



chariots of tire

a comedy or horror film—you decide **by steven moore**

The “ticking clock” is a Hollywood term for a deadline that adds tension to a story. The hero must prevail before the bomb blows up or the asteroid hits. Well, it was Hollywood at our place a couple of months ago when a 15-minute job took a week with a deadline looming. Here’s the screenplay for *Chariots of Tire*.

Act 1:

On Wednesday, our hero, let’s call him Clint, needs the tractor so he can clear the latest 50 cm snowfall with the rear-mounted snowblower. Oh my, the tires are soft, both front and rear. Common when the weather gets cold and the air pressure drops. Can’t use the tractor. He calls Ben to plow out the driveway. Forecast: Two more big storms followed by a thaw when the wet snow can’t be moved but there’s plenty of time.

Clint calls Greg at the local garage to see if they have an air pig, a reinforced cylinder like a propane barbecue tank but with a hose and tire nozzle,

that can be filled with air and taken to the tire. He does. Good. Greg says he will fill it and put it in the box on the old red pick-up out in back. Clint stops by on his way home Thursday evening and picks it up.

Brief Flashback: Clint coached Greg in the local baseball league. He and Clint’s son alternated between catcher and third base. Greg was quietly reliable then and he is now—plus he is an outstanding mechanic. Clint reflects on how lucky he is to have an honest, skilled, reliable mechanic close by. So far this is a family movie.

Back to Thursday evening: By this time it’s dark, so Clint and his wife go down to the barn with flashlights because the solar-powered lights in the barn just give general illumination and aren’t really strong enough for close work. Filling the front tires is easy. With about 30 pounds pressure, they’re like car tires.

But the big rear tires are a different matter. Although they hold only 12

pounds pressure on a 1958 Fordson Dexta, they also contain a mixture of air and liquid calcium chloride (CaCl). Forecast: Big storms due tomorrow and Monday. The plot thickens.

Backstory: The proper term for this mixture is liquid ballast, but most people around here just call them loaded. Liquid ballast increases the weight of the tires and provides more traction. Loading both tires adds about 340 kg to their weight and 25% to the overall weight of the Dexta.

Each tire is filled with a mixture of 60 kg. of CaCl, 110 litres of water, and 1 kg of lime to prevent acidity. This protects against freezing to -40C but makes filling them with air more complicated.

The valves of the tractor tires are on the inside. Clint crawls around underneath to loosen the valve caps with pliers, as the calcium chloride is corrosive.

He loosens the first cap by touch, then looks to find he was unscrewing the valve itself. More air hisses out of the tire before he can replace the valve. He starts the tractor and eases it forward until the valve is at the top so the CaCl doesn’t squirt out, then wiggles the air hose up between the inside fender and the tire to fill it.

After some grunting and squeezing, Clint discovers that the air pig is now empty. Filling the front tires shouldn’t have taken all the air, but he can’t do more today.

Latest Forecast: Heavy snows on Friday and Monday with a melt to start Thursday that would make the accumulated snow impossible to move.

Act 2:

Friday morning. Clint takes the pig back to the Gary and asks to borrow it again that night full of air. He picks it up and, by the time he gets home, all the air leaks out. So that was it – a leaky pig. It snows all night Friday.

Saturday morning. Call Ben again to plow out the driveway. He tries to keep a straight face. Clint takes the leaky pig back to the garage.

Greg apologizes and tries another pig. That one leaks, too. Clint calls Ben and asks if he has an air pig. Yes, Ben has a compressor with a tank at his parent's house that could serve as a pig. He will put the hose and a tire nozzle in his shed for Clint tomorrow when he is finished plowing everyone out. Latest Forecast: Big snow again on Monday, big melt moved up to Wednesday.

Sunday morning. Clint picks up Ben's compressor, tank, hose, and tire nozzle. He packs everything in his trunk, drives home, plugs it in, turns on the compressor and fills the tank with air. Then he decides to practice on the car tire to make sure everything works. He bends down to put air in the car tire

He has plenty of air. But when he tries to fill the first tire, he finds the valve rotted and unable to hold any air. Clint is ready to shoot the tires and be done with it.

and OMIGAWD, what happened to the nozzle that was on the end of the hose?

He looks on the floor of the garage, he takes everything out of the trunk, including the spare tire, he puts his glasses on and looks behind the stove, under the shelves, in buckets, around recycle boxes—that nozzle has disappeared. As a last resort, he thinks. He knows it was on the hose when he picked it up.

Back to Ben's. He looks in the driveway, in the barn, outside the barn, he sifts through the straw and the snow with his fingers. Clint's wife looks in the open bags of dog food and cat food and at Ben's. Nothing.

Movie re-rated to R because of strong language. Big storm still due Monday, melt for sure on Wednesday.

Act 3:

Monday morning Clint drives to Kingston to buy another nozzle. Back at the farm, he turns on the compressor, fills the tank, hauls it down to the barn on a toboggan. He has plenty of air. But when he tries to fill the first tire, he finds the valve rotted and unable to hold any air. Clint ready to shoot the tires and be done with it. He calls Greg at the garage and asks if he has tire valves. Yes. When Clint gets there, Greg doesn't have the right size so Clint drives to Roblin and finds one new, one used in the garage there.

Clint returns to the farm, replaces the valve and fills one tire. It takes all the air in the tank so Clint trudges back up the hill with the tank on a toboggan to refill it, then back down to the barn to loosen the valve caps, then starts the tractor and eases it forward until the valve is at the top, then wiggles the air hose up between the tire and inside fender to fill it.

Tires full. Clint returns the compressor. Snows all day Monday.

Tuesday: Clint spends the whole day on the tractor blowing snow as the temperature gets warmer and warmer. Finishes just as it begins to melt.

Wednesday: 10°C, water running everywhere, snow weighs a ton. Can't be moved but driveways are clear. Clint gazes out the window toward the barn, the tractor, and the full tires.

Music up, roll the credits.