

# Wooing the pro cutters

An expanding Iron Country responds to the growth and increasing sophistication of today's grounds manager.

by Ron Hall, associate editor

Edwin Budding, an engineer, studies a steel cylinder slicing nap in an English wool mill. "Uhm," Budding muses. "Maybe I've got something here."

Budding invents the lawnmower. Thanks, Mr. Budding (155 years late); the world hasn't looked at grass quite the same since. Your invention revolutionizes lawns. Allows golf courses. Popularizes sports fields. The mower: the keystone of today's turfgrass industry.

A new year approaches and we at WEEDS TREES & TURF expand our Iron Country coverage (see July '85 WT&T). The industry is moving that fast.

## Iron Country?

Editors of WT&T visited manufacturers in Wisconsin, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Kansas this past summer and fall. We even went back to where it all started—England—to gauge professional cutting and see where it's headed.

Only two years after Budding invents the lawn mower in 1830, J.R. & A. Ransome, Ipswich, England, begins making them.

"We have measured our work and we are getting a tremendous move to greater mechanization," says R. Guy

Catchpole at the 100-acre Ransomes site just west of Ipswich. About 1,100 people assemble commercial "grass machinery" (that's what the British call it) and agricultural equipment here. Ransomes exports to more than 100 countries. Mowing machinery surpasses agriculture now for Ransomes.

"It's going to get bigger by leaps and bounds," Catchpole says. The U.S. market—which Ransomes broke into with the purchase of Wisconsin Marine several years ago—provides the challenge. The opportunity too.

Catchpole feels there are two major trends in the cutting industry.

- Greater mechanization leading to more cost effectiveness for grounds managers.

- The versatility of mowers to cut varying heights of grass.

"The whole operation now is cost effectiveness," says Catchpole. "Users ask, 'How much does it cost to cut an acre of grass? What's the payback period?'"

The market for commercial mowers looks strong through 1986, Ransomes officials say. The company just installed a pair of Japanese-produced, computerized Higata "ma-

chining centers" in its Ipswich plant at a cost of \$1.5 million. Look for new products from Ransomes at the giant IOG show in Windsor next fall.

## A busy market

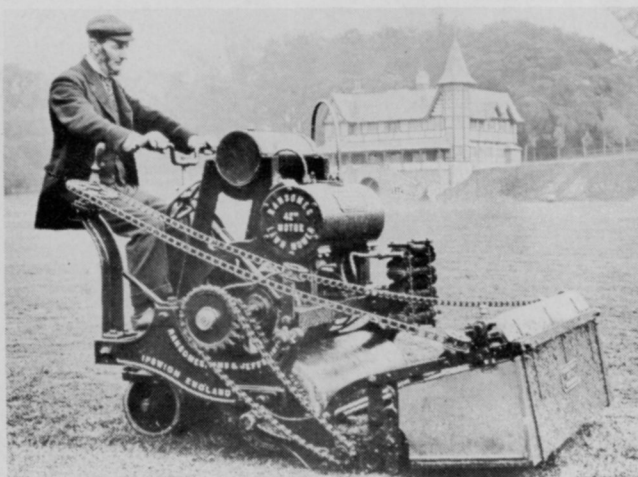
There's new energy at Yazoo Manufacturing, Jackson, Miss. A new building, new production lines, and a new 42-inch, front-cut hydrostatic mower.

"We're building the best product now that we've ever built," says Howard Day, longtime vice president of marketing. The fortunes of Yazoo began rising again with the purchase of the company by Southern businessman Robert M. Herin several years ago.

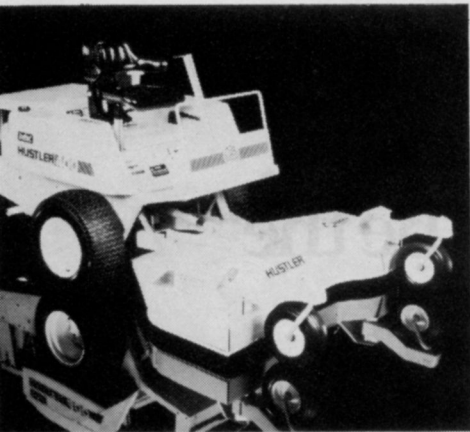
Yazoo is no newcomer. In 1945 it introduced its Big Wheel mower. In 1959 it helped pioneer the front-cut mower so familiar with professional groundsmen today.

Now there might be 20 companies manufacturing out-front mowers. Although the basic design hasn't changed all that much, manufacturers continue to strive for added durability, versatility, and safety.

Exmark of Beatrice, Neb., for instance, recently announced the rede-



**Mower technology:** Ransomes' second motor mower built in 1902 (left), and a Ransomes Motor 180 with U.S.-built tractor, English-made cutters



Excel's powerful Hustler 400 with 34-hp gas engine



Gravelly shows Pro-36 intermediate mower



Jacobsen's HR-15 can cut 16-foot swath



John Deere's new diesel-powered F935



Bunton's Multi-Trac handles many implements



Exmark announces redesign of 48-inch Ranger

sign of both its 36- and 48-inch Ranger commercial mowers. Both now come with new blade engagement devices that stop moving blades almost immediately. Also, electrical safety devices will not allow engine startup if blades are engaged on the Exmark products.

And versatility has long been associated with Gravelly products, initially two- and four-wheel tractors, more recently mowers. Three different engines—the 11-hp Honda, an 11-hp Briggs & Stratton, or a 16-hp B&S—are available on Gravelly Pro

Series mowers. Attachments manufactured on Gravelly's spit-and-polish assembly lines still fit tractors produced decades ago.

### More versatility

"The landscape contracting market is expanding in numbers and in the education of the people using the equipment," says Gravelly's Lee Bouldin. "And they want equipment to do more things."

The newest product in the Gravelly stable is a 36-inch intermediate com-

mercial mower which offers rear or side discharge and the option of a bagger.

And, some front-mowing machinery grows larger. Jacobsen's HR-15 mowing tractor cuts a 16-foot swath with its three 72-inch rotary decks. Individual hydraulic lift controls allow the operator to hydraulically raise or lower the decks for cutting medians, parkways, around obstacles, and through narrow areas. This grass-cutting bully is powered by a 74-hp

*continued on page 30*

Perkin's diesel engine.

Bunton, meanwhile, comes out with a smaller version of its Multi-Trac, multi-purpose turf tractor. Implement options include three gang reel mowers, rotary mowers, flail mowers, snowblower, and vacuum sweeper. A 22-hp diesel powers the tractor.

This move to diesel, because of both longevity and economy, is real.

This spring, Toro unveiled the diesel version of its Toro Groundsmaster, the 217-D with either 52- or 62-inch cutting decks.

This summer, Excel announced the 28.5-hp diesel 340.

In September, John Deere introduced two front mowers, both diesel powered.

Says Mark Rostvold, director of consumer products for Deere, "In late 1984 and early 1985, we began selling our first mowers designed specifically for professional groundskeepers. We are following up on our commitment to the commercial market with two diesel front mowers and implements to make them even more versatile. We are a major force in our very first year.

And we expect to grow rapidly."

Here are some of the trends Rostvold foresees:

- More bagging systems. New varieties of grass require more intensive care, which in turn brings about more rapid thatch build-up.

- More hydrostatic drive tractors. Hydro drive is a no-clutch transmission—one lever controls direction and speed.

- More diesel engine models. They provide fuel savings and have a longer life.

- More instrumentation. Operators want to monitor key signals at a glance.

Bucking a trend of the past decade, however, John Deere begins production of three below-40-hp compact tractors at its Horicon, Wis., plant. In recent years, Japanese-manufactured tractors dominated the small tractor market in the U.S.

It's this effort to stay abreast of the industry and to meet the challenge of imports that led Toro to introduce its own overhead valve (OHV) four-cycle engine for 1986, a competitor to the Honda OHV. The new engine will be available on four rear-bagging Toro walk mowers being introduced next spring.

## Designs of the future

"We now have a family of new generation engines employing state-of-the-art technology that will remain current well into the 1990s," says Rich Mueller, Toro marketing designer. Toro promises easier starting, more power, longer engine life, and improved fuel efficiency from the new OHV engines for walk-behind mowers.

Product development accelerates as commercial cutting grows. A good example is Excel in one-stoplight Hesston, Kans.

Beginning in a backyard machine shop 25 years ago, Excel has developed 17 primary tractor models and more than 20 special attachments. Excel's zero-turning-radius Hustler mower first appeared in 1969. It, and the Hustlers it spawned, found a ready audience in the municipal market.

This summer Excel unwrapped its newest Hustlers: a 21.5-hp model 320, the 28.5-hp diesel 340, the 34-hp 400 with its 72-inch cut, and the 18-hp rear-discharge 250.

How could Edwin Budding have foreseen what was to follow?

Mowing and the commercial mowing market expands and grows in sophistication. **WT&T**

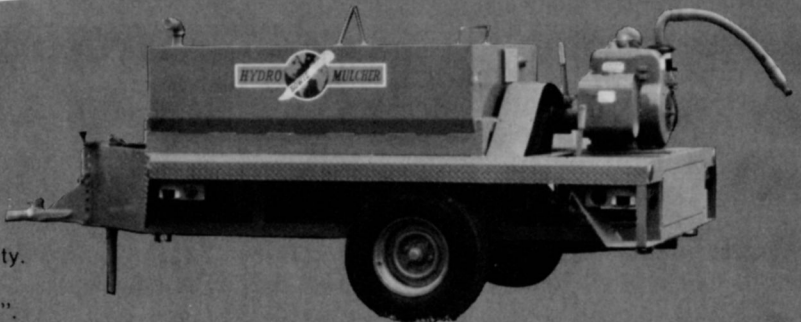
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