

# MASSEY TRACTOR DRIVER IS NATIONAL CHAMPION

BY CARMEN TARBILL

**W**hen I was in high school—back in the day—tractor driving contests were a really big deal. Sometime called “tractor rodeos”, they were often part of 4-H or FFA projects. These events involved many skills but the most interesting and difficult part was the backing portion. They would consist of backing an implement through an obstacle course of varying degrees of difficulty. The implements could be anything from a manure spreader, hay wagon or—the most difficult—a side delivery hay rake. I recently had the privilege of meeting the 1959 National Champion, Jack Tarbill, who drove a Massey Ferguson 50 all the way to the finals. The national win was a big deal and Jack still remembers the details like they were yesterday! —Editor

## A STRONG INTEREST IN MASSEY TRACTORS

In October of 1959, at the age of 18, Jack Tarbill began his journey to victory at the National 4-H Tractor Operator’s Contest in Columbia, Missouri. This feat would not have been possible, according to Jack, without the support of the Dunlap Company Massey Ferguson Dealership and the Massey Ferguson organization.

Young Jack had been active in the Scioto Valley Machinery Club and had been a 4-H member for eight years. In addition to his interest in tractors his other projects had included swine, sheep and dairy. The tractor contest required the operator to pull and back implements—usually a hay wagon—take a written quiz and complete a practical examination. However, it was backing a specially adapted manure spreader through the obstacle course that was always his most difficult task.



## GETTING READY FOR THE COUNTY FAIR

Tarbill started practicing for the Pickaway County Fair in Circleville, Ohio using a Massey-Harris 22 at a course set up on his family farm. He was not allowed to use his own tractor in the contest, so he went to nearby Williamsport, Ohio to visit Jack Dunlap, with

the Dunlap Company Dealership, to see what tractors they would be taking for their exhibit at the Pickaway County fair. Mr. Dunlap showed him a Massey Ferguson 50 tricycle, with power steering that he thought would be somewhat

similar to the Massey 22 Tarbill had been using for practice. With the county fair only three weeks away, Mr. Dunlap allowed Tarbill to take the tractor to his family farm in Atlanta,

**(ABOVE)** Part of the competition at the Ohio State Fair, was backing a hay wagon into a very tight spot. Notice that the stakes were connected by ropes and each stake had a small ball sitting on top. The slightest touch would knock off the ball causing a major loss of points.



Jack Tarbill holding his National Championship trophy that he won in Columbia, Missouri. He was upset because he had to pose for the photo sitting on a Massey Ferguson 35 because the hi-crop 50 was so tall that it covered up most of the sign.



Jack receives that Ohio State Championship trophy from Tom Christen, Farm Sales Manager for the fair. Sohio—Standard Oil of Ohio—paid for the trip to the National Championship in Missouri.



This is Jack Tarbill today on his favorite Massey Ferguson 50 tractor. —Photo by Carman Tarbill.

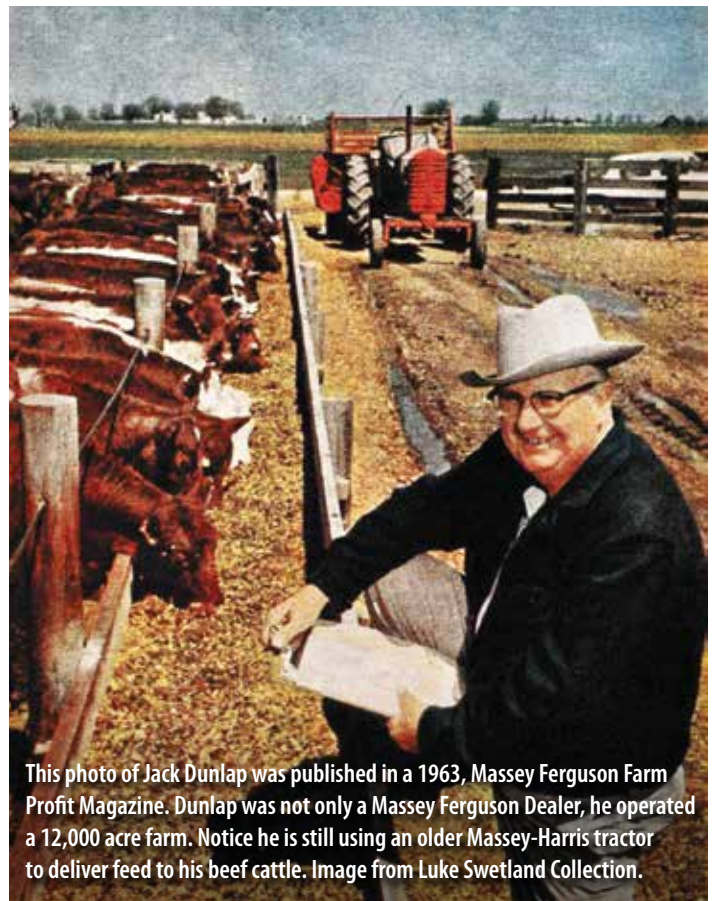
Ohio, so that he could continue to prepare for the contest. Jack ran the tractor in low range so he would not make any mistakes. During practice, his father said, “Grandma could do it at that speed. Put it in high range.”

For a while, this was quite difficult, but soon he was able to complete the course at a faster speed, which was necessary because the contest would be timed. Mr. Dunlap’s generosity along with Tarbill’s practice paid off with a win at the 1959 Pickaway County Fair. He was proud to show his trophy to Mr. Dunlap and share the exciting news that he had now earned the opportunity to compete at the Ohio State Fair. Jack Dunlap’s graciously allowed Tarbill to continue to practice with the Massey Ferguson 50, back at the home farm. Dunlap then made arrangements to have the Massey Branch in Columbus provide the exact same tractor for the state contest. Jack Tarbill was headed for the Ohio State Fair.

## ON TO THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

After a successful win at the Ohio State Fair—where he had competed against forty-five other contestants—Tarbill made another trip to see Mr. Jack Dunlap to thank him for his support and show him the trophy. Jack’s next stop was the National Contest in Columbia, Missouri. His trip being paid for by the Standard Oil Company of Ohio. Dunlap made a phone call to the Massey distributor in Springfield, Illinois to make sure there would be a Massey Ferguson 50, just like the model he had been practicing on for use at the National Competition.

Upon arriving at the arena at Stephens College in Columbia, where the contest was to be held, Tarbill immediately noticed the Massey Ferguson 50 with a narrow front end, all set-up and ready for him to use. Jack would be driving against competitors from twenty-three states in the National Tractor Operators



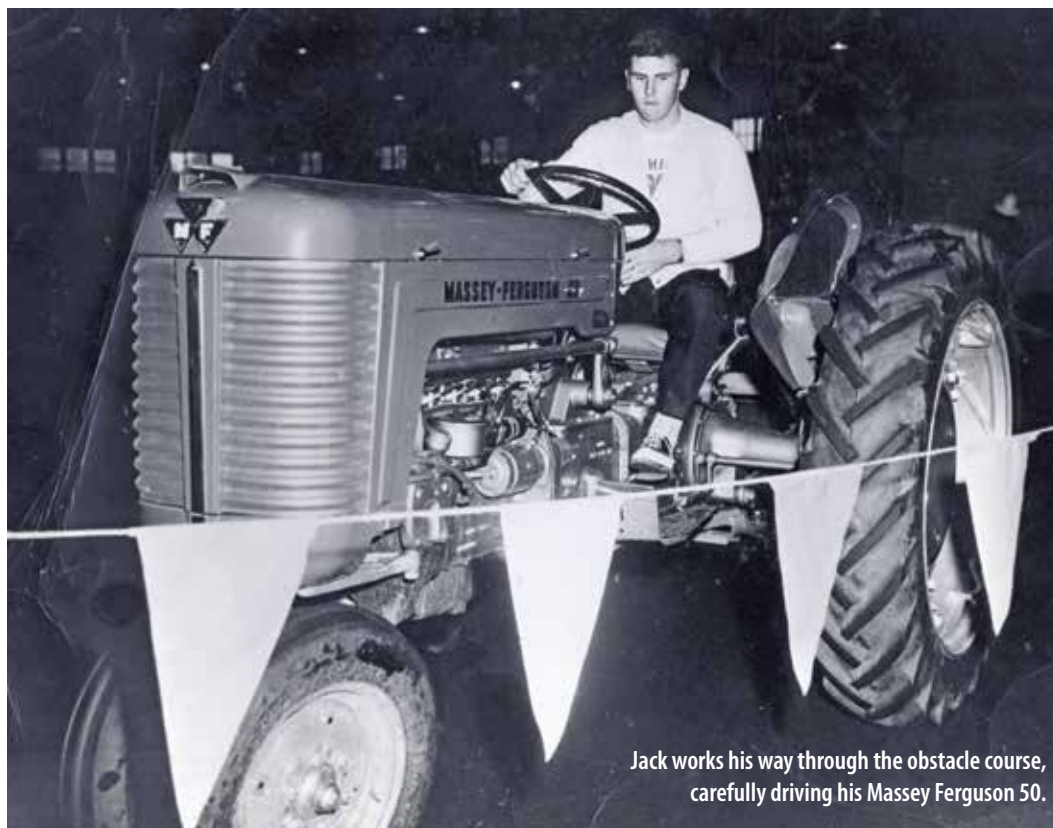
This photo of Jack Dunlap was published in a 1963, Massey Ferguson Farm Profit Magazine. Dunlap was not only a Massey Ferguson Dealer, he operated a 12,000 acre farm. Notice he is still using an older Massey-Harris tractor to deliver feed to his beef cattle. Image from Luke Swetland Collection.

Contest. While Jack went to inspect his tractor, a man walked up and introduced himself as Jack West from Massey Ferguson. Mr.

West said, “I am here to make sure that the tractor is set-up correctly for you. If anything needs to be adjusted, I will take care of it.” With that kind of support, Jack was able to win the 1959 National 4-H Tractor Operators Contest. Once again, Tarbill proudly returned home with a trophy to show Jack Dunlap and thank him again for all that he had done.

After Jack Tarbill had told me the complete story of his national victory, he leaned thoughtfully back in his chair and said, “I knew then and now that my winning was not possible without all the help I received from Jack Dunlap, Jack West and all the Massey Ferguson people who were involved. *LQ*

*Side Note: Jack still owns a Massey Ferguson 50 that he pulls locally tractor and is passing his love of tractors on to his granddaughter, by teaching her to drive and pull at county fairs.*



Jack works his way through the obstacle course, carefully driving his Massey Ferguson 50.