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JUNE 2015

No 304

EXCLUSIVE

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UK STEAM DEBUT**

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CLASSIFIEDS!**

**STARS OF
SANDSTONE**



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SENTINELS**



**175 miles in 18 hours flat
A preservation-era record?**

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SHOWTRACS
IN WORKING DAYS**

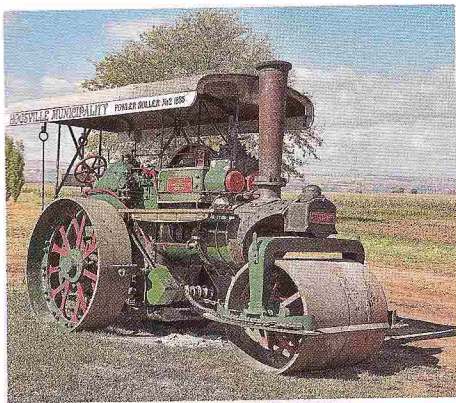


Foden 40 at the Castle

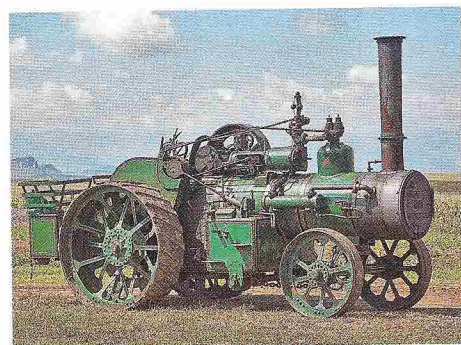


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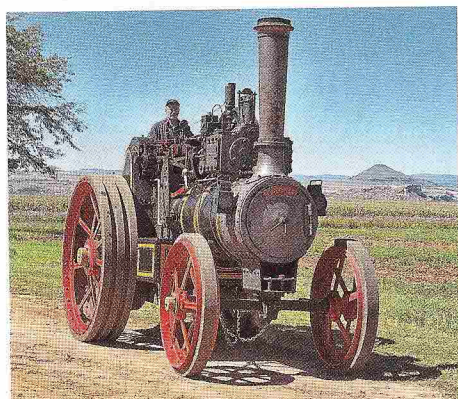
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Fowler roller No 19539 of 1935 is a regular workhorse on the estate, consolidating the many dirt roads.



The unusual styled Marshall Colonial engine No 53048 of 1909 with its steam dome.



McLaren No 797 of 1904 is in the capable hands of visiting UK loco and traction engine owner Peter Best.

STARS of SANDSTONE

Paul Stratford reports from the recent Stars of Sandstone gala in the Eastern Free State, South Africa

Situated near Ficksburg on the Lesotho/South Africa border and nestled beneath the Maloti mountain range lies the 7000 hectare farm and headquarters of Sandstone Estates. The farm produces over 120,000 tonnes of maize in addition to sunflower seed, soya bean and is one of the few commercial producers of cosmos seed – the wonderfully vibrant coloured plant originally from South America.

In addition to being a commercial enterprise, the farm is the headquarters of the Sandstone Heritage Trust, the brainchild of Wilfred Mole, who not only heads the Sandstone Estates but who is also an avid preservationist and collector of vintage machinery, vehicles, traction engines, military vehicles and, not least, narrow gauge steam railway locomotives and rolling stock.

To this end, Wilf has, without outside funding, built a 27km 2ft gauge railway around part of the estate and amassed a sizable collection of locomotives including former South Africa Railway Garratts, all of which have been restored at the trust's own workshops at Bloemfontein.

The 2015 Stars of Sandstone ran from April 2-12 on the basis of pre-booked tickets, except for Saturday 11th when the event is thrown open to 'pay at the gate' locals at this annual event which showcases everything that the Sandstone Trust offers.

This encompasses a narrow gauge steam

railway gala, traction engine rally, vintage tractor, commercial vehicle and vintage car displays and, in conjunction with the South Africa Armour Museum, a working display of tanks and other military vehicles. Running alongside a section of the narrow gauge railway is the grass airstrip, 'Sandstone International Airport', which this year played host to two de Havilland Chipmunks, two de Havilland Tiger Moths and two North American Harvard trainer aircraft.

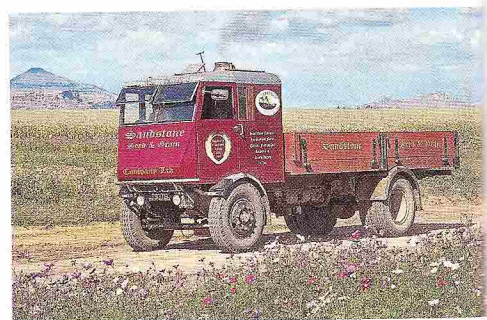
Each day a full list of events was published in the official programme, in addition to which extra train services – which included early morning photo specials – were added on an ad hoc daily basis. While the event is primarily a narrow gauge steam railway gala, this does not detract from the many other exhibits on offer working around the site and furthermore the many and varied unrestored items stored under cover, saved from the cutter's torch or the ravages of nature, which someday may join the working exhibits.

Train crews are drawn mainly from overseas volunteers. For many this is an annual pilgrimage and after a strict competency assessment they are rostered on a daily basis, the more experienced given the chance to crew the Garratts around the 'mountain'.

This was true also for the crews of the traction engines, who were largely left to roam the site at will, while the rollers were under instruction and put to good use repairing storm damage to the dirt road leading to the airstrip. Six road steam engines were to be found in steam on various days: Sentinel No 9178 of 1935, Marshall roller No 88876 of 1940, Fowler roller No 19539 of 1933, Marshall Colonial No 53048 of 1909, McLaren No 797 of 1904 and Fowler B5 crane engine No 9403. Of the many portable engines on display around the site only



An ex-French Army Gazelle helicopter adds to the drama of the Sound of Thunder armoured vehicle display.



S Type Sentinel waggon No 9178 is based on the estate and acts as a useful carrier.

Fowler B5 Crane Engine No 9403
seen hauling a suitable load.
ALL: PAUL STRATFORD



Marshall 12nhp Britannia firebox No 45672 of 1906 was in steamable condition.

Under largely clear blue skies for the duration of the event, there was much to keep the photographic fraternity busy from dawn until dusk. Rather than the usual backdrop of caravans, orange netting and other rally paraphernalia, the multi-coloured cosmos flowers, sunflowers, maize crops and mountains are the order of the day and with the unique covered wagon drawn by 12 oxen adding an unusual fillip to the scenes.

The Sandstone Heritage Trust has in its collection a huge array of former military vehicles and equipment and each day a Sound of Thunder display saw and heard a selection of former Russian, American and South African Army tanks put through their paces, a low flypast by a Harvard aircraft or the ex-French Army Gazelle helicopter adding to the atmosphere.

Vintage tractors, cars and commercials toured the site, offering rides and much-needed rest to weary legs when moving around from the more remote areas. A vintage Bristol single-decker coach provided photographers means of access to photo locations when following the afternoon double headed NGG16 Garratt hauled passenger train around the whole of the 27km system.

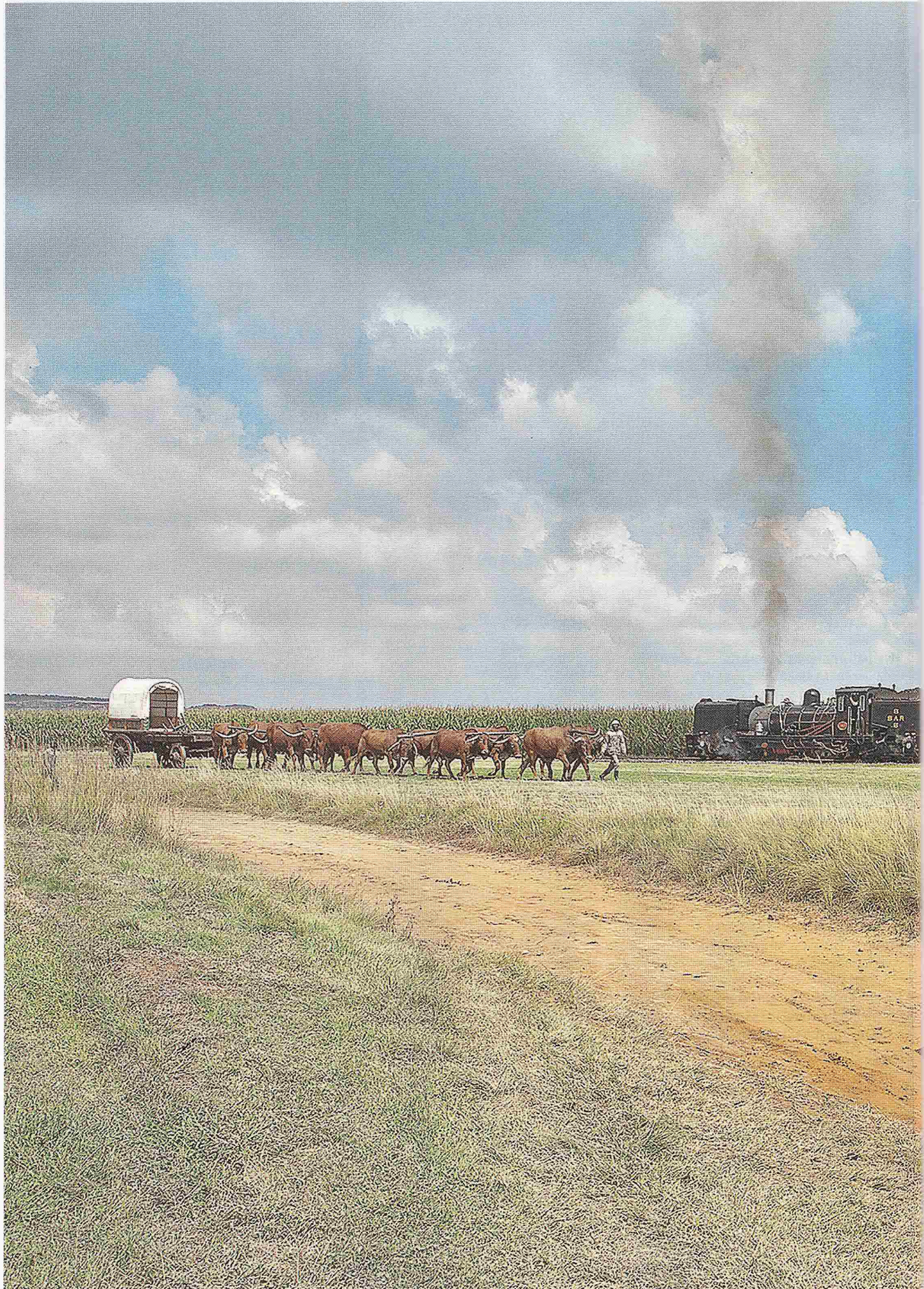
Plans are already in hand to make Stars of Sandstone into a biennial event, beginning in March-April 2017, with even more attractions and plans for a stationary engine display and an earth-moving demonstration using vintage construction equipment. ▶



The 1941 Harvard aircraft executes a low 'wheels up' pass over the Sentinel waggon.



A stunning Model A Ford meets an ex-South African Railway NG16 Garratt locomotive.



Marshall roller No 88876 pauses to watch a passing Garratt-hauled freight train and covered wagon drawn by 12 oxen at the Stars of Sandstone 2015 gala in early April. PAUL STRATFORD

