



ON THE BANKS THE MISSISSIPPI

Nick Baldwin takes us back to his early years and how he learned of an unfamiliar name, M-R-S Manufacturing Co, of Flora, USA.



lack of progress in French!

On the Mobylette I scoured local quarries and scrapyards for interesting plant machinery and other things worthy of note. One day I was studying an American construction site magazine where I learned of an unfamiliar name, M-R-S Manufacturing Co, of the delightfully-named town of Flora on the Mississippi. The picture showed a heavy-wheeled tractor used in the construction industry, so I wrote a polite letter to the address asking for more information.

As a result I set in motion a curious chain of events which in other circumstances (if, for example, I had the benefit of money or experience) might have resulted in Baldwin being a name to conjure with in the field of plant sales and hire like Finnings, Levertons or SLD.

SALES OPPORTUNITY

Jack L. Brown, sales engineer at M-R-S, replied with a splendid clutch of catalogues and photos of 4x4 machines and asked me if I could help M-R-S set up a sales organisation in Europe. After all, Switzerland was HQ of the Caterpillar marketing organisation and he plainly took me for the sort of multi-lingual go-getter that they needed!

From my very limited knowledge of the British, let alone European, market I wrote back saying that launching an unknown brand might be difficult, though I noted that the use of Detroit, Cummins etc. was a plus point. I asked if M-R-S also made 4x2 tractors as all the scrapers I had seen had these power units with the addition of a crawler pusher for loading. "Yes!" came the

Above: 1975 A-100 with bulldozer blade and disc harrow on land-leveilling duties.

Above: Front-end loaders came in 1962 with 175 or 250bhp Cummins diesels and four-range torque converter transmission.



In 1963 I had just left school and was sent to Lausanne in Switzerland in a vain attempt to improve my O-Level French. However, I ended up with a job in a garage selling Land-Rovers and spending my free time on the Mobylette

I had acquired this from one of the other mechanics, who, like most of the workforce, was Italian. Hence my

reply. And another mighty package thumped through my parents' letterbox back in England.

By then, Jack L. Brown had obviously spotted that I was not the dynamic entrepreneur that M-R-S needed and after a while he employed Smith, Kirkpatrick and Co. Inc. of New York to be exclusive export distributors. This firm advertised in our own *International Construction* magazine in 1964 and had a page of editorial in *Muck Shifter*, June 1967, but whether any European sales resulted, I do not know.

FOUNDED IN THE '40s

So what was M-R-S? And what was it offering? Unfortunately, I had failed to ask Jack L. Brown about the company's background history, but knew that M-R-S was set up in 1943 and may initially have been called the Mississippi Road Supply Co. In 1951 its products included some type of machine with a 50bhp International Harvester diesel, but it was not listed in the journals of the day and there was no mention in exhaustive looks at plant providers in 1958, which makes one think that production of such equipment may have started in, or possibly before, January 1961, the datecode on my earliest brochure.

Incidentally the list of scraper manufacturers in those early journals consisted of Allis-Chalmers, Caterpillar, Euclid, IHC, Le Tourneau, Oliver, Seaman-Gunnison and Wooldridge - so no great surprises there. M-R-S also made front-end loaders but was not listed in that category either, which included the above names, plus Case, Michigan, Payloader, Scoopmobile, Speedball, Tractomotive and Trojan.

M-R-S 4x2 tractors ran from 280 to 650bhp with Cummins or



CO-ORDINATED STEERING



CRAB STEERING



INDEPENDENT FRONT WHEEL STEER



INDEPENDENT REAR WHEEL STEER

Above: M-R-S four-wheel drive tractor showing various configurations of steering.

Detroit diesels and there was also a 76 cu yd struck capacity scraper with separately-powered rear axle propelled by 700bhp Cummins V12 in the tractor and 430bhp V8 Cummins on the scraper. All models featured a hydraulic ram from the drawbar to the swan-neck of the scraper which could increase or decrease weight on the tractors' back axle - this contained M-R-S's own design of planetary hub reduction in the differential housing. Most models had nine-speed constant mesh semi-automatic gearboxes with two reverse ratios. The tubular front axle rode on a centrally-mounted

transverse leaf spring with the whole lot located by a substantial box section radius frame.

The M-R-S two-axle scraper trailer featured separate hydraulic control of the bowl, lift, apron and ejector, the first also being available for positive down pressure when cutting. The deep curvature of the scraper apron was said to allow a greater fill, the weight of which helped to keep it closed from pit to unloading point.

The 4x4 models had 150, 175 or 250bhp Cummins diesels with four-range powershift or ten-speed mechanical transmissions. Both front and rear axles had planetary

M-R-S TWIN ENGINE COAL SCRAPER COMBINATION
55 CUBIC YARD STRUCK CAPACITY - 860 TOTAL H.P.
EASY, DEPENDABLE POWER SHIFT OPERATION



TWIN ENGINE POWER, FOUR WHEEL DRIVE, PLUS EXCLUSIVE M-R-S DOUBLE ACTING WEIGHT TRANSFER
power coming! power going!



Right: In 1962 M-R-S made two sizes of twin-engined scraper totalling 860bhp and 1130bhp.

OF





Above: The 1961 M-R-S 250 was spectacularly large, weighing in at 64,340 lbs and having a 1,710 cubic inch Cummins V-12 providing a top speed of 34mph in ninth (top) gear.

hub reduction but there was now no suspension, simply a central attachment point for the front axle. Again, they came as scrapers though curiously no mention was made of their suitability for dump trailers.

TIGHT TURNS AND CRAB-TRACKING

The 4x4 types had four-wheel steering and often featured a front-mounted dozer blade which could be raised at either end or complete, while some had reversible controls to permit 3.5 cu yd 10,500 lbs loading shovel or back acter. The front and rear axle could be steered together or opposite for tight turns or crab-tracking.

In 1967 *Muck Shifter's* article concerned the 'new' 1-905 tractor, with 186 flywheel horsepower Detroit V-6 two-stroke and six forward-range VIP powershift which had lock-up in ranges 2-6. This one hauled an articulated scraper, or, to be precise, a 12 cu yd Hancock self-loader (which had also featured in 1964 advertising).

The next time I heard from M-R-S was in 1975 when, in line with rising American fuel prices, the horsepower of its tractors had come down and much play was made of the extra efficiency and loss of wasted fuel through slippage given by four-wheel drive and low-ply tyres with

low air pressure. Detroit's were the standard engines, as indeed they were when I last heard from Leonard Yarborough, M-R-S Industrial Relations Manager in 1982.

EARLY SPECIALITY

The tractors and dozers of up to 322bhp were still listed but there was also plenty of specialised machinery for sugar cane harvesting, which makes me wonder if this was not also the firm's early speciality when it was making unspecified equipment with International Harvester engines in 1951. Mississippi Road Supply Co continued to operate as a (presumably) separate business renting, repairing and, (presumably) selling plant and machinery from addresses in Flora and Jackson.

Were any M-R-S tractors sold in Europe? And do any survive? Indeed, how many tractors did they make for their home market? I have never seen one in any views of construction sites or in plant yards on my occasional visits to the States. Perhaps, for all the talk of competitive shipping weights and 12-foot delivery width, they were known primarily in their local terrain of wide flood plains and breached levees that needed specialised high-mobility 4x4s for maintenance and repair. 



Spreading Fill, Pulling Compaction Rollers



M-R-S Hancock Elevating Scraper Combination Features Four Wheel Drive-12 Yard Capacity



M-R-S Four Wheel Drive Tractor with Four Wheel Elevating Scraper.



M-R-S Tractor Equipped with High Capacity Hydraulic Backhoe

Above: 1964 advertisement showing a wide variety of equipment in use with 4x4 tractors.

The M-R-S A-80 (DIESEL POWERED) 167 HP Four-wheel drive-Four-wheel steer Tractor



Left: 1975 brochure showing 167bhp Detroit 4-71 diesel model with ten-speed, two reverse gear constant mesh gearbox.

Below: Land levelling with a 65 x 12 foot landplane hauled by a 4x4 M-R-S.

