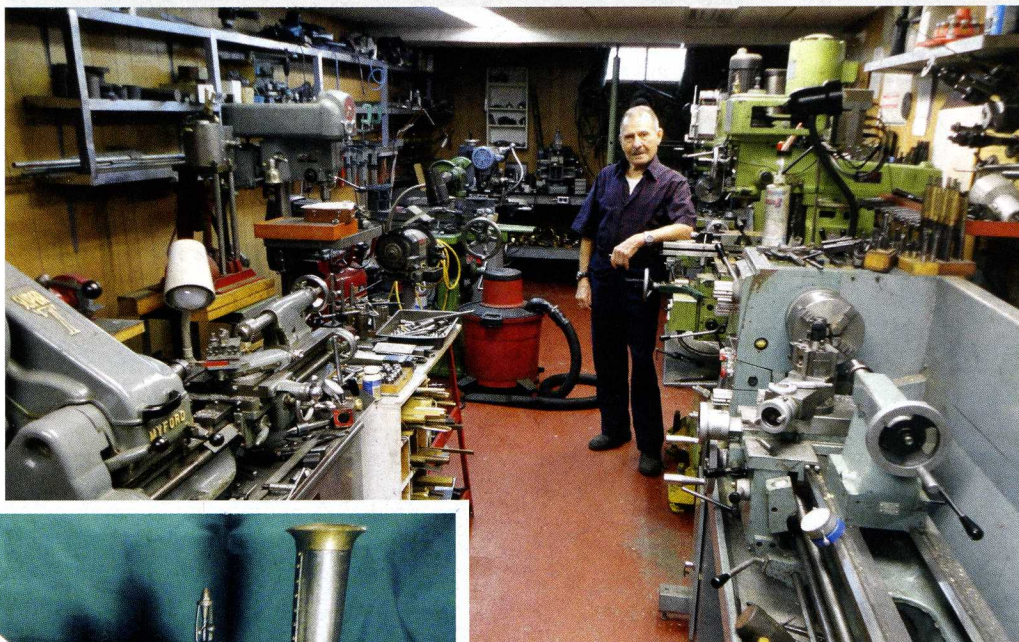


Tony's Engines

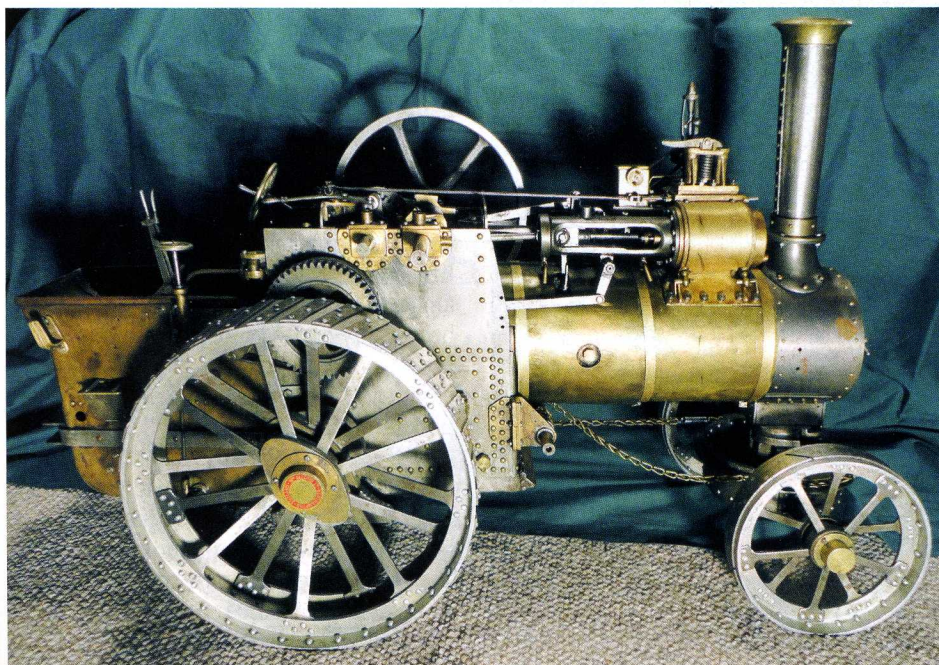
by Ray Verone

Everyone knows that a key factor for a happy retirement is that one should feel a sense of purpose or accomplishment in whatever they decide to do with their newly found free time. For most people, this means getting back to long ignored hobbies or getting those home projects completed. But for Tony Leschinski, it meant finding a brand new hobby; something he did not have much experience with.

So at age 65, Tony equipped himself with a fully loaded woodworking shop and started building various projects for around the house, like a fireplace



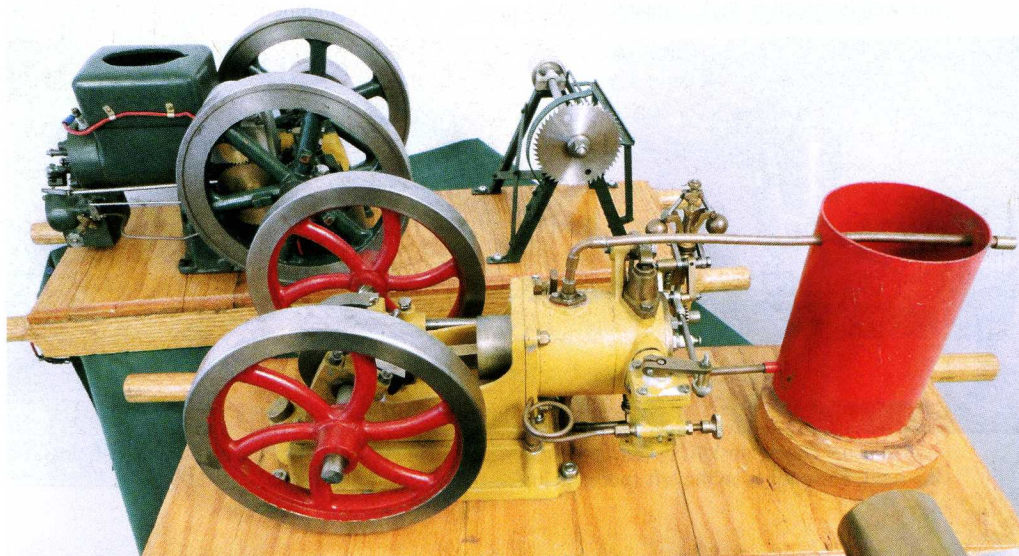
A myriad arrangement of machine tools surrounds Tony in his well-lit basement shop.

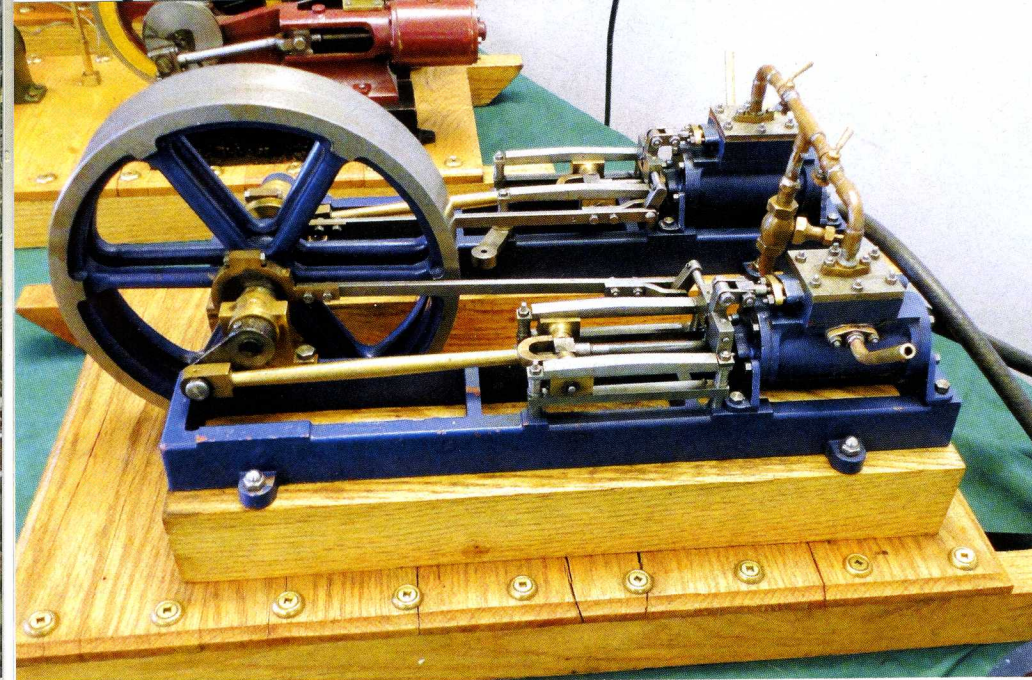


Tony's first project: an English Alchin steam tractor built from plans.

mantelpiece, a grandfather clock (not a kit) and even manufacturing his own 10-foot long 4" × 6" laminated beams for a sunroom addition to his house. Somewhere during that first year at this he discovered that the sawdust did not agree with his asthma, nor did it agree with his wife Flora's housekeeping. Tony had to find a different hobby.

Two examples of hit-and-miss gas engines show Tony's clever techniques of creating interesting displays. The upper engine (with the water jacket on the cylinder) is set up to run a miniature buzz-saw rig. The lower engine is piped to spray the cooling water into a vertical cooling tank.

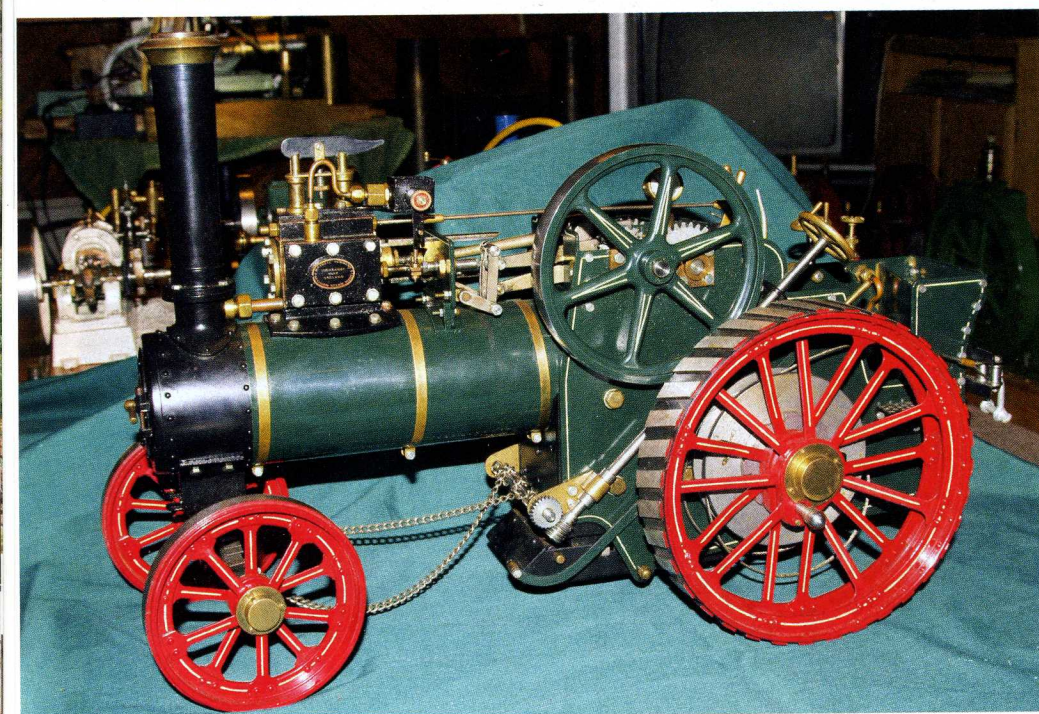




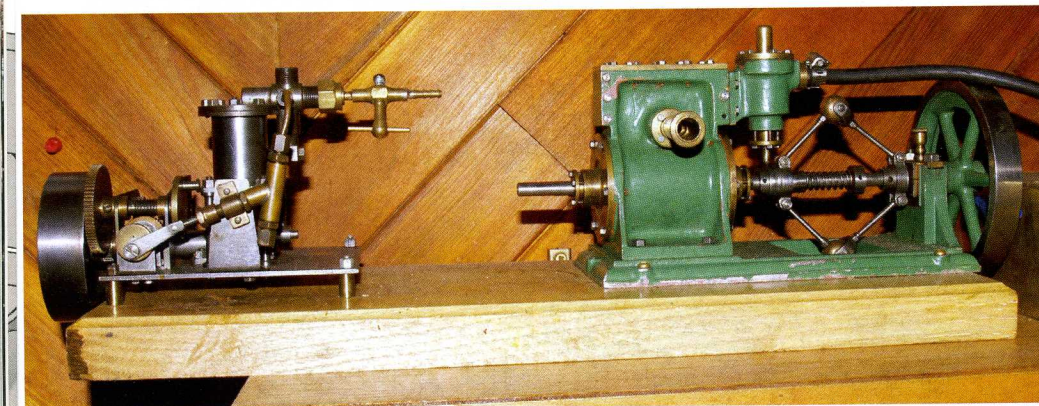
The Victoria twin is essentially two horizontal engines placed on a single flywheel offering twice the power to the wheel.



Another single-flywheel twin has been set up to run a small dynamo.



Among the collection is this beautiful example of a Maxwell Hemmins steam traction engine. Maxwell Hemmins of York, England put out some fine kits and components back in the 1990s.

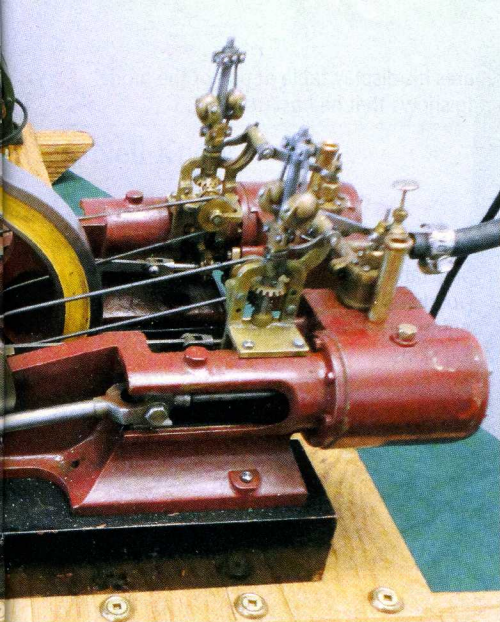


Two unusual engine designs in Tony's collection: Note the vertical flyball governor on the engine at the right. The engine on the left sports an interesting worm-driven pump.

Having seen some machine shop projects in magazines, he thought this might be something worth trying. He had never so much as touched a lathe in his life, but decided to get one and give this a go. He purchased plans and started building his first replica model steam tractor, an English Alchin. The success of this project started a near frenzy of new projects. One after another, sometimes built from plans with purchased castings, and sometimes built entirely from scratch. In his years of retirement, Tony has amassed a collection of over sixty beautifully crafted model machines of all types; some tractors but mostly stationary engines. His craftsmanship and attention to detail is impeccable.

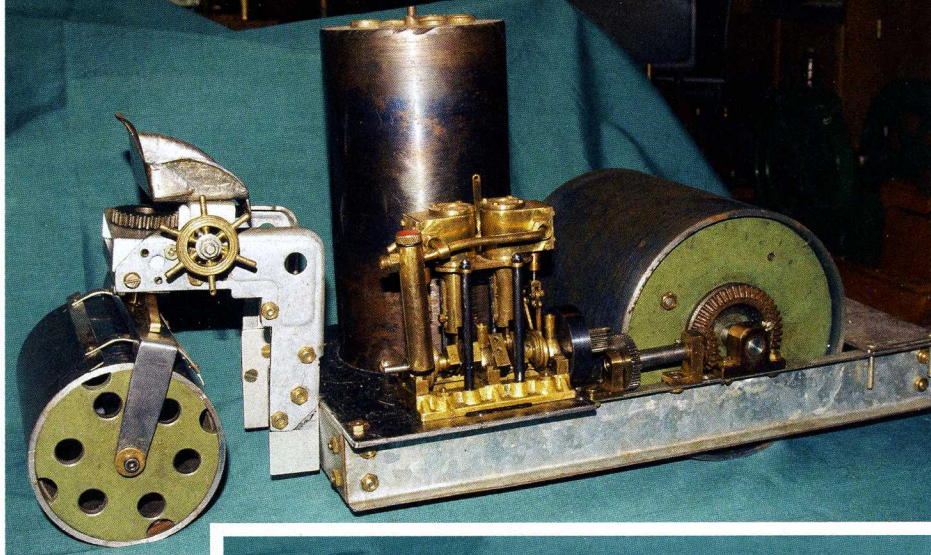
Tony was born in 1921 on a farm near Pine River, Manitoba. He was always mechanically inclined and recalls building his own toys including a scraper to play in the earth on the farm. He completed grade 10, and after a stay in the army, he opened his own welding shop. Throughout his career, he worked at a number of trades largely related to heavy-duty mechanics and eventually became superintendent. He recalls actually seeing many full-sized tractors, pumps and engines and machines working in industry and on farms, and of which he would later build replicas.

When I last visited Tony to take photos of his machines, I counted 46 in his basement family room. Not much actual room left in that room for family gatherings to be sure. Tony has already given away many of his models to family and close friends, and he has sold a few. He is not quite sure what to do with all of his models, which he knows he needs to part



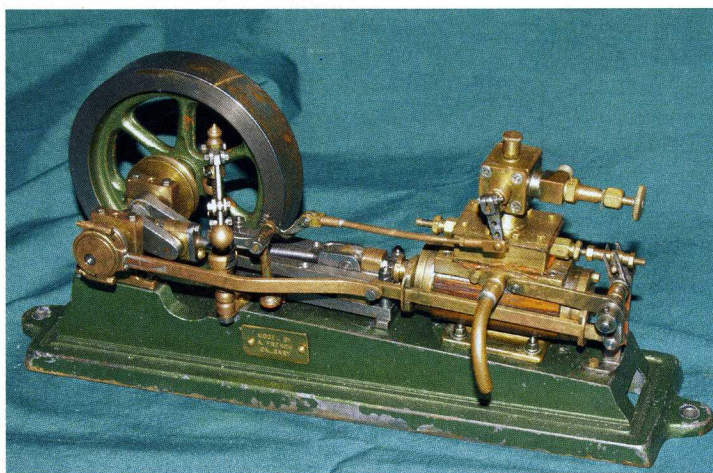
with at some point. He would however like to keep his collection together.

I asked Tony how he managed to build so many high quality models. He said, as soon as the first leaves started falling in September (this is Calgary), he would head down to his basement workshop and spend most of his days there until the last snow flake melted in May. He said, "I have the Mineral rights downstairs while Flora (a prolific quilter)



Similar to Bill Harris' steam roller, this vertical-boilered steam roller is still under construction.

Part of Tony's collection is this antique horizontal mill engine built by A. French of Calgary.



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Tony prepares his display table at one of the model engineering shows that he has attended.

The display table is ready for the show to open. Tony's woodworking experience is evident as most of his engines are placed on beautifully finished hardwood skids.

has the Surface rights upstairs." Neither of them had much use for television. I think that's another big part of the secret of a happy retirement.

Tony is a long-time member of the Alberta Model Engineering Society. To see more of Tony's collection, check out www.ironhorsepark.net/livesteam/

Photos by Author.

Most family rooms contain lounge chairs, televisions and games; not so with Tony's. His family room is literally stuffed to the ceiling with model steam and gas engines of all varieties and sizes, although one can spot a radio in the left corner!

