

sales manager for the full line of A-C tractors, everything except lawn and garden.

So, you really got to know the brand.

If you're a product manager, you're working with everybody who's involved with the tractor. Everybody: manufacturing, sales, field sales, dealers, customers. My telephone rang every time somebody wanted to know something

about the product, whether they were happy with it or not.

What does a product manager do?

You introduce the new models; I introduced a flock of them. It was up to me to put together the product stories for the new tractors. So, I'd sit down with the engineering people, find out what they thought was important, and try to translate it into sales language. That's what got me started writing.

And you've written a great deal about the history of the company. Give us a little primer.

Allis Chalmers developed its first tractor in 1914. It was a Model 1018, a three-wheeled tractor. Most of them were at that time. They were messy and hard to handle, but they pulled a plow. A-C was primarily a heavy-equipment company at that time; the company itself goes back to 1847. The company was into big, heavy stuff—mining equipment and such—and that kind of went sour.

Pretty soon, the tail was wagging the dog and farm equipment was the big business. A-C was the first company to put tractors on rubber tires. The first rubber tire model was the Model U, in 1932. That's when A-C really took off.



Swinford's collection—perhaps the largest of its kind—is full of valuable pieces like this Model U.

What made the company so successful?

Price. The most successful tractor was the WC, which came out in the early 1930s. That and the All-Crop Harvester put A-C in business. They were priced right for the family farm, and they caught on like wildfire. The WC cost right at \$850 for the steel wheel model, and another \$150 for rubber tires.

That was the start of a long legacy, and over the years farmers became fiercely loyal to tractor color. Do you think that's still the case today?

It's important, but not like it used to be. A farmer today is a different breed of cat than when I started in the business in the '50s. The farmer today is a big businessman. I came up in the era of the family farm—about 160 acres. The big change came in WWII, when people like me were off in the service. Farms became more specialized and larger. Most of the farms today have a lot of different lines of tractors, too.

You still have loyalists, though—both farmers and collectors. What do they ask you when you meet them or hear from them?

Something I don't know [*laughs*]. I know the historical stuff—paint colors, and stuff like that—but I'm not good technically. For that stuff, I refer them to other collectors. There are super collectors, some who own dozens of A-C tractors. Some restore tractors, and those guys have the good details. People want to know, when did this tractor come out, what color was it painted...

Do you ever get tired of it?

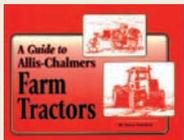
Oh no. I thrive on it. I get tired of a lot of things, but I don't get tired of A-C. I'm trying to keep the name alive. I guess you could say that's my mission since I retired. ■

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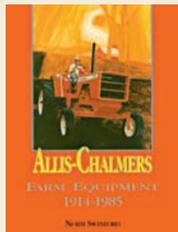
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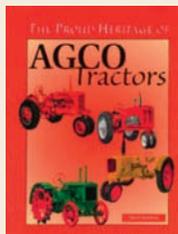
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