



Grass Never Grows Under His Feet

By Lori Ward Bocher

It may sound strange to say this about someone who works in the turf industry, but the grass never grows under Dan DeVault's feet. Oh, it's true that he spends lots of time on turf-grass. But he never stays in one place for very long.

"I'm on the go a lot. If I'm not on the go, I don't know what to do with myself," he admits. "I like to be running and to be on the edge all of the time."

In the summer, his job certainly keeps him on the run. As a sales rep in the turf division of Hanley Company, Inc., (Sun Prairie), he spends about 95 percent of his time on the road during the growing season. His territory in Wisconsin covers an area roughly southwest of a line from LaCrosse to Wisconsin Dells to Beloit.

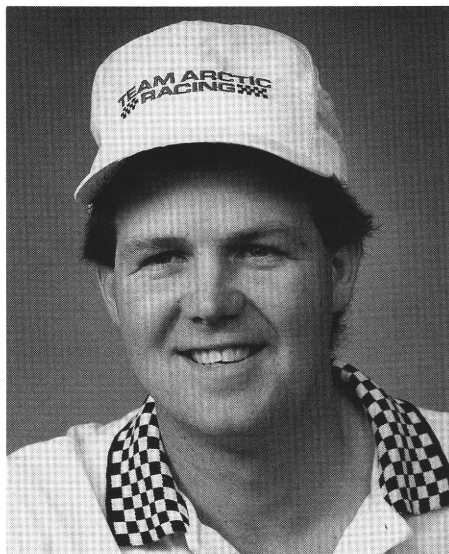
And in the winter, his snowmobiles keep him on the run — so much so that this past winter he finished first in final point standings among all snowmobile racers in the U.S. (compiled by United States Snowmobile Association). His brother and racing partner, Ed, finished second.

"This was a real good year for us," Dan emphasizes. "The points added up. We won three races at Eagle River, which attracts a lot of racers from all over the world."

Dan travels to snowmobile races just about every weekend from early December to the middle of March. "It pretty much eats up the whole winter," he says. "But it fits in pretty nice with my work because that slows down in the winter."

Dan and his brother have traveled to races as far away as Grand Forks, N.D., Brainerd, Minn., or Manitoba, Canada. In addition to the travel, they spend two or three week nights working on their machines. "After getting home from work, we'll work on the snowmobiles 'til midnight or one in the morning," Dan points out, adding that they do all of their own maintenance.

"I started racing snowmobiles in 1973 when I was just 12 years old," Dan explains. "My dad was racing prior



Dan DeVault, world class snowmobile racing champion!

to that. They had junior classes that you could start racing in when you were 12, and I've been racing ever since." His father still goes to the races with his two sons.

"My brother and I race together. For the past six years we've been running it as a business," he continues. "We have a lot of sponsors who help us. Triangle Tool Corporation out of Milwaukee is one of them. Arctic Cat is the brand we race, so they support us with parts and traveling money."

Dan and Ed run five different race sleds. "The type of racing we do is oval sprint racing which is done on pure ice," he points out. The race track is half a mile long, with races running five, seven or ten laps depending on whether it's a heat, quarter final, semi final or final. "And we race in five different classes, so we can put on a lot of miles in a weekend."

The classes are based on the power of the engines. "We have some souped up engines, one that puts out at 115 horsepower," Dan points out. "The others are stock snowmobiles — the same as a consumer could buy in a store. Our smallest is at 80 horsepower and our largest at 102 horsepower."

Their fastest machine will run at 98 mph in 600 feet. Because they're operating on pure ice, they add studs to the snowmobile track and put carbide on the skis.

"We wear leather race pants for protection against the studs. We've got very good, expensive helmets. And we wear an impact-resistant jacket," Dan says of their protective gear. So far, he hasn't had any major accidents. "A couple of bangs and bruises, but no broken bones as of yet, knock on wood. I have been hit by snowmobiles passing by at about 80 miles per hour. It leaves a heck of a bruise on your leg."

Why does he race snowmobiles? "It's a hobby that we enjoy a lot," Dan answers. "It keeps us really busy in the winter. It's very competitive, and we both like competition. And I think racing is safer than riding on the trails these days because you're riding on a closed circuit instead of out in the woods."

When the snowmobiles are put away for the season, Dan finds other sports to keep him busy. "I play fast-pitch softball a couple of nights a week in the summer," he points out. "I like to hunt deer, pheasant and grouse. I and try to get up north to do a little muskie fishing."

Dan and his wife, Sandy, live in Cottage Grove and have two sons who help keep life hopping. Bradley is 7 years old and Billy is 3. "The kids like to fish, so I take them out whenever I can," Dan says. "In the summertime we try to go out real early on Sunday mornings. The boys are in sports, too — soccer, basketball and T-ball. And they like to swim. They keep us busy running around."

With their hectic schedules, Dan and Sandy sometimes run into each other unexpectedly. Sandy is a landscape architect for Herman Landscape in Madison and a sales rep for McKay Nursery. "We have a lot of the same clients. And once in a while we run into each other at a turf show," Dan explains. "She tells me she's going

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some place one day, and we don't know we're going to the same place until we get there."

Dan helped organize the Wisconsin Turfgrass and Greenscape Expo '95. "I worked with the vendors in the trade show and really enjoyed it," he says. "It's become one of the premier shows, I feel."

Hanley Company, Inc., is an associate member of the WGCSA, and Dan attends some of the meetings. "I really enjoy the association," he says. "Monroe is a great person. He's involved me, let me know who the people are. He's made it a lot of fun to be in the business."

"The best part of my job is being out on the golf course with the superintendents," he continues, adding that about 50 percent of his business is with golf courses. "It's like visiting friends every time I stop at a golf course. It doesn't seem like a job some days. It's always fun to demonstrate new equipment. People are always intrigued by it."

Dan listens to what others say about the new equipment. "After you demonstrate it and get input from five or six people, you form an opinion about a new piece of equipment," he says. "A lot of times we pass comments back to the factory. Sometimes they can make a change (in the equipment) quite easily."

But there are some people who don't want to be bothered with equipment demonstrations, so Dan stays away. "I try not to be a pain," he says. "If they want something, I let them know that I can always be reached at any time, at home or at the office. But I don't want to be a pain in their side."

The turf division of Hanley Company carries equipment from some old, familiar companies like Ransomes, Cushman, Ryan and Ford, as well as from some newer

companies like Land Pride and Daihatsu. "There are a lot of new companies coming into the turf business," Dan explains. "Even Cushman, Ransomes and Ryan are growing in leaps and bounds right now. It's hard to keep up on it."

He believes the increase in business is due to the growing number of golf courses. "It's unbelievable. There are more people wanting to golf and more golf courses being built every year," Dan says. "There's a big market out there. And there's a lot being missed. We spend our time looking at the bigger golf courses while driving by the smaller ones. That's something that I want to work on a little bit more — to concentrate on the courses that we are missing."

Dan came to his present sales job at Hanley Implement through a rather interesting route — one that emphasizes his need to be active and outdoors. The route also makes him more effective in his career.

Born in Madison, Dan graduated from Madison East High School in 1980. Then he attended Madison Area Technical College to study diesel mechanics. "My father was a diesel mechanic and I was always around him," Dan explains. "It seemed interesting to me."

After graduating from MATC, Dan went to work for Diesel Injection Service in Sun Prairie. "The work was completely indoors. We were locked in all the time, never outside," Dan recalls. "That was one of the reasons I wanted to get out of there."

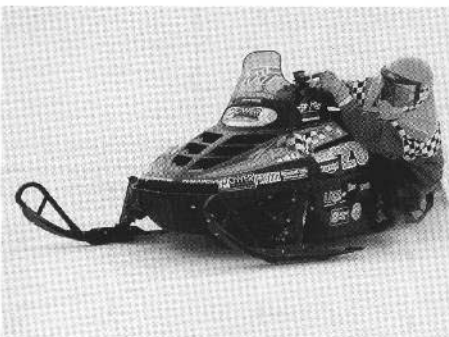
So he went to work with his grandfather on his 40-cow, 400-acre dairy farm near Cazenovia. Dan had spent a lot of childhood weekends on the farm, so he had good memories. "The farm was so appealing — to go from a locked environment to being outside all the time," he points out.

But things didn't work out. "There was a discrepancy between the old ways and the new ways," he explains. "My grandfather didn't want to give up anything or let me invest in the farm. He wanted to be in charge of everything. All the money was in his pockets. I knew I had to go someplace where I could make a long-term investment."

In 1983 he started at Hanley Company as a mechanic. Later he was promoted to shop foreman in the lawn and garden division, and then to department manager of the same division. "And about seven years ago I started selling turf equipment," Dan says.

"The former sales manager took me on a trip once because he needed a mechanic," Dan recalls. "We ended up going to Sentry World and a couple of other courses. The golf course side of the business intrigued me. I liked being outside with the equipment and on the golf courses. I was never a great golfer, but I always liked being around golf courses."

So he moved into his newest job, the one that he has stayed with the longest. And even though he spends a lot of time on turfgrass, this avid sportsman still doesn't let any grass grow under his feet. 🍷



Dan runs to a first place finish on December 11, 1994 in the D stock class.



Watch ESPN for the races and, as in this November 26, 1994 picture, interviews with our Dan DeVault!