

## “Assembly Required” For These Wooden Tractor Toys

When Clay Friis ships his model trucks, cars and tractors, they're in pieces so the buyer has to put them together. Each wooden model consists of individually wrapped pieces, ranging from 30 pieces for a Model A to 76 pieces for a 9300 series Deere tractor.

“Only one guy called to tell me he couldn't put it together,” says Friis, who makes the wooden toy puzzles in his Omaha, Neb., shop. “Part of the fun is taking it apart and putting it back together.”

He strives to please two senses – sight and touch. Each piece is sanded five times before he rubs in Danish oil for the final finish.

“I don't use any stain,” Friis says. “They are made with black walnut and exotic woods – bubinga, ebony, purple heart and tulip wood, for example.”

A jack of many trades, Friis says working with wood was always a passion, but he wasn't born with a talent for it. Based on his high school shop projects his teacher would never have predicted that Friis would make wooden puzzles for people such as Ronald Reagan, Roger Penske and the Gatlin Brothers. The head coach of the Nebraska University football team has one of Friis's trucks with a drop deck trailer that holds a football.

Friis worked with a car toy maker to learn the craft. He applied it to his love for big trucks and started making 1/10<sup>th</sup> scale toys in 1980. He includes plenty of detail with floating axles, bucket seats and dashboards. He has signed and dated more than 1,000 models over the years that have been shipped all over the U.S. and to Japan, Australia and Germany. Most of his customers are business people who purchase them as gifts for clients, Christmas gifts and as rewards for safe driving and retirement.

Friis creates his own patterns, working from photos, brochures or models.

“As I progress, they get more difficult,” Friis says. Pieces interlock, and some models require putting pieces together in a specific order.

His tractor model is his latest. He started making them once he figured out how to make the tires.

“I've had good reviews on it,” Friis says. The tractor is 20 in. long and 11 in. wide. It is articulated and heavy, made of Brazilian cherry wood.

He includes photos of his work on his Facebook pages, “Clay Sfc Friis”.

At 65, these days Friis gives most of his puzzle models to people who have made an impact in his life. But he also teaches the craft in the Omaha area and takes orders.



Clay Friis ships his model trucks, cars and tractors in pieces so the buyer has to put them together. Pieces interlock, and some models require putting pieces together in a specific order.

Prices range from \$275 for a Model A to \$400 to \$500 for semis and \$200 to \$1,000 for trailers. He hires someone with a laser to add company logos.

His largest semi weighs 110 lbs., is 5 ft. long, and is part of his personal collection. He believes that the pieces are a testament to passion and that people can really do anything

they decide to do.

“This is a gift I had inside me, but I didn't know it,” Friis says. “Anybody can do this if they have a desire.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Clay Friis, 11025 N. Post Road, Omaha, Neb. 68112 (ph 402 598-7245; Rhyrail@msn.com).

## Hickory Syrup Made From Bark And Nuts

Shagbark hickory syrup looks like maple syrup but has its own unique taste. Instead of being made from sap, hickory syrup is made from hickory tree bark and nuts. For enthusiast John Humphrey, getting the taste just right is key.

“Hickory bark has its own flavor,” says Humphrey, who has a PhD. in chemistry. “It's not quite as sweet as maple syrup and is a little lighter.”

Humphrey and his wife sell their syrup at various farmer's markets as well as from a website. The syrups are made from hickory trees on their own farm.

To make it, they gather the bark, which hangs in loose strips from the trees. Removing the loose bark has no effect on the tree. Recently fallen bark can also be used.

The bark is carefully cleaned. Brushing it under running water removes insects and most other material. It is then broken up for processing. The Humphreys have developed their own 8-step process using pressure cookers and aging of the recovered liquid.

Other hickory syrup makers report boiling it or toasting it in the oven first and then simmering it to make a tea.

“We developed a pretty good syrup after about two dozen attempts over a 6-month period, reviewing more than 30 recipes that go back several generations,” says Humphrey. “We believe our pressure cooking and aging produces a less bitter or stringent brew.”

Using his chemistry expertise, Humphrey examined the sugar components of maple syrup. He noted that it naturally contains sucrose, glucose and fructose. Since the hickory bark extract contains no natural sugars, he adds a ratio of the three sugars, including a small bit of molasses for its color.

“We use multiple filtrations and bottle it at more than 215F, which sterilizes the bottles,” says Humphrey. “What sets our



Unlike maple syrup, which is made from sap, hickory syrup is made from tree bark and nuts.

syrup apart is the crystal clarity.”

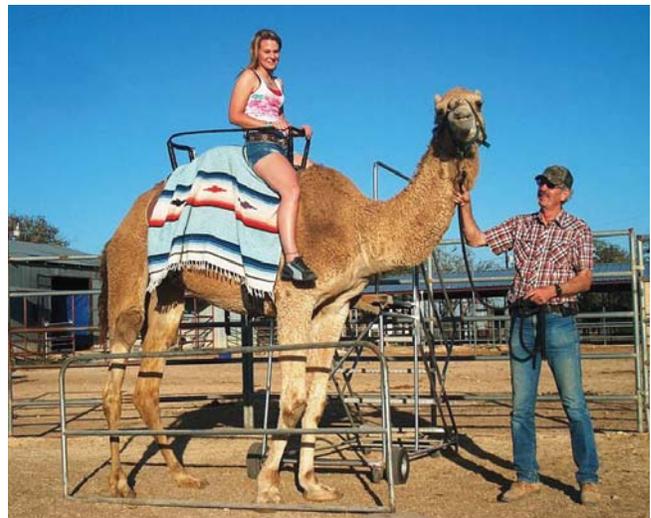
Humphrey follows a similar but more complicated process to make a syrup from hickory nuts. FARM SHOW tested both syrups and liked them. Each flavor is unique with the bark syrup much stronger. While the sweetness says maple syrup, the bark extract flavor has a real “earthy” flavor. The hickory nut syrup is much lighter and is true to the flavor of hickory nuts, lightly toasted.

Both syrups have won awards in specialty foods competition. Humphrey offers multiple recipes on his website.

Humphrey recommends using both on pancakes, cornbread and ice cream. “Native Americans crushed and boiled nuts to something they called hickory milk,” says Humphrey. “They used it as an ingredient in their cooking. I'm looking forward to making cornbread with some hickory milk.”

Online the syrups are priced at \$12.99 a bottle, including shipping. If buying three or more bottles, the price is reduced.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Turkeywoods Farm, 110 Haley Rd., Mystic, Conn. 06355 (www.mysticsyrups.com or www.turkeywoodsfarm.com).



Exotic animal trainer Bill Rivers offers camel safaris on his guest ranch in Texas and leases camels to zoos, amusement parks and to individuals to set up camel rides.

## His Business Is “Everything Camel”

Second generation exotic animal trainer Bill Rivers has made a business out of finding niche opportunities for camels and other exotic animals. That includes work in movies, parades and festivals, as well as summertime leases to businesses offering camel rides.

“Camel ride leases are priced according to the volume of people coming through,” explains Rivers. “We're in the business to rent or lease animals. We'll go anywhere if the price is right and lease to anyone with a legitimate business.”

Rivers has supplied camels and even a zebra for movies in Africa, as well as movies in this country. He offers camel safaris on his guest ranch in Texas and leases camels to zoos, amusement parks and to individuals for camel rides. Recently he held his first camel training symposium.

Rivers' camels have appeared in the “Scorpion King”, “Hidalgo” and “Evan Almighty” movies. In the latter case, his camels were ac-

companied by lots of other exotic animals trained by Rivers.

As a camel breeder and trainer, Rivers advises people interested in buying a camel to start with a well-trained adult. “With babies, you don't know the background or health,” he explains. “You may end up with something that you can't handle or isn't suited for what you want to do.”

Rivers is also interested in training trainers. A recent camel training clinic attracted about a dozen people. Rivers says he will be holding a second seminar in late October of this year. The seminars, like his safaris, grew out of an interest expressed by customers.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, BR Lightning Ranch, 818 FM 1283, Pipe Creek, Texas 78063 (ph 830 535-4096; billrivers@indian-creek.net; www.lightningranch.com or www.movielandanimals.net).