

# PROGRESS



## At a fast clip

With the focus now on speed and productivity, bare-bones mowers are a thing of the past.

**W**hen it comes to advances in mower technology, “I don’t even know where to start,” says Brian Anundsen, product marketing manager for Ariens. From the first cast-iron mowers and engine-less reel mowers to the high-tech zero-turns of today, mowers have evolved dramatically, and the trend will continue.

Mowers have come a long way since their early days, but older models continue to inspire. “There were a lot of good ideas that have come and gone,” says Steve Brinkman, Husqvarna’s global director of ride R&D. “There’s a lot to be learned from looking backward. It becomes interesting, just like cross mowers of the past are back in vogue again.”

In the past, the way a deck was mounted to the machine was a relatively complex process, says Exmark Marketing Manager Daryn Walters.

“It took time, a lot of parts, and you had to make a lot of adjustments in the deck.”

Today, the focus is on combining pieces and parts and simplifying the design, he says, thereby creating easier machine maintenance.

### Customers seeking speed and performance

“Most of the time you have two people working, and they don’t want to come home and sit on the tractor for three

or four hours at a time,” Anundsen says. “Now the zero-turn saves them a lot of time.”

Sean Dwyer, Husqvarna’s global product manager for zero-turn mowers, says the zero-turn “opened the door for increased productivity and it started a revolution.”

That “revolution” brought much improved maneuverability, faster speed, better performance and better durability. The combination enables contractors to finish their work in far less time than they used to, Dwyer says. And for contractors, his Husqvarna counterpart Brinkman says, “it’s all about ‘how fast can I get the job done?’”

Anundsen bought his first zero-turn in 2006. He was torn between that and a riding tractor. “I’m definitely glad I went with the zero-turn,” he says. “I cut an acre and half in an hour and 20 minutes. Prior to that it was three or four hours on a riding tractor.”

It’s true that zero-turn tractors cut faster than traditional lawn tractors, and that has changed the whole shape of the industry, Exmark’s Walters says. “But it’s not just about speed now. It’s about the quality of the cut, operator comfort, safety, discharge, all of those things are at the forefront of landscape contractors’ buying decisions.”

or four hours at a time,” Anundsen says. “Now the zero-turn saves them a lot of time.”

Sean Dwyer,

Husqvarna’s global product manager for zero-turn mowers, says the zero-turn “opened the door for increased productivity and it started a revolution.”

That “revolution” brought much improved maneuverability, faster speed, better performance and better durability. The combination enables contractors to finish their work in far less time than they used to, Dwyer says. And for contractors, his Husqvarna counterpart Brinkman says, “it’s all about ‘how fast can I get the job done?’”

Anundsen bought his first zero-turn in 2006. He was torn between that and a riding tractor. “I’m definitely glad I went with the zero-turn,” he says. “I cut an acre and half in an hour and 20 minutes. Prior to that it was three or four hours on a riding tractor.”

It’s true that zero-turn tractors cut faster than traditional lawn tractors, and that has changed the whole shape of the industry, Exmark’s Walters says. “But it’s not just about speed now. It’s about the quality of the cut, operator comfort, safety, discharge, all of those things are at the forefront of landscape contractors’ buying decisions.”

### Walk-behinds to stand-ons

Walk-behind mowers aren’t as popular as they once were, Walters says, but Exmark has noticed that the company’s wide-area walks, big commercial mowers, are selling well. “They can go up to deck sizes of 60 inches,” he says. “They’re big machines, but they allow contractors to cut in places that are difficult,” such as steep hills.

“Over the years the market has flattened in this category, but it’s still popular because of its safety performance and quality of cut,” he says.

Dwyer says stand-on commercial mowers are beginning to make some movement in the market.

They’re much shorter than a typical rider, so contractors can fit more in their trailers and finish jobs more quickly.

Stand-ons have many advantages, says Anundsen. “If you can stand on

the mower, you can go faster than you could with the walk-behind. You can access smaller areas and wetter areas.”

### What the future holds

Going forward, mower manufacturers will continue to focus on making machines even more productive, safer and more durable. “And you would not have to look very far to see that environmental manufacturing is going to be at the forefront,” Walters says.

