



Picture from July 1978, the first year the Blackstock Tractor Pull started on its own, after breaking away from the Blackstock Fair. That's organizer Harvey Graham, (inset), calling the event 34 years ago.

Blackstock Tractor Pull thunders into 35th year

The roots of the tractor pull go deep into Ontario's agricultural soil. And some of the seeds of its widespread popularity germinated in Blackstock, where one man's vision helped elevate the event as a spectator favourite in numerous rural community fairs.

"I was aware of other competitions in the U.S. and in western Ontario, so we organized a tractor pull as part of the 1977 Blackstock Fair," recalls the event's founder, Harvey Graham. "That spirit of competition – whose tractor was more powerful – has always existed among farmers. It was around before mechanization, when the event would've been called a horse pull!"

A full time cash-crop farmer himself, Harvey recognized quickly he'd found a popular idea in staging the pull. Over 50 tractors, almost all of them working machines from area farms, registered for that initial event.

"The second year, we moved it away from the Fair's dates – it was that popular."

Tractor pulling requires competitors to link their machines to a "weight-transfer sled." As the sled moves, its weight shifts from the back to the front of the sled, dramatically increasing resistance over a 300' course.

Each entry's distance is measured once the load leaves the tractor motionless; the greatest distance wins, unless more than one "full pull" (completing the entire distance) is achieved. Then a pull-off between entrants is needed.

"There's a great deal of skill required," Harvey explains. "The driver must find the right speed and gear to maximize the momentum he initially achieves. Tire pressure is also critical. And with tonnage distinguishing classes of machines, weight distribution is another important factor. "Sometimes a pull will be decided by fractions of an inch."

With the popularity of tractor pulls taking off throughout the province in the late 1970s, Harvey recognized another need.

"In the interest of safety, we had to establish consistent rules for the pulls," he explains. "I became the founding president of the Ontario Tractor Pull Association, and I'm proud to say we've never had a serious accident all these years."

He also became the "voice" of tractor pulling. "I announced at the events – did that for years."

When those years started to add up, Harvey made a decision. "It got to be too tiring, all that travel. So I retired a few years ago."

Thirty-odd years later, that single Blackstock event has grown into a 27-stop circuit in Central Ontario. The season's overall champion will ultimately be declared, with competitors accumulating points according to their finish at each race, similar to the rules in professional car racing.

Tractor pulling has expanded its scope considerably from those early days.

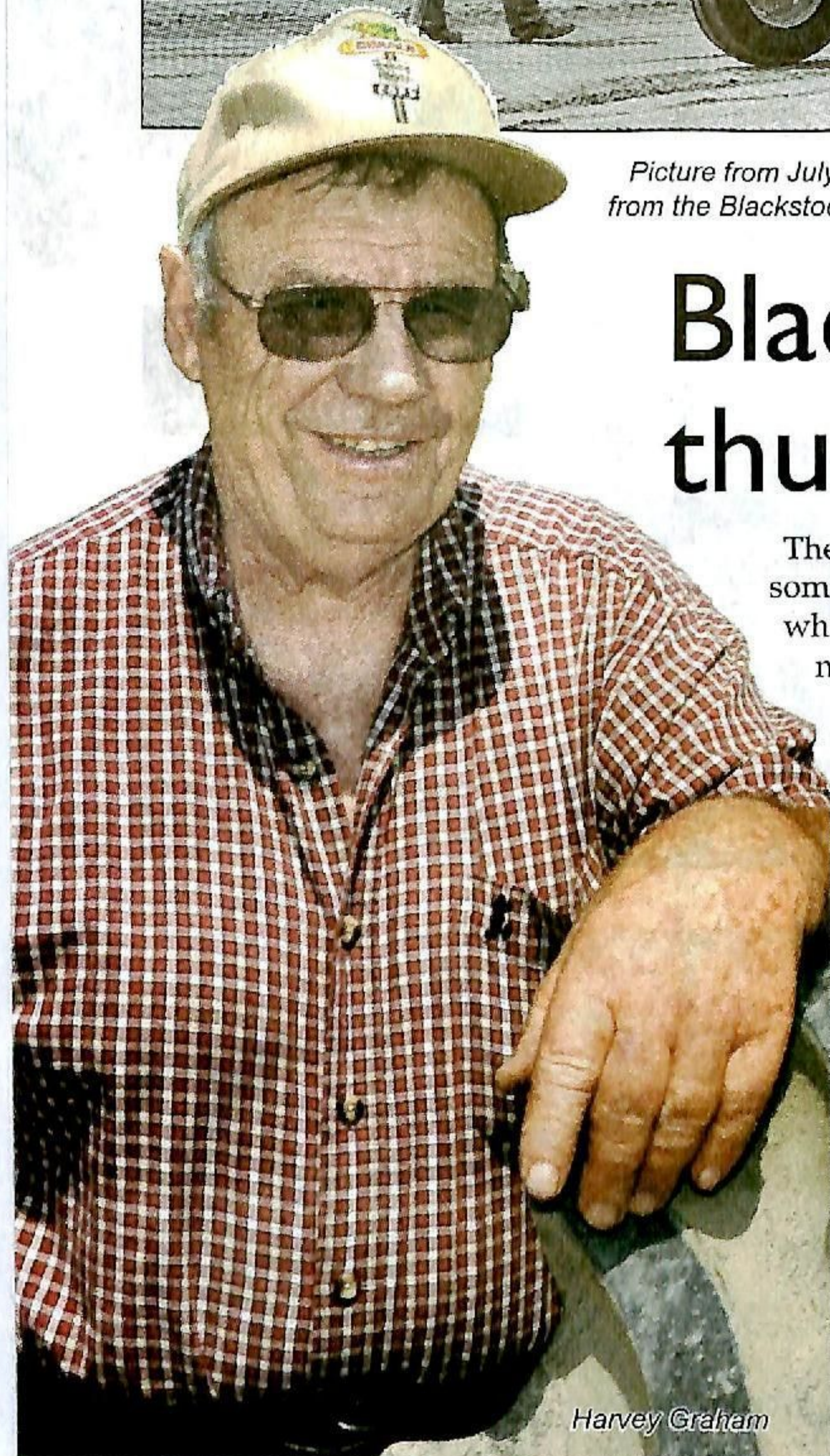
"Few, if any, of the machines in a modern competition are working tractors from a farm," Harvey explains. "Most of them are modified: the original engine block has to remain, but some can run up to 1,000 horsepower. And the pulls now include multiple weight-classes of 4x4 trucks." Harvey enthusiastically supports these developments.

"The addition of trucks, in particular, as well as the movement to modified tractors, greatly increased specta-

tor interest. Those larger crowds meant the events could usually generate a bit of a profit for the fair, or wherever the event was held. And it allowed us to hand out small cash prizes to the winning drivers, enough to cover their gas and expenses. But winning is more about pride than dollars."

This year, the Blackstock tractor pull which Harvey Graham started will take place July 8-9 at the community's fairgrounds, carrying the proud distinction of being one of the longest-running events of its kind in the province.

While he won't be its announcer, organizer, or participant, you can bet Harvey Graham will be there to enjoy the action, "pulling" for yet another successful event.



Harvey Graham

Blackstock Tractor & Truck Pull
Friday, Saturday, July 8, 9