



- ▶ walk-behinds
- ▶ trailerable cutters, or
- ▶ very large, tracked, self-propelled cutters.

The walk-behind cutters typically involve small engines powering a cutting head, which the operator must muscle through the stump. A favorite of rental stores, these small cutters can be man-killers, as Mike Nissely discovered. They can be difficult to position and hard to hold in place.

Trailerable cutters are much more powerful, with far larger engines. They cut very quickly, but are can take a long time to get situated for cutting.

Self-propelled cutters back down from no stump, dead or alive. Their engines sometimes approach 200 hp, and they might include dual hydrostatics and even remote control operations. And they might cost \$25,000 or more.

Reinventing an idea

Nissely lives in a city that he calls “the tree capital of America.” Down in Tallahassee, his three options in hand, Nissely soon discovered so much work that he found it necessary to invent a fourth option.

“Back then, I knew I’d have to go to a tow-behind unit or to a crawler, and frankly, I wasn’t much impressed with the efficiency of either one,” he recalls. “So I began to look around for another way to cut stumps.”

Nissely’s father had taught him to weld and showed him how to think for himself, which came in handy when he stumbled across a very old Excel Hustler 275, which he found parked and unused behind a friend’s barn. This gave Nissely more ideas.

Unfortunately, he didn’t own the cutter. His friend refused to sell, so Nissely searched for other similar old models. He quickly found two in Georgia. Both were tired, with blown engines, but still factory-strong in the frame and with the zero-turn capability that stood at the heart of his big idea: To join a high-powered stump-cutting head to a tractor that could position it just so.

Cutter takes life

Nissely gave new life to those old models by rebuilding them, and experimented how best to join the cutter to the tractor. Soon after, he had a strong platform with the ability to turn on its own axis, speed on the straightaways, narrow and

Mike Nissely is an impressionable young man. Even as a high school kid, he noticed ways a guy might made a living. A good friend’s father cut stumps every day, and Mike filed that fact in a back of his brain.

A few years later, working as a mechanic in a rental equipment store and needing a little extra money, Nissely remembered the work his buddy’s father did, and he bought himself a used grinder. When he advertised his stump grinding services in Tallahassee, FL, he had a half-dozen jobs a month. There was plenty of stumps to grind, if he didn’t wear himself out first.

Hard, hard work

As his business began to grow, Nissely began to grow tired. “Anyone who has run a hand-operated grinder knows that if you run that thing all day, you’ll be begging for mercy by day’s end,” he remembers. He understood his options:

Stump cutting, reinvented

agile enough profile to weave in and out among still-standing trees and lightweight enough to allow it to go on landscaped properties.

With a second prototype on the job, Nissely called the people who made his tractor of choice. He had ideas of partnership. Excel engineers recognized right away that a good idea was lying right there under their noses.

The partnership resulted in a 15-in. cutter wheel that can be attached to the Hustler 3000 or 4000-series tractors. Nissely's idea to mount a conventional stump-cutter on a zero-turning-radius tractor would result in more mobility, productivity and ease of operations on the job.

He can use the combination of units for both mowing and stump cutting in wide or tight spaces, and get quick cutting head positioning and both forward and sideways cutting movements through various size stumps. The combination with front-mount mowers allows for accurate and controlled side-to-side movements, good speed from stump to stump and minimal impact on the turf.

As a contractor using his cutter on as many as 20 jobs a day, Nissely has thought about all the ingredients of productivity. Key to his thinking is a dozer blade that backfill the hole as the grinding is completed. On larger stumps, the blade pushes the chips out of the cutter's way as the grinding continues. His model has cutting heights from 23 in. above ground level to 14.5 in. below ground.

Like a knife through hot butter

On his first job with the new blade attachment, Mike Nissely moved onto a 3-acre site where he ground 65 stumps in 90 minutes. With a set of newly sharpened teeth on the cutter, he sped through the 15-in. pine stumps with their sap and soft, stringy wood in a time that even surprised him.

"I use the hydraulics on the blade to flip the mulch back into the hole, then move on the next stump," he says. Typically, his cutter rips through a 24-inch stump in less than four minutes and then positions itself in a half a minute on the next stump to disappear.

Nissely uses his cutter all day, almost every day, imposing huge amounts of wear on the machine. But it's still more useful than the others he



Nissely's solution

Mike Nissely had only three options for stump cutters:

- ▶ walk-behinds (requiring lots of muscle)
- ▶ trailerable cutters (sometimes hard to maneuver)
- ▶ large, tracked, self-propelled cutters (can be very expensive)

His solution:

- ▶ strong platform that can turn on its own center-axis
- ▶ unit gives speed on straight-aways
- ▶ narrow, agile in profile to move in tight areas
- ▶ lightweight that won't tear up the ground

Nissely's first job with his invention

- ▶ 3-acre site
- ▶ He ground 65 stumps in 90 minutes
- ▶ Flips mulch back into the hole from the blade
- ▶ Cutter rips through a 24-inch stump in less than four minutes .

tried. Nissely says even a high school kid could see the difference.

For more information, contact Hustler Turf Equipment, Excel Industries at 800/395-4757; www.excellhustler.com