

Whatever Happened To Low Tech?

By George Porter

Lately I have been noticing that "high tech" is everywhere. The car adds talk about high tech engines, transmissions, and suspensions. The programs on TV talk about electron microscopes, space walks, Hubble telescopes, brain surgery with computers, and lots of other things that seem nearly impossible. The great effort of the smart folks of this world seems to be to make a computer chip that can do a zillion calculations in a millisecond.

Everywhere I travel I see people using laptop computers that have more memory and information than the Library of Congress and can communicate with any other computer in the world over the information super highway. We all have VCR's and CD's that play music with a laser beam.

We can take a single drop of blood from any one of the billions of people in the world and identify the person it came from. We send pictures over the phone and our TV sets pick up signals from satellites in outer space over dishes in our backyard. Most of the technology we live with today, taken for granted in our everyday lives, did not exist 15 years ago. The computer I am using right now is one year old and it is obsolete, I can't even give it to my daughter in college because it is not powerful enough for what her classes require.

The manufactured housing industry is filled with the same kind of high tech. Engineers work on computers so big they would cause the lights to dim in small towns. They design frame camber, roof trusses, floor systems, wind loading, thermal efficiency, and a thousand other things that go into the making a home. The diesel truck that delivers the home works by injecting a highly refined petroleum product into a compressed and turbo charged cylinder full of air under thousands of pounds of pressure. This charge is timed to a microsecond so that it instantly explodes when the piston is just beyond top dead center. It can do this hundreds of times a second, running for half a million miles before you replace it.

And then we have set-up.

It is almost like we left home on a family trip in a super sonic jet and forgot the baby. I can show you set-up manuals today that say you don't need frost-free foundations in the North, all you have to do is adjust the anchors every day as the ground shifts beneath the home. Some manuals say all you need to set a \$60,000 multi-section home are a couple of boards and some grease. This is not low tech, it's NO tech.

We don't need lasers and computers to set homes but we surely need some good low tech common skills. A \$20 home made water level, some safe rolling and jacking equipment, and a few hand tools are all the equipment you need to do it right. But that is not enough, the manufacturers need the skill to write a manual that the set-up guys can read; and then show them how to use it. This may be very low tech, but guess what, the high tech stuff won't work without it. Solving this problem will have a greater positive effect on the industry than any computer chip ever made. We can do it if we try, we have to, our future depends on it.