and readily admits he was no academic but he did excel in metal work, woodwork and technical drawing where he regularly achieved top marks. These skills along with his father’s pioneering spirit have obviously stood him in very good stead.

FENCING MECHANISATION



JOCK STARTED OFF BY DOING ALL HIS FENCING BY HAND.

Jock started digging holes by hand then went on to use a handheld earth-boring auger which didn’t last long because of the hard stony conditions, then to a Danuser tractor-mounted earth auger with a Pengo head (Pic 2)



JOCK THEN PROGRESSED TO A HANDHELD AUGER WHICH WAS VERY QUICKLY REPLACED BY A TRACTOR-MOUNTED VERSION WITH PENGU HEAD

This was a big help but still needed a lot of handwork with heels on posts and backfilling. The Danuser auger was used for about 3 years but he was losing too much time so in 1977 a Linden post driver with 400lb hammer was purchased for £1160 – this was a major advancement but within the first week modifications were already underway, namely wider

wheels and stub axles off a Clayton 103 Combine, a ballast box which doubled up as a means of carrying coils of wire, and a hydraulic jack leg so that one side of the machine could be raised off the ground to make up for the shortfall of mast tilt travel when working on steep ground.



HE PURCHASED HIS FIRST POST DRIVER FOR £1160 AND IMMEDIATELY SET ABOUT MAKING CHANGES TO IT TO SUIT HIS WORKING CONDITIONS.

Workloads were increasing all the time and with the risk of losing customers, three years later he took the chance to buy a hardly-used model of the same make. But now Jock had 2 post drivers and only 1 tractor. Most of the ground

he worked on was in the hills which was often steep and dangerous so now with a bit of cash in the Bank he bought a brand new 4WD Fiat 680. He now had 2 outfits which allowed him to keep 2 customers happy at the same time - in other words he could have a few days with one and a few days with another without having to move equipment. As he always worked on his own and was in relentless pursuit of more output, he built himself a heavier-duty version of this trailed-type machine and mounted a Kinghitter mast on it so now he had more hitting height and more hitting power with a 700lb hammer. (Pic 4)



HE THEN MADE A HEAVY DUTY VERSION WITH 26 PLY AIRCRAFT TYRES TO STOP BOUNCE. A KINGHITTER MAST WAS FITTED WITH A 700LB HAMMER.

All the fences that he was erecting were variants of Bryce permanent electric and when he started he was erecting 5 wire permanent electric fences on hill ground for 26p/yard. 50% Grants were being paid on 5 year schemes on hill farms and so with between 10 – 30,000 mts having to be done on many farms over a period of 5 years, output had to be of the highest order to keep pace with the work in hand. So this new post driver with more hitting power was a step up again but because of the size of contracts that he was now taking on in this hill country he

needed to carry enough materials with him for a day’s work and be able to travel on any terrain. So in 1985 he sold this post driver he had made himself and the proceeds helped him fund a brand new chassis with a power-driven axle from Land Drive at Canonbie in SW Scotland. On to this chassis a post driver was built which included sideshift and backshift and as can be seen on Picture 5 this machine had the double slider sideshift and mast tilt ram bracket that was later to be incorporated in the design of the Bryce Suma Profi fully mounted post driver.

FENCING MECHANISATION CONTINUED...



THE 6 WHEEL DRIVE OUTFIT MADE IN 1985. NOTICE THE DOUBLE-SLIDER SIDESHIFT, AND MAST TILT RAM BRACKET WHICH MANY YEARS LATER WERE INTRODUCED ON THE BRYCE SUMA PROFI.

This 6 wheel-drive go-anywhere outfit allowed Jock to transport strainers, posts, rails, wire and net anywhere in the hills in Southern Scotland much of which is hard and steep and with peat bogs higher out. This post driver was now into a different league and needed a bigger tractor to pull it so the Fiat 680 was sold and a Fiat 880 was bought and he had a dozer blade fitted to it for levelling off fencelines . This new tractor had a ground-drive feature which allowed the post driver axle to be driven too so Jock now had his 6-wheel-drive go-anywhere outfit. The sideshift and backshift combination “ was absolutely brilliant and saved so much time and energy ” Jock says. Because he always worked on his own, this great combination

saved a huge physical effort because there was now no need to move the tractor/post driver to keep the post in line with the mast – you simply moved the sideshift and backshift at the flick of a lever. Hammer weights were now up to 750lbs and as a result of this and all the new design changes, output shot up again and now he was where he wanted to be for his contract work. Because it was a unique combination, he could see a commercial opportunity and while working on his own was putting together in his mind what would be a build requirement for a 3 pt linkage mounted post driver to sell in the marketplace. In his mind he was sure it would be a winner.

INTRODUCTION OF THE BRYCE SUMA POST DRIVER

On a business trip to an Agricultural Show in Eire in 1996 to support a Company distributing his electric fencing products, this plan came a step closer to being a reality. Just by chance when wandering round the Show, Jock met a couple of Irish guys who already made 2 small basic post drivers for the Irish market using the services of a self-employed part-time fabricator called Andy Moriarty.

After meeting Jock, they asked Andy if he could make a prototype using the design criteria set out by Jock, namely a post driver with sideshift, backshift, mounted on a 3 pt linkage, with a counterbalance and sitting on 2 legs. It was to incorporate a mast originally designed by Ben Colchester and Dickie Neil, and it is interesting to note that this mast design was based on the Linden post driver but with design changes that included a top pulley. This mast was upgraded with design changes to the current patented, fully automatic design.

Andy Moriarty was the skilled

fabricator who followed Jock’s instructions and he explains that designing and developing the prototype of the Bryce Suma post driver was very much a case of trial and error. “Getting everything exactly to Jock’s very demanding specifications involved a great many phone calls between us, especially as I’d no drawings to work from,” says Andy. “I made the prototype simply by chatting to Jock about his very specific ideas for his new post driver and taking everything step by step.”

After three months, Jock had his prototype – and, one week later, he’d sold it! He had meant to keep this machine for his own use but the customer said if he didn’t buy it today he wouldn’t buy it at all so with a chance to cash it in, he let it go and as it was to a local customer he could monitor it if required. “When the first person who saw my new post driver snapped it up, this confirmed my belief that this would be a winner,” says Jock. “After this prototype, design changes were immediately instigated before any other machines were manufactured then another 3 were ordered. Improvements were continually being made to these post drivers during the following years.”

That was the start of ‘Bryce Suma Post Drivers’, which have proved to

be highly-successful and, as well as being a best seller, have won many top awards, including 2 Silver and 1 Gold Award at the Royal Highland Show, a Gold Award at the Royal Show, a Gold Award at the Royal Welsh Show as well as 2 Lamma Awards. As recently as 2012 Jock also won the Alban Davies Award at the Royal Welsh – the top award for the best machine at the Show for his HD180 one man Tracked Fencing Machine.

When Jock Bryce won 3 Gold Awards in one year it was widely recognized throughout the farming and fencing industry as a feat never achieved ever before by any machine in these industries. In these machinery competitions Bryce toppled the might of JCB, New Holland and Michelin to name but a few, with his Bryce Suma post driver.

He is rightly proud of his designs and the awards they have won but reveals that comments from satisfied customers give him even more pleasure and he draws my attention to a couple of recent letters...

“The new twin-pulley mast is absolutely brilliant, I wouldn’t consider anything else and from now on all machines ordered will have your cleverly thought out Rockspike System and Quadshift”.

“The new Magnum is truly a World Class piece of kit – the best has got better. This thing is in a league of its own and the job has not been invented that this machine is not the master of”.

Regular messages are received by phone, email or letters from countless customers old and new who express their delight at having purchased these Award-winning post drivers.

“It’s comments like those that make all the hard work and long hours worthwhile,” says Jock.

THE NEW BEGINNING

In 2008, Jock had a major change in direction and made the decision to start to manufacture his post drivers ‘in house’ by converting his existing cattle shed into a fabrication shop on his small farm near Kelso in the Scottish Borders. Andy Moriarty who had made his prototype back in 1996, moved over from Ireland with his family in order to work full time with Jock. “That was a very good move,” says Andy. (Pic 6)



ANDY MORIARTY AND JOCK BRYCE WITH THE PROTOTYPE ANDY MADE TO JOCK’S DESIGN REQUIREMENTS IN 1996, ALONGSIDE THE CURRENT AWARD-WINNING MACHINE SHOWN ON THE RIGHT

As Jock walks round the fabrication yard, he points out the latest Bryce Suma post drivers, including models which can be attached to tractors, articulated loaders and diggers, as well as the Bryce Fencemaster and HD180, both of which are one-man tracked fencing machines. “Many of the Bryce Suma machines we’re now producing are destined for the global market,” says Jock, who adds that Bryce Suma’s award-winning post drivers are now in use in many corners of the Globe including Russia, USA, Australia, New Zealand, throughout Europe and even Hawaii!

THE FUTURE

What does the future hold for Bryce Suma? These machines are frequently described by others as ‘The best in the world, the Rolls-Royce and the Benchmark.’ Jock is always striving for perfection and is fanatical in his pursuit of excellence. He never rests on his laurels but is driven by an inner desire to make things better but not at the expense of durability and reliability. That single-minded approach is clearly evident in everything he turns his hand to whether it be fencing, farm contract work, producing ¾ bred Limousin calves or of course the World-renowned Bryce post drivers. Bryce Suma post drivers are continually evolving, it is all ongoing and they now have a total of 12 patents granted to them and various Registered Designs. Jock says he designs these post drivers to meet the needs of modern-day requirements for safety, simplicity, speed and efficiency. Upgrades are only made if they guarantee improvement and ensure reliability and longevity – as he says, “I don’t try to re-invent the wheel but just try and make it turn a little faster.”

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