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The annual Autumn Steam and Heritage Gala at Sandstone Estates in the Eastern Free State, South Africa 23 March–1 April 2012 was a long event in more ways than one, *writes Peter Love.*

The crown jewel in the Sandstone collection is its 2-ft narrow gauge railway – all 25.6kms (15.9 miles) of it! Some 30 restored steam and diesel locomotives are in operation. The objective of the 10-day event was to showcase all of these locomotives, as well as to make the programme as diverse as possible to feature the widest variety of heritage items.

Sandstone's philosophy is to create a holistic heritage experience and it certainly succeeds. There are some wonderful old buildings, including the Engine House with a 1933 National engine running to supply the electricity.

In 1995 the Wille family sold the extensive farm to Sandstone Estates led by the dynamic Wilfred E Mole. It is also where the record for the most tractors working in one field was initially established, in 1999.

In more than 180 years, the property has only been in the hands of two owners and many of the old sandstone buildings are still in daily use. That includes the main farmhouse, which sits adjacent to the 1907 railway station building.

This provides an excellent backdrop for Model T Fords among other old vehicles.



The train was already loaded with some interesting items as the MF 35X was also lifted on.

It is also home to an outstanding variety of traction engines, a superb military vehicle collection as well as other vehicles and even a fine herd of oxen!

Sandstone also has a huge collection of more than 400 vintage tractors. This year, as in previous years, it was difficult to do justice to them because of lack of expertise. Inevitably, those who understand these older machines are dwindling in number and Sandstone is currently embarking on a campaign to train a new generation of technicians to look after and operate these machines.

The mixed train used during the festival featured a number of tractors. For many years steam trains delivered tractors

from manufacturers and distributors to the dealers and farmers in all parts of the globe. This year it was decided that the mixed train would feature a couple of restored Massey Ferguson 35s, a petrol/ TVO FE 35 and a 35X.

Those tractors had been extensively restored and complemented the train admirably, attracting the many photographers that take the opportunity to attend this semi-private event.

The Sandstone Gala is an experience for preservationists with a broad scope of interests and for people who want to see magnificent heritage equipment operating under almost original conditions, against the background of a beautiful landscape.

The 1931 Henschel 2-8-2 NG15 was built for the Otavi Railway in Namibia (south West Africa). This class of engine was very successful for South African Railways.

