

Zero In

GERMAN FIRM CREATES SPACE-AGE MOWER THAT TURNS CLIPPINGS TO DUST WITH LASER TECHNOLOGY

By James E. Guyette

Germany's Wolf-Garten Co. hopes to revolutionize the age-old quest for the perfect cut with its Zero riding mower — a former Mercedes two-seat automobile modified into a mower equipped with lasers instead of cutting blades.

"There are five laser beams that cut the grass," said Jim Morris, president of Grassmasters of Barrington, Ill., Wolf-Garten's U.S. marketing partner for the device. "It drops the clippings into the turf as grass dust."

There are zero cuttings since the machine chops the cut grass into tiny particles — and dries it — avoiding thatch and mold formations. Blade wear is zero because it has no blades, and courses remain free from damage inflicted by



WOLF-GARTEN CO.

On paper, the Zero scores a perfect 10 as a mower. The out-of-this-world machine costs a mere \$30,000.

dull blades.

Mercedes engineers designed the original 8-foot-long Smart car as a park-anywhere vehicle for European and Japanese drivers. Wolf-Garten modified the original car for golf course use by removing the roof and customizing the body components to provide a precision turf trim.

The Zero has small, squat tires to protect greens and fairways from tire tracks and a sophisticated Electronic Stability Program that measures wheel slippage to ensure top traction on wet

grass.

The Zero will also help superintendents meet new noise ordinance standards because of its laser-beam technology. Morris said whirling blades create 80 percent of a typical riding mower's noise, so the laser cutting keeps the unit quiet.

There have been a few bugs along the way, Morris conceded. The Zero experienced minor problems during development, such as burning the blades of grass. The engineers solved the problems by shading the Zero's beams on slopes.

"The professional turf maintenance model is ready to go," Morris reports, adding that demonstration models will

Quotable

"Ely's genius, as demonstrated through his development of innovative golf equipment and unique marketing strategies, have clearly helped propel golf to new heights over the past 20 years."

— Tim Finchem, PGA Tour commissioner, on the death of golf equipment icon Ely Callaway. (GolfDigest.com)

"If a technique was good enough for Old Tom, who am I to change it?"

— Eddie Adams, head greenkeeper of the Old Course at St. Andrews, in a speech to Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents earlier this year.

"We tend to forget as we're out playing golf that we're actually walking on a living cell, a live plant. We can control so many aspects of the course, but we can't control Mother Nature."

— Bill Spence, veteran superintendent of The Country Club in Brookline (Mass.), telling it like it is. (The Boston Globe)

"The Cold War ended when the reds were on the greens."

— Robert Trent Jones Jr. commenting on his design in Moscow during a recent architecture seminar.

