

# A cut above



**When did you last try a different make of brushcutter? Brushcutters targeting professional users may have grown over the years, but for some brand loyalty sees a reluctance to consider anything other than just one make. Unless you try a range of alternatives, however, you may miss out on the tool that is best suited to your needs**



**As with any item of equipment, brushcutter designs have evolved. You may not notice this when you take a casual look at what is on offer but compare similar models made a few years apart and the chances are the newer machine will be more pleasant to operate.**

This will typically be down to lower vibration and noise levels, two key improvements that can really help reduce fatigue. Power to weight ratios have steadily improved too, some nominal 25cc units seeming to pack a punch well above what you could have experienced per-

with a greater degree of adjustment, are more common. So too is a longer line of mounting points for a harness, enabling more operators to select a balance point to suit how they want to work the machine.

That said, key developments relate to noise and vibration. What is often not considered is that the level of vibration produced will be influenced by the task being carried out. Large brushcutters, with the right blade type, can be used as a clearing saw to tackle heavy growth to include small saplings.

This type of work will produce different levels of vibration than when the same tool is used to clear



*Choosing a brushcutter is not easy – there is not only the choice of engine type and power to consider but price, make and local support too. Although you can play it safe by sticking to a big name, there are alternatives that may well fit your specific needs better.*

haps just a few years back. But do not expect a dramatic improvement over more recent designs; much changed when power units were brought into line with legislative demands made in the 2000s.

Detail developments have of course continued. On loop handle trimmers, not only has the shape of the loop altered on some machines but so too has the material from which they are covered; soft finish grips are increasingly common to help improve comfort. Similarly, anti-vibration systems have evolved.

Fire up a new 'pro quality' brushcutter with cow horn bike handles and then revert to an older machine from the same maker. Notice anything different? Offset handles,

bracken or brambles.

Similarly, a light trimmer used to cope with long grass around trees, benches and marker posts will behave differently when dealing with docks and thistles. It is for these reasons that it is important to try out different makes and models in the key environment in which they will be operated.

Most professional users tend to target top spec models with a full harness and wide bike handles. This type of tool can be used all-day and everyday. But is it the right tool to fit with a nylon line cutting around obstacles?

A light loop handle trimmer may be the better choice for this type of work.



When it comes to power units, you have more choice. Still most popular are two-stroke engines. Proven, simple and reliable, modern two-strokes are not only quieter but cleaner too. But to get the best from these engines it is important to use a high quality two-stroke oil.

A 50:1 'petrol' mix is pretty much the default with a synthetic oil, but more advanced oils not only lubricate better at a low mix rate but burn more cleanly too. This reduces fumes and, of equal importance, helps keep the engine internals cleaner too. A modern 'green' Pro or Ultra oil can cost three times as much as a decent 'bulk' two-stroke oil but you get what you pay for.

Conventional two-stroke alternatives include the now familiar 4-Mix designs from Stihl and C4 from Shindaiwa plus four-stroke engines from companies to including Makita, Honda, Ryobi and Hitachi. Jonserved and Husqvarna offer two-stroke brushcutters with a catalytic convertor and... well you have far more choice with regard to engines than you may think. You can also opt for battery power.

With this in mind, it is perfectly fine to admit to not really being fully up to speed on what would make the best choice. And nothing beats getting your hands on a given unit and trying it out. Take four-stroke power. When the first four-stroke brushcutters were introduced over a decade ago, uptake among professional operators was low. And it still is.

But the latest four-strokes, such as the MM4 models from Makita are impressive tools, the company claiming its 33.5cc EM4340L models can consume up to 60% less fuel than a two-stroke alternative with lower noise and vibration too.

Entrenched brand loyalty is another point. Nothing wrong in sticking with the same make but insisting that a given brand is better needs to be tested occasionally. You may be surprised to find a different brand actually fits your demands perfectly – and if it doesn't you can use this to prove your loyalty point.

There are no best buy recommendations; the right tool is the one that suits your business and no two operations will ever be exactly alike. But now is a great time to consider trying before buying. There are some really good brushcutters out there and some will be made by companies you may not have considered before such as Echo, Tanaka, Sanli, Efco, Solo and Kawasaki.



*Emission controls have driven small engine developments, the Stihl 4-Mix cutaway diagram showing its four-stroke 'breathing' combined with two-stroke lubrication simplicity. A four-stroke engine runs on straight petrol, with a sump full of oil for lubrication. Two-strokes can have a catalyst fitted to reduce fumes, but the best oil you can buy will also help.*

*RIGHT: Modern cow or bike handle designs are 'offset' to the right, a degree of adjustment allowing the operator to set up the machine to suit personal preferences. Vibration control varies between makes and models, so it is worth trying a few alternatives; the best designs are much less tiring to operate over extended periods.*



*ABOVE: Modern cow or bike handle designs are 'offset' to the right, a degree of adjustment allowing the operator to set up the machine to suit personal preferences. Vibration control varies between makes and models, so it is worth trying a few alternatives; the best designs are much less tiring to operate over extended periods.*



*LEFT: A grass blade can tackle heavier growth than a line and, dependant upon design, also cope well with docks, light brush and bracken. There are so many designs of blade available that it is worth trying a few different types. The reversible four-blade unit pictured produces very little mulch and suits long grass that is raked and cleared separately.*