Hover-mower manufacturer recapitalizes

By HAL PHILLIPS

YARMOUTH, Maine — Bankruptcy couldn't have come at a better time for Grasscraft, manufacturer of round-backed rakes and engine designer of a near-perfect turf-cutting operation, engine design on their domestic manufacturing system.

Grasscraft is celebrating its fifth anniversary in 1996. Unfortunately, the first four were marked by a lack of funding capital, making service and expansion extremely difficult. Steven Searle, Grasscraft's new president and chief executive officer, hopes to change all that.

"We're prepared to invest the needed capital and manpower to meet our goals: A three-fold increase in sales and production over the next three years," said Searle, who purchased the firm in October 1995.

In market dominated by Flymo and Allen — two British firms with U.S. distribution — Grasscraft sees its Maine-based manufacturing operation as a selling point. "People realize that since we manufacture domestically and sell direct to our customers, we can offer lower pricing and better service," said Searle. "Getting warranty work done and ordering parts from a foreign company can be a real problem."

Added David Rodway, Grasscraft's VP of sales: "A big part of our marketing program is dealing direct... I think we're going to sell half the mowers at dealer price. We want to pass that savings on to the course by dealing direct."

Searle and Rodway said the golf course market has always been receptive to the Grasscraft product, with its nylon safety cutter deck, 5hp, two-stroke Tecumseh engine and aircraft quality, computer-designed impeller. However, the firm isn't standing pat. Current research and development efforts are focused on a 4-cycle prototype now being tested in North Carolina.

"The 4-cycle engine is about five times quieter," Rodway explained. "It doesn't pollute near as much as the 2-cycle because the oil and gas are separate... It's also much more durable. The best example of that? Well, when you get into heavy grass with a 2-cycle, it bogs a little bit and you may have to pull off. The 4-cycle blows right through it."

While Grasscraft intends to deal directly with superintendents, some distributor relationships are inevitable. The firm has already lined up Agri-Pacific to rep the product in Asia-Pacific.

"Our mower is made in the USA, every piece of it," Rodway said. "We've visited a lot of superintendents and it's very difficult to get parts. We have the capital and the manpower to service this product. We realize the sale doesn't stop when the mower is shipped."

"We think it's important people realize we have the funding, the capital to back this thing up — to have enough stock, to have enough parts to make it work."

For more information, contact Grasscraft at 1-800-644-6013, PIN #4319; or drop by their booth (#293) in Orlando.

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