

## The Massey Ferguson 135: The Irish countryside's 'iron horse'

If you grew up or lived in rural Ireland during the '70s, '80s or '90s, the machine on our cover photo was probably a familiar, even a daily sight. You might even have lived with one! If you did, you probably learned to drive using it.

The Irish countryside would look very different without its coating of Massey Ferguson 135s.

The 135 was first produced in 1964 and was introduced at that year's Smithfield Show in London.<sup>1</sup> It was a modernisation of the 35 and 35X, which were a favourite of Irish farmers (they even had songs written about them!). Massey Ferguson wanted a versatile tractor which could build on the success of the 35 series, but with a modern (for 1964) design and appearance. There was a facelift to the design from 1971 onwards.

The 135 was manufactured at the Canadian company's Banner Lane factory in Coventry. This 80-acre complex was originally a World War II shadow factory which made aircraft engines. After the war, it was leased by the Standard Motor Company for the production of Ferguson Tractors. It was leased by Massey Ferguson from 1959, and closed completely in 2002,<sup>2</sup> when the company concentrated its production at Beauvais in France. By the time the last 135 rolled out of Banner Lane in 1978, 413,153<sup>3</sup> had been produced!

The 135 came along at a crucial time for Irish farming. The 1960s had seen a huge push towards mechanisation, even on small holdings. In 1973, Ireland joined the E.E.C. and farming changed forever. While some of the 135s which came into Ireland were new, many more were second hand. They proved extremely popular.

They were affordable, were small enough to work in small fields and tight yards, they were reliable, and when they were not, they were easily repaired. They had to be versatile. One day they might work in a dry hayfield, the next they might be used to draw turf out of bog. Massey Ferguson even produced a limited narrower design so that the tractor could work in French vineyards.

This iron horse traversed the Irish countryside working day in and day out on a 45.5 h.p. engine,<sup>4</sup> (later 47 h.p.<sup>5</sup>); about half the size of what you'd find in a small hatchback car today.

Most Irish models had the Perkins AD3-152, 2.5-litre, three-cylinder, direct injection diesel engine. There was also a petrol-powered version, which was really aimed at overseas markets, and sold well in New Zealand.<sup>6</sup>

The original models came without a cab, but with changes to safety laws in 1970, these became standard. Many of the models had the red and white flexicab, which was part metal (made by Sankeys of Wolverhampton<sup>7</sup>), part glass and part soft plastic covering. Others had the distinctive Duncan cab, with its slanted, angular lines and sliding windows.

There are still thousands of MF135s working on farms in Ireland today, perhaps taking a back seat to a more modern (and several times larger) machine. They are extremely popular with vintage tractor enthusiasts and restorers. Their simplicity make them ideal as a starter project for restorers, and a fully restored model can command a healthy price.

*Thanks to Frank Davidson (Mayo North Old Engine & Tractor Club) and Eddie Gibbons (Carrownisky, Louisburgh) for their help with this article.*

<sup>1</sup> From heritage machines.com

<sup>2</sup> From fergusonclub.com

<sup>3</sup> From heritage machines.com

<sup>4</sup> From heritage machines.com

<sup>5</sup> From vintagetractorengineer.com

<sup>6</sup> From heritage machines.com

<sup>7</sup> From historywebsite.co.uk

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# North Mayo Heritage Centre NEWSLETTER

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Vol. III Issue 29  
17th July 2022



**Fun day for all the family**  
Mayo North Old Engine and Tractor Club  
**TRACTOR DAY**  
**July 17th 2022**  
*on the grounds of Enniscoe Estate*

**Feature article:**  
**The Massey Ferguson 135**  
Cover image from JMG Vehicle Pics Flickr.com

A Massey Ferguson 135 with a Duncan cab.  
Image from Independent.ie

A Massey Ferguson 135 with the 'flexi' cab.  
Image from jarlef.no.

Image from donedeal.ie





**This year promises to be spectacular - Midwest radio, Thomas McBride, Pat's Country Roadshow, threshing, churning, R118 Rescue helicopter, food trucks, café, bog train, vintage vehicles and much more.**

17<sup>th</sup> July 2022  
Enniscoe,  
Crossmolina



**Images by Mike Kinsella and Mayo North Old Engine and Tractor Club**

**The North Mayo Heritage Centre is dedicated to preserving and promoting the rich heritage of the region**