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Maseka — mechanical genius...

By Z B MOLEFE

MR JAN BUTI MASEKA is not called "The Mechanical Genius of Orkney" for nothing. For years he has been involved in building tractor models as a hobby.

But you have to visit him in order to appreciate his skill which has seen his tractor models finishing among the prizewinners during the annual Springbok Radio "Toys for Joy" competition.

THE WORLD visited this soft-spoken 40-year-old father of two children at the Vaal Reefs Mine married quarters.

"In fact my hobby started when I was a boy working as a farm labourer at Koster in the Cape," said a beaming Mr Maseka, who had just put finishing touches to his latest model — a front-end loader, which has taken him more than six months to build.

After inviting reporters to inspect the model which had everything built into it including intricate mechanical pieces like brake shoes and drums, we wanted to know if he uses any drawings or plans before embarking on the building of each model.

"Man, it's all in my head. Remember, I spent six years of my life working with tractors. I just look at any tractor and in no time it's all in my head," he said.

Mr Maseka, who is employed as a messenger-driver at the Vaal Reefs Mine, and has gone as far as Standard Three at school, uses wire for all the body work of his models, and floor and shoe polish tins for wheels.

It was in 1960 that he made his first good model that impressed the children of his manager. In 1967 he made his first sale when his impressed white colleagues bought a model from him for R3.

From there there was no looking back for Mr Maseka. His work was improving so much that the training officer at the Vaal Reefs Mine, Mr Tony Woodrow, bought him a soldering machine.

"Any spare time I had was spent building my models.

"Another white colleague was so impressed with his models that he bought one for R35. The same colleague told me to enter for the "Toy for Joy" competition. I won third prize and collected R100 and a R100 gift voucher," said Mr Maseka.

"The following year I improved and won second prize with the model I had entered. I have also sold my models to whites in Cape Town and Pretoria.

There is also the well-known shoe polish manufacturer who has shown interest and has ordered a model," Mr Maseka continued.

He has only one regret. "I could work a lot and achieve much. But now my house is so small. And of course there is the problem of the children. You know that type of situation where when you want to do serious work the children will also want give a hand," he said.

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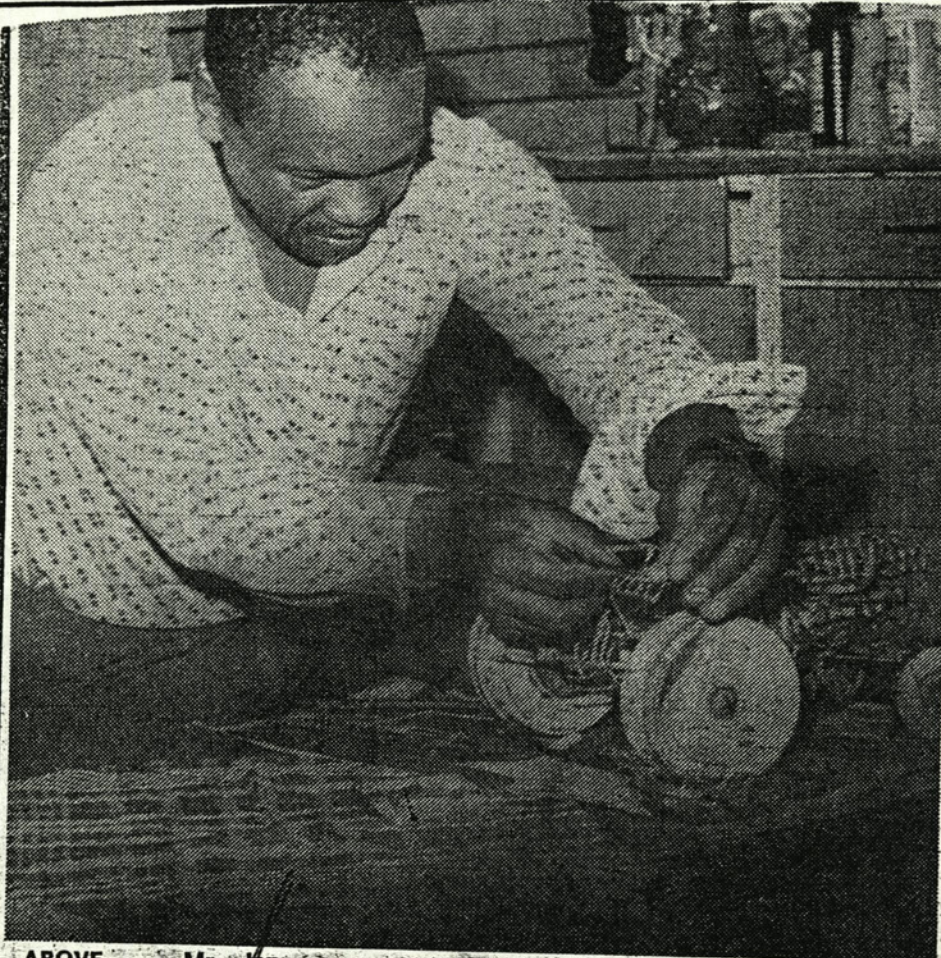
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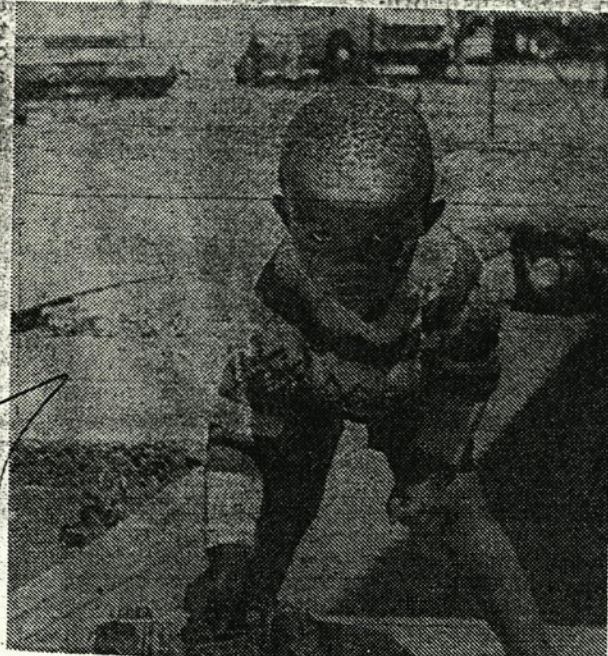
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ABOVE — Mr Jan Buti Maseka, the mechanical genius of Orkney, seen putting finishing touches to one of his tractor models which have won him fame and a small fortune.

RIGHT — Petrus Maseka, 3, plays with one of the tractor models which has been built by his father, Buti, who has won fame as the mechanical genius of Orkney.



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BELOW — Mr Z T Monyane (left) admires the work of his friend, Mr Buti Maseka, who has won fame as the mechanical genius of Orkney for the tractor models he builds during his spare time.

