

## We were cookin' at Expo 99



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**H**ot. Hot. Hot. How hot was it in Louisville for the Outdoor Power Equipment Expo 99?

Let me tell you.

It was so hot that the Kohler Engine folks had to grill those delicious Wisconsin brats a little longer than usual just to get them up to temperature on the top of our heads. (Free food! And lots of us enjoyed the shade of the Kohler tent.)

It was so hot that those insane checkered pants that Dane Scag wore to his company's Friday night reception seemed . . . well, almost "cool" by comparison.

It was so hot that we saw some of the young maintenance guys trying out new mowers and driving them *slowly*.

### Making waves

OK, so I'm no Carson, and enough about the heat. Here are some of what we saw at Expo 99, starting with Dane.

Opinionated. Feisty. Perceptive. At 80-plus years old, Dane makes as many waves in the mow-

ing industry as ever, building his 2 1/2-year-old company. (How many times has he done this before?) While some manufacturers are building mowers with ever-bigger decks powered by ever-bigger engines, he announced that his company is focusing on machines that are simple, affordable and efficient. His reasoning—there's a lot bigger market out there for mowers that cost \$3,000 than for machines selling for \$25,000.

While price is always a consideration with mowers and other landscape equipment, so is the work they let you and your crews do each day. This was the number-one message of several manufacturers at Expo 99. We saw lots of productive new ideas like:

► Even more compact construction equipment, purple and teal mini-excavators and mo-

torized installation gadgets to make work easier and more productive. Everybody's searching for equipment that can reduce their dependence on labor which, as we all know, has been pretty darn scare.

► Riding mowers with a radical new independent suspension; others with larger, more comfortable seats; several convenient tow-behind cutter attachments; and of course, plenty of cup holders for those riders.

► "Designer" looks sporting sleek, rounded, plastic components; high-end operating indicators; even more sound and vibration deadening.

► Great new specialty products like mowers for everything from steep hills to dams, inventive new hydroseeders, plenty of built-like-a-tank walk-behind mid-mount mowers, quick-as-a-wink topdressers, double leaf collector bins that ride on mowers, even extendible hand-held trimmers that articulate in several directions.

► And, talking about mowers, we saw a new generation of automated robot mowers, units powered by both battery and the sun. These little mowers looked like something from the Jetsons. The battery-powered mower that we saw demonstrated cut a small patch of grass (almost without a sound), then returned by itself to the recharging station when it started running low on power. Commercial applications? Certainly, but they'll be specialized.

### Look for the new stuff

Not everything at the Expo was steel and iron. There were plenty of great ideas too, like the rollout of a nighttime landscape franchise, as well as some interesting fertilizing, marketing and equipment transporting ideas.

Look for upcoming issues of LM—and particularly our New Products section—for more great ideas from Expo 99. **LM**