

# THE LAST OF THE LINE - STEELFAB RESTORATION

PART  
1

A machine that spent much of its working life in Derbyshire has been given a new lease on life by a well known Classic Plant restorer.



The Steelfab 170/180 as found in a field in Derbyshire

Classic Plant restoration supremo Julian Carder has restored many JCB including a JCB 3CIII backhoe loader which was commissioned by Leeds based H&H Construction Ltd., back

in 2021 when in under 6 months the machine was restored and displayed at The Great Yorkshire Show in July of that year.

However, Julian is also the owner of a fully restored Steelfab 170/180 Loader/

Backhoe, which has seen the same level of dedication to its rebirth as was lavished on the JCB3CIII.

Steelfab's 170/180 Loader/Backhoe was launched at the Public Works and Municipal Services Exhibition at



Years of standing in the open took their toll on the bodywork

Olympia, held from the 10-15 November, 1968. The 170/180 was based on the Ford Force 5000 skid unit and it was priced at £3,500.

Julian explained "This was the very last one built in 1972, and just 73 were made. It was a development of the 160/180 which had been launched five years earlier, and retained all the same technical features but with a new larger cab with side door for easier access and 'Up and Over' rear window.

"The Ford engine and tractor skid was a lot more powerful and stronger



Strapped up and safe for transportation, the very long journey to a full restoration begins

Ford & Fordson Tractors



The distinctive Steelfab logo was still intact

than the International Harvester B2275 fitted in its predecessor, the 160/180. It was also available with an optional torque convertor transmission for an additional £575."

Julian went on to explain the machine's history.

"This actual machine was the very last one off the Steelfab production line in February 1973. It was sold to the dealer Lewis Machinery of Stoke-On-Trent where it spent its first four years, before it was sold by Malcolm Harrison (Leek) Auctioneers in April 1977.



Julian's finished restoration of the very last Steelfab 170/180, which came off the production line in February 1973





Julian's restoration have a reputation for excellence and this one is no exception



The cover of the Steelfab 170/180 sales brochure



An original photograph of the first Steelfab 170/180 to be built

"It was then purchased by Staden Farm Garden Centre in Buxton who used it for four years and then sold it to a local farmer in 1980, who used it for

## Company History

The Company was formed under the name Steel Fabricators Limited in Birmingham in 1935 to manufacture pressed and sheet metal work. During the 1939 to 1945 period the Company was solely engaged on Government Contracts and had 50 employees.

In 1946, to meet expansion plans, the company relocated the factory to Pengam Road, Cardiff and for the next three years gained large contracts, including the British Iron and Steel Federation Fabricated House and Rigid form beams for the Ministry of Work

In 1949 it was decided to enter the front end loader market and a licence was formed with Horn Brothers, U.S.A., to manufacture and market agricultural hydraulic loaders.

In 1952 a subsidiary company was formed in Australia.

In 1954 it was decided to enter the backhoe market and a licence was formed with the Shawnee Company, U.S.A., to manufacture and market Shawnee industrial loaders and diggers.

In 1958 a licence agreement was made with H.G. Poole Consultants Limited, to manufacture and market Shawnee Poole Rear Dump Haulers, which enjoyed considerable success throughout the world and were leaders in the articulated dumper field.

In 1959 Steel Fabricators (Cardiff) Ltd., was taken over by the Adamant & Western Group and became a member of what was known as the Adwest Group.

By 1959 many hundreds of Scout diggers had been sold, but they did have limitations and introduced a stronger and more powerful Shawnee Warrior digger to supersede the Scout.

In 1959, a market survey was carried out with a view to introducing their own design 'combination unit' of loader and backhoe as opposed to the Shawnee Warrior type attachment digger, to fall between the JCB 4 and Massey Ferguson 710.

In 1963 they launched the 160/180 digger on the Fordson Dextra tractor skid

unit but initial units quickly failed as they were inadequate to take the stresses of a digging machine so was quickly replaced with the stronger and more powerful International B2275 skid

In 1962 Steelfab (France) S.A. was formed with its Headquarters in Paris to market the agricultural and industrial products in France.

In 1963 the Company's name was changed from Steel Fabricators (Cardiff) Limited to Steelfab Limited.

In 1964 Steelfab (Africa) (Pty.) Limited was formed as an associate company, to market and manufactures equipment designed by the parent company.

In 1965 the Horndaulic '800' backhoe was introduced as a light digger to fit a wide range of tractors which proved popular with farmers.

In 1968 the Steelfab 170/180 was launched to replace the 160/180, fitted with the market leading powerful Ford 5000 skid unit. It also had new larger cab with side opening door for easier access instead of through the rear of on the previous model

In 1968 the 'Power X' container system was introduced. In the same year an agreement was made with Ford Motor Co., to manufacture Agricultural Loaders for Ford. They employed 150 people and exported 65% of their products.

At the 1978 Smithfield Show a new Drive-In loader designed exclusively for the Ford range of tractors was launched.

In 1987 the company was purchased from Adwest Group by two of the Directors in a management buy-out, although the site was still owned by Adwest group as part of the deal. In 1988 the new management purchased the whole site back from Adwest. At that time, they had 85 employees.

Steelfab continued to manufacture agricultural loaders for Massey Ferguson but sales were badly affected by the problems faced in the farming industry in the 1990's and production finally ended after six decades in 1998 when Steelfab went into receivership.

ditching and loading and kept it for 40 years."

In 2020 Julian recovered it from a field to restore and at the time it was the only Steelfab 170/180 known to still exist.

Julian has several photographs of the condition of the Steelfab 170/180 before and after restoration which he has shared with us on these pages, which show the machines remarkable transformation.

In addition to his 170/180 Julian has also restored a Steelfab 160/180 backhoe

loader, which was the forerunner to the 170/180 and has an unrestored Shawnee Warrior digger. He also recently found a second Steelfab 170/180.

"I found it in a barn Austria where it had stood for 25 years and arranged for it to make its way back to England. I can't wait to start it's restoration. These are the only two 170/180 models known to survive."

Next issue Part 2 - Restoration and the road to Malvern ■