

Zeros to Heroes

James de Havilland looks at what's available with today's zero turn mowers - more choice, more performance and more productivity

When zero turn mowers first entered the UK market, petrol power and mowing decks that could be compromised in heavy going were the norm. Now Zero turns have matured, with choices that can include diesel power, heavy duty wide decks and collectors.

When zero turn mowers first started to be sold in the UK there were those who predicted this type of machine had the potential to take over from mid-deck tractor mowers and out front rotary models. It has not happened that way of course, zero turn models just adding choice to an increasingly diverse mower market. But there is little doubt that a zero turn mower, in the right application, will literally run rings around a 'conventionally' steered alternative.

The key to getting the most from these manoeuvrable mowers is choosing the right machine. Although it is tempting to lump all zero turn models into a single category, the reality is that there is a tremendous difference between the mowers on offer.

As a starting point are entry level petrol powered models with decks of perhaps 36 inch / 0.90m. Ideal for nipping in between trees and awkward to mow areas, these small zero turns are great at getting into areas that at one time would need clearing with a brushcutter. These entry level models are priced from around £5,500 for a 15 to 20hp unit.

Slightly larger petrol powered machines, with power units of about 25hp and decks of around 60 inch / 1.52m form the next 'group'. Physically larger than entry level models, these units offer good performance and productivity and can be well priced at around £8,000.



It does not take long to master the controls of a mower like the Toro Z590-D, a close cut around trees helping to reduce the amount of work that may previously have been carried out with a brushcutter. When trying a machine, try it with a collector. These can be useful when dealing with leaves in autumn



With a choice of 52 inch / 1.32m or 61 inch / 1.55m deck, the Wright Sentar can tackle reasonably large areas without any compromise on its ability to mow close to trees. As with any zero turn mower, clean turns can be achieved after only a little practice



Lastec offer a wide choice of zero turn models, with diesel power units from 22HP to 36HP. The established Articulator deck design allows close following awkward contours as pictured, the mowers being offered with deck choices that include working widths from 39 inch / 1.0m to 195 inch / 5.0m with three or four deck sections according to model. Options include stripping roller kits and collectors

Going for diesel power makes sense on units that will see a lot of use, a 60 inch / 1.52m machine tending to be priced in the £12,000 to £14,000 bracket. This is a significant hike compared to a petrol machine of similar width, but these prices are just a guide. Wider 72 inch / 1.83m diesel models will typically be priced over £15,000.

It is worth repeating the listed prices are ball park figures; it is really difficult to put a price to equipment these days and listing individual equipment prices can be misleading as a result. With this in mind, check to see exactly what the price includes. In some instances options such as a rear catcher and front weights can be disproportionately expensive. So cost them in from the start and not as an afterthought!

It is also important to check on the warranty offered. A one year warranty is the norm, but some manufactures offer second year cover as standard. Check the conditions of the warranty are made clear too. It does vary between suppliers.



The John Deere JD 717E and JD 997 (pictured) zero-turn mowers are powered by 19hp petrol and 30hp diesel engines respectively, the larger model being designed and built in Europe and featuring a choice of side-or rear-discharge decks. Both models are fitted with folding ROPS frame and lap belt as standard



Powered by a 20hp diesel and fitted with a 60inch / 1.50m deck, the Ransomes ZT220D is claimed to have the capacity to mow up to 3.5 acres / 1.4ha in an hour. Although this will be in ideal area mowing it does serve to illustrate the serious capacity offered by zero turn mowers



Fitted with a saddle as opposed to a seat, the 25hp petrol engine Wright Sentar is also offered as Sport version with a diminutive 36 inch / 0.90m deck. This allows it to work amongst closely spaced trees. The operator can stand up to get a better view, making the mower great in a tight space



Husqvarna offers both petrol and diesel powered zero turn mowers, the 27hp BZ27D sharing the same compact dimensions with other models in the range. Fitted with a 61 inch / 1.55m deck, its larger 34hp brother, the BZ34D will suit those looking for greater output with its 72inch / 1.83m mowing width

Powered by a 31.5hp diesel and offered with a choice of 61 inch / 1.55m or 72inch / 1.83m deck, the Ferris IS 5000Z is, in zero mower terms, a large item of kit. Despite this, it will still mow close to trees and around difficult obstacles, but has the mowing capacity to cope with large areas



JCB initially launched its zero turn mowers as concept models at SALTEX 2005. The diesel ZT20D is fitted with a 48inch / 1.22m rear discharge deck, the collector and side discharge decks of the pictured unit suggesting the company is looking to offer several options. Keep on eye on what JCB has to offer. The company has the determination and resources to develop its groundcare range



Offered with a choice of 60inch / 1.52m side- or rear discharge deck or a side-discharge only 72in / 1.83m unit, the 28hp Kubota ZD28 targets those looking for a rugged medium capacity zero turn that is equally at home in tough going as it is on finer turf



Powered by a 27hp three-cylinder diesel, the Toro Z590-D is offered with a choice of 60 inch / 1.52m or 72 inch 1.82m side-discharge deck. Available also with a mulch deck option or collector system, the ROPS frame can be folded to clear overhead branches



Cut and collect zero turns are often called upon to help with autumn leaf clearance, a point to consider when looking at new models. Kubota offer two collector models, the GZD15 and GZD21 with 15 and 21hp diesel power units with 42inch / 1.06m and 48inch / 1.22m decks respectively