



Farm News - February

Not many people who live in the city get the opportunity to see what a real farm truck looks like. I've owned several. Most start out as fairly decent trucks and rapidly regress to "farm truck" status. One memorable truck was the one we called the "fire truck", an old 67 Ford 4x4. Before starting the truck you had to open up the hood and then grab the old coat from the back. After turning the key a while the engine would backfire a few times and then literally fire-up with flames coming off the motor! After beating out the fire with the old coat you were ready to drive.

My present farm truck is a '99 Dodge I've driven for the past 660,000+ kms. The box of the pickup is pretty rough. The front is smashed from a heavy load that shifted forward. The drivers side is crashed in from an unsuccessful lesson in towing. The tailgate often required a second person and a hip check to close it and more than once it fell off, dragging down the road held on by one strap. For the past few months I've had to keep it tied on with a rope. The passenger side of the box was pretty good up until last month. That's when the deer ran out of the ditch and smashed into it. Didn't hurt the deer much, he just ran off. Insurance said they would fix it but the body guy just shook his head. "You'd be better off to find a used one and we'll fix it up for you." And they did!

When I picked up my truck the box was showroom perfect. The tailgate would even open and close with just one hand! I felt "teenager proud" driving my shiny new farm truck home. When I passed by the spot where I hit the deer, I thanked him.

Farm Olympics. With the 2010 Olympics happening I had to wonder what event on the farm would qualify for Olympic status.

Giving straw to the growing pigs is an Olympic challenge for sure. The event starts out with a 1000 pound bale of straw set in front of the row of pig houses. The goal is to get the straw into the house for bedding. As soon as the bale is placed down, around 80 pigs from 100 - 250 pounds race out of their houses and surround it. Pigs love straw and delight in nosing thru it. The challenge is to remove as much straw as possible from the bale with a pitch fork, find a path thru the pigs and carry it into their houses immediately returning to repeat the process. The event is over when all the straw is inside the house at which point so are the pigs.

The premiere event is feeding the sows. They love their grain and their intake has to be limited to control their weight so they are always excited to get fed. If you just stop to look at them and they'll start lining up in anticipation.

This event starts the moment the first pail is filled with grain. The 30-40 sows weighing up to 800 pounds are ready. Every eye is on the pail of feed. The 1st challenge is to cross the fence into their pen and find a path thru the giant pigs while carrying the full pail of grain (13 kg). While dodging the giant sows the goal is to get to the trough and spread the grain evenly before the pigs arrive. If you are a bit slow or get blocked and can only dump the feed in a pile then just a few pigs can eat and all the hungry ones will follow you and your pail back to the fence. There they will be lined up ready for the 2nd bucket. The event is finished when all the buckets (15-20) are evenly spread in the troughs and the sows are happily eating. Tip: When the next feeding time comes the pigs will remember your previous technique and be ready. You have to outsmart them each time which can be difficult.