

## The lost art of match plowing

Last week, I took something of a step back in time. I attended the Peel-Dufferin plowing match.

I can't recall the last time I was at a plowing match, but it was like a trip down memory lane for me, since my dad and I used to drop by the local matches when I was a kid.

It seems, when one looks at the crop tillage methods we see today, match plowing is something of a lost art. Minimum tillage practices that farmers employ today have taken over the industry. Minimum tillage (planting without extensively working up the land) is good for the land and more economical, but there's a magic to plowing a field that is hard to describe.

And at a plowing match, all those old values are resurrected, and the farmer's pride of plowing a field is once again in the forefront.

Watching the competitors doing their thing, I had to smile as the unstated 'rules' at a plowing match came to mind.

Rule One: First thing, one must peer down the land (the plot of land that is to be plowed) while rubbing one's chin, looking here, then there, to locate the best place to strike-out (turn over the first furrow.)

Rule Two: After a suitable amount of inspection time, one drives a stake in the ground at one end, then positions the tractor at the other end of the land, and very slowly, eyeing down the hood of the tractor, slides the plow into the ground, and creeps down the field, turning over that all-important first furrow of the strike out.

Rule Three: Two more passes, and it's time to stop for lunch.

Rule Four: After lunch with fellow competitors, (at which time you discuss all the neat farm-oriented things, like crops, weather and the newest farm equipment) it's back to the land, to finish plowing it with laser-straight perfection, then wait for the judges to score it.

Whether they plow with horses, antique

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Ted Brown

trailer plows or the best mounted match plow available, for the most part, every plowman leaves his finished land as straight as a dollar.

My dad was never a match plowman but I think he always competed with himself to see that his strike-out down the field was the straightest he could possibly achieve.

"You have to look at it until spring," he'd say, "So it may as well be straight."

And his strike-out was always straight— so straight I felt I could never come close to matching it. But that didn't stop me from trying.

Dad wasn't unique. When I was a kid, most farmers took pride in their plowing, keeping it straight and level, as they competed in their own personal competition with themselves.

Plowing was one of those seasonal jobs that gave one time to think, time to reflect and enjoy the solitary beauty of the outdoors, and at the same time accomplish something. One could spend hours, turning over the ground, not actually feeling like he had accomplished much.

But, at the end of the day, after looking behind, he could see what he had covered that day, as the freshly plowed ground showed a darker color than the previous day's work, simply because it hadn't yet dried out.

It reminded me of life. Sometimes one has to stop, and take a long look behind.

If only to see how far one has gone.

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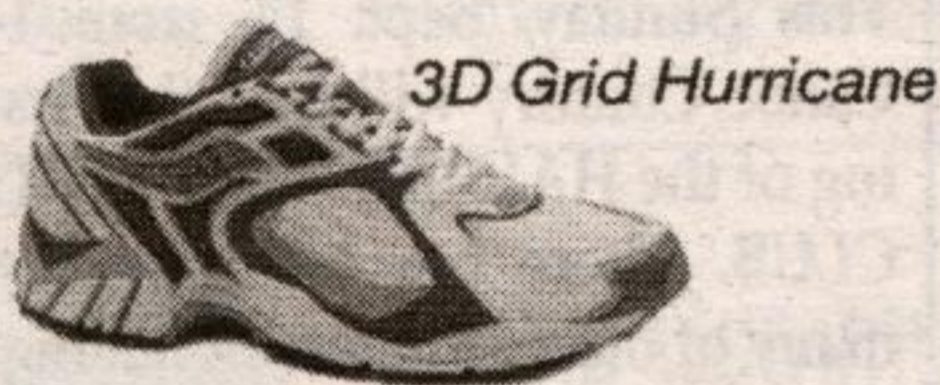
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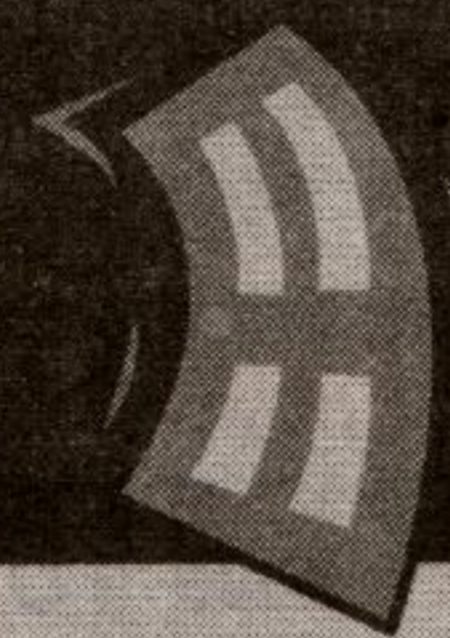
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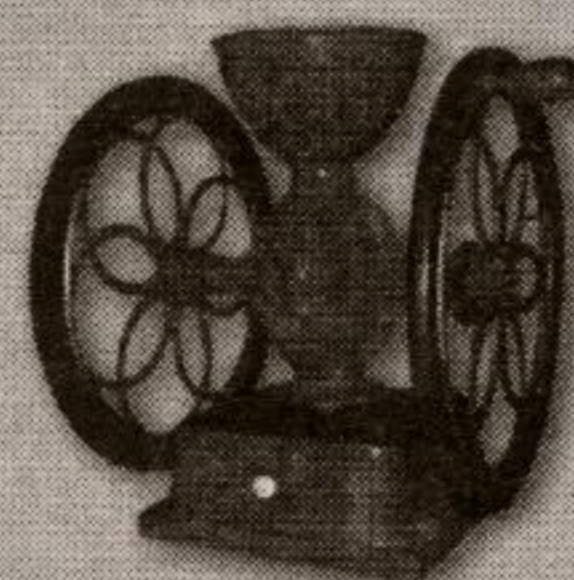
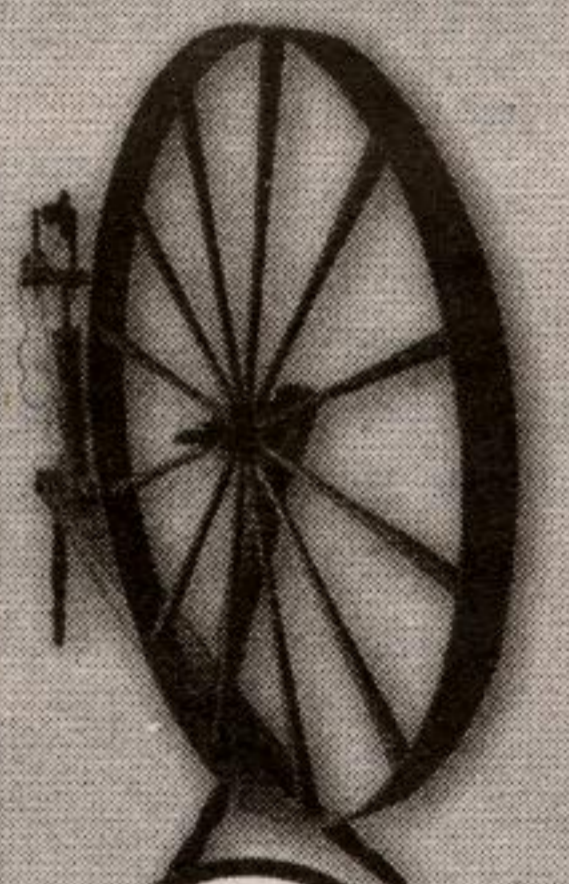
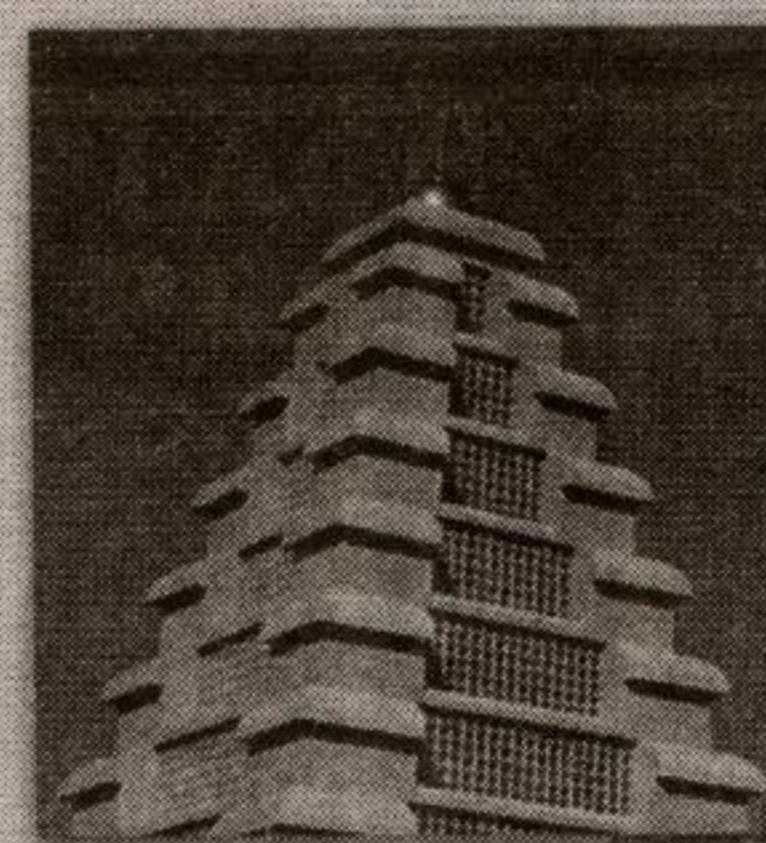


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