

## Clutch

By Sam Morton

I was standing on the clutch pedal of our international tractor as a five year old, and my best friend Tommy Dowd, almost five, had found a screwdriver and was turning it in the ignition when I took my foot off the clutch and stepped on the starter. Away we jerked in whatever gear we were in. We were both faced backwards on the seat laughing hysterically at his father running after us. Our fathers had been building fence and had left us to our own devices. I can now appreciate the move he must have made to mount a runaway tractor. I wonder if our fathers can laugh about it in heaven or if they are even able to communicate about their former life. My mother told me that it is not what you think, but that it is nice to be floating around with your friends. She told me this in a dream over the phone after she died so make of that what you will. My next memory involving a clutch was when I was standing in the door of our barn as a ten year old, next to my sixty year old dad watching my fifteen year old sister teach her 16 year old boyfriend how to drive using a clutch. "Whose driving the truck?" my dad asked watching his 1966 Chevy pickup heading for the barn. It was a dark green, three-on-the-tree, farmer pickup. "It's Tim Rochee, he plays for the Blue Knights. He named his dog Damnit!" My dad was not impressed. He was about to be really unimpressed when Tim Rochee drove our pickup with his only daughter straight into the side of the barn ten feet away from us. The truck was totaled, Damnit abandoned the back of the truck for mother earth, and my sister and Tim Rochee jumped out who kept apologizing to my father as fast as he could. My dad was a large, mean looking man. Tim, hoping to do something right, looked at me and said; "You can have my dog" I was thrilled. "Cool! C'mon damnit!" I yelled and took off for the house with my new dog to show my mother before anybody changed their mind. The wreck was somewhat understandable. It was a tight turn and probably a bad time for a novice to try to pull it down into first gear with the clutch in and make the turn. But I blame that on my sister. He should have already been in first before he tried the turn, but then she never was much of a coach. She was more of an instigator. Two years later, I was twelve, with my twenty-seven year old brother and sister learning to shift on a straightaway. I inadvertently speed shifted from second to third. "He did that on purpose!" my brother yelled at my sister. He was always yelling but there was a kind of outlaw accusation to it which I kind of liked and from then on I vowed to be a demon behind the wheel. This brings me to my final story of my friend from the tractor days timing me in the quarter mile in yet another of my dad's pickups. We were now fifteen. The tailgate was down and the family dog (not Damnit, I had to give him back) was asleep in the back with the spare tire. You guessed it. I drove right out from under them when I took off. Even though our dog was fine, my friend still makes me feel bad about it. Later, I beat my brother in a drag race because he didn't know how to shift in a race. Years later when I finally got my first new pickup of my own, the same brother he drove it through a fence going seventy by the junction of the upper and lower road in Big Horn. He had to hitchhike home, and don't you know my seventy six year old father was out from Carolina visiting. My brother had a big barbeque party on and everybody was waiting for him to show up to get started. He showed up kind of in shock My dad asked me if he had a drinking problem. "Yeah, you might better talk to him dad, at least for the kids sake." He sat my brother, now 40 years old, down for a lecture. It's the only high point I got out of my wrecked pickup which was drivable once I put the clutch bar back on.