

HOW TO TELL HOURS

1. Pull the dip stick and see if the oil is clean or dirty. If it's dirty, feel it between your thumb and forefinger for grit. Does it have an acrid odor? If so, that indicates the oil has been in there for a long time and acids may have started to develop.
2. Pop the air filter lid and look at the air filter element. Is the pre-cleaner installed? If so, is it dry or has it been oiled as it should? How dirty is the pre-cleaner and how dirty is the main air filter element?
3. Look down into the carb. Is the throat clean or dirty? Dirty may indicate it's been sucking more than air.
4. Check the bottom of the air filter housing for oil and dirt buildup. A small amount is not a worry, but a buildup that covers the entire bottom or is thick in the corners is bad.
5. Start the engine when cold. Does it smoke on startup? A lot or a little? A little is not so bad. Once the choke can be taken off, run the throttle slowly from idle to full throttle, wait a few seconds and slowly bring it back to an idle. It should be smooth through the full range, without any hesitation.
6. With the engine running, turn the steering wheel lock to lock. Check to see if the front wheels respond accordingly.
7. Take a look at the transmission fluid sight glass at the rear of the tractor. Is the fluid "red" or "amber". If it's red, it could very well be the original fluid. If it's amber, it's been changed. Transmission fluid should be changed every 200 hours, along with the filter.
8. Pull a plug, heck pull both plugs. If either is black and sooty, or wet -- not good. If they are light tan and dry, that's good.
9. Look inside the black engine shields, into the air fins on the engine. Are they clean and free of grass, dust, and oil buildup? Or is everything kind of dirty? Clean is good, dirty is bad. It's an indication of the kind of care the tractor has been given -- either way.
10. Drive the darn thing. See if the brakes work smoothly. Check to make sure the tractor sits still when the hydro lever is in neutral. Get a feel for the steering. And listen for the hydrostatic transmission. If it whines too loud, I'd be concerned.
11. Don't overlook the deck. You want to check for indication of rust through. Also, when engaged, you want to make sure there's no shudder. In other words, are the spindle bearings in good shape and are the spindles straight. If the blades are worn, badly nicked, or bent, it's another good indication of the type of care the tractor has been given.
12. Check the overall condition. Does it look ratty, abused, or neglected? Or does it look used, but maintained? It's a judgement call.