

# Demo that mower first



**Mowing managers say that price is important, but not as important as durability, serviceability and dealer support**

BY DAVID WALKER JR.

**S**ome of the considerations that contractors take into account when purchasing new lawn mowing equipment include price and quality of cut. But, there are others, and to find out what they are, we asked the pros who operate mowers, the mechanics who service them and the owners and key managers who buy them.

Several clear-cut trends emerged in the course of our not-so-scientific investigation. They include: the significance of properly 'demo-ing' equipment and the consolidation of vendors and employee retention.

#### Try before you buy

For Dave Bradford, a horticulturist with Landscape Services, Birmingham, AL, getting a chance to demo a piece of equipment is one of the most crucial steps he takes before making any purchasing decisions.

"I attend several regional and national trade shows every year. At the shows I like to try equipment first-hand," says Bradford. Once he finds a piece suitable to his needs, he proceeds carefully. "We're a 45-year-old company and we want to feel comfortable about anything we purchase. Our taking on new equipment is

more of an evolution than a revolution. We call and talk to other people who used the equipment to get their opinions."

Once Bradford and his associates reach a mutual comfort level on a mowing unit, they take one more precautionary step. "After demo-ing it, we'll buy just one or two. If they perform well for a length of time, then we'll buy more," says Bradford.



Dixie Chopper

Mitch Rolsky, vice president of operations and business development, Stano Landscaping, Milwaukee, WI, searches for new technology that will give his company an edge.

"I'm constantly going to trade shows and watching what our competition is doing," says Rolsky. Just like Bradford, Rolsky moves with prudence once he finds a unit he likes. "We used to watch a mower for about an



hour. Now we keep it for a week and have a lot of different people test it."

Gary Schwartzkopf, director of internal operations, Buckeye Landscape Services, Columbus, OH, says he has reps calling him all the time who want to demonstrate mowing equipment. After years of being in the industry, he can usually 'size up' a mower in a matter of moments.

"Sometimes I can look at a piece of equipment for five minutes and tell it's not worth it. When I find something that's good, I'll take it over to our mechanics and give it a good going-over. From there, we'll take it out to a site and have the crew leaders operate it in the field for a day," says Schwartzkopf.

Just what do the crew chiefs look for? "I'd say the three most important factors are safety, quality mowing and ease of operation. With the high turnover in our industry, you need to use equipment that's easy to learn. I look at all these things before considering price," says Schwartzkopf.

Chris Hayes, vice president of operations, Groundmasters, Cincinnati, OH, has several foreman test mowing equipment and operate units in multiple locations before making any purchasing choices.

"We operate the equipment on different terrain to see how it performs on hills versus flat areas. We try to run equipment for at least a week. Plus, our mechanics want to know about things like belts, grease fittings and parts availability," says Hayes.

What are Hayes' top priorities? "Operator comfort and quality of cut are important factors," he says. However, of all the purchasing caveats that Hayes has established, there's one that stands head and shoulders above the rest: "Any equipment that we buy must have been in existence for at least one year. A year gives you a chance to see if any bugs still need to be worked out."

Bill Parker, vice president of maintenance, Moore Landscapes, Glenview, IL, sees two other crucial reasons for a thorough 'hands-on' evaluation of mowing equipment before placing any order. First, says Parker, "If your foremen don't like a piece of equipment, they won't use it. I always make sure they test it first to make sure they are comfortable with it."

Second, in addition to having his mechanic inspect

## Keep it or trade it?

Landscaping professionals might argue about which type or brand of lawn mowing unit is the best, but regardless of their selection they all agree on one thing: without a quality maintenance program, every mower is destined to underperform and eventually break down. What are contractors doing to avoid costly equipment failures?

Joe Loyet, president of Loyet Landscape & Maintenance, St. Louis, MO, believes part of the equation is knowing when to retire your equipment. Says Loyet, "After three years, a mower is tired so we trade it in. It's very cost effective and it saves us downtime. And saved downtime means a lot."

During 36 months of use, Loyet ensures his equipment stays in top running condition by installing something very special: "pride." In case you're wondering, it's not the mowing gear that receives this unique attachment, it's his staff.

"Every man on a crew is issued his 'own' lawn mower, string trimmer and backpack blower. All they have to do is check the oil every day. If your mower breaks, it is fixed that night and you're given a back-up. By assigning mowers, they take pride in their equipment," says Loyet.

Loyet also uses this approach on larger riding units. "The big riders are only ridden by crew leaders. And when you go on vacation, no one rides your mower," says Loyet.

Lenny Zeglin, a shop foreman at Pennink Arrimour, Huntingdon, PA, could have his hands full servicing 50 walk-behind units every day. Fortunately, Zeglin says, his company takes a team approach to caring for equipment that pays big dividends. "The crew leaders show all the guys on the crew how to change oil, change filters and sharpen blades. What they can't fix they just tag and I make sure to look at it. We have some Kawasaki engines that have been running for 10 years. The key to longevity is good maintenance."



Yazoo/Kees Cutter  
Hydro

and evaluate mowers for performance specs, he goes one step further. "Our small-engine mechanic reviews all the parts to see which will wear out the fastest and need to be replaced. He'll then call our distributor to see if the distributor stocks these parts."

### One for all?

As a former John Deere dealer, Tom Brown knows the vital role a distributor can play in a contractor's success. Brown, a divisional manager for Thornton Ground-

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scare, Cincinnati, believes that streamlining or consolidating vendors today is paramount to profitability.

"We have a basic shop that handles things like changing oil, fixing tires and sharpening blades, but for everything else we have to send it out to a dealer. Obviously, fast turnaround is important. A dealer needs to stock the right parts," says Brown. To facilitate this process, Brown offers this advice: "Don't bring oddball pieces together. Try to stay consistent with the equipment you are using."

Bill Sandford, a shop foreman at Habersham Gar-



dens, Atlanta, GA, asks this question before buying a mower: "Who has the parts?" He says he's able to stock some parts but must rely heavily on his dealer for the majority of them. As such, Sandford reached this conclusion: "We're endeavoring to standardize our equipment and go with one vendor. We believe by doing this we'll get better service. Hopefully, we won't be seen as just a number but a real customer."

## Make it easy on your people

Mowing contractors recognize that even the most user-friendly mower benefits by having a seasoned professional walking behind or riding atop it. How are landscaping firms holding on to a transient workforce in a year that saw the lowest unemployment rates posted since the early 1960s?

Kirk Talgo, a regional manager with the Morrel Group, Atlanta, GA, says: "When we get a good person, we do everything we can to keep him." Because a large portion of his labor pool is made up of Hispanics, Talgo stresses the importance of understanding the cultural differences between the United States and its Latin American neighbors.

"Many workers we have come from Mexico and do a great job for us. But often they get homesick and want to return to Mexico to visit their families. We give them a three-month leave of absence and they can still come back and receive their full benefits. We also try to give them holidays off that are part of their culture but not ours."

Mitch Rolsky is accounting for another demographic shift in the American labor pool: maturation. Because of this shift, he says you need to be cognizant of aging workers. "The workforce is getting older as a whole," says Rolsky. "We need to be constantly searching for new technology that will compensate for that. I'm always looking for ways to be more efficient and effective."

Whether a worker is 25 or 55, there are two issues Tom Brown strongly considers before purchasing any mowing equipment: operator safety and operator fatigue. He's invoking several changes to address these concerns which he believes will create a more loyal crew.

Says Brown, "We are trying to reduce the number of walk-behind units we have and replace them with stand-ons to reduce worker fatigue." And despite the fact he has never experienced a trailer accident, Brown is taking a proactive stance to stop one from occurring.

"I haven't had a trailer accident, but I've heard of plenty and I want to prevent them." Brown's company is investing in custom-made trucks where "you don't have anything dragging behind and there's no break-away problems to worry about," he says.

### One-stop shopping

Stano Landscaping's Mitch Rolsky is also trying to consolidate his suppliers. His consolidation efforts have two important prerequisites. "Our goal is to develop a relationship with a vendor. However, we are looking for a supplier with a broad base of equipment. I'm also hesitant to deal with smaller entities. I'm afraid they might be gone one morning. We're trying to stay with a major player or one in the second tier," says Rolsky.

Dave Bradford realizes another benefit of reducing vendors: recognition. "We like to work with people who know us. We have suppliers who actually order ahead of time for us because they can anticipate our needs from past experiences."

What Bradford labels 'recognition,' Gary Schwartzkopf sees as 'persistence.'

"Switching over manufacturers is a real investment. The more manufacturers you deal with means the more parts you have to inventory and keep track of. Our distributor has persistence. They've been around a long time and we've been dealing with the same person, and that simplifies things," says Schwartzkopf.

Chris Hayes emphasizes that not only is it easier to stock mower parts when you have fewer makes and models, it also simplifies employee training. Says Hayes, "We use one line only and that makes it a lot easier to train people." Because Groundmasters has invested so heavily with one distributor/manufacturer, Hayes says they've reaped another benefit. "When any of our mowers under warranty break down, our distributor supplies us with units on loan. They actually deliver them right to us."

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# New Mowers for 2000

## Powerful zero-turn mowers

Husqvarna's six new zero-turn radius mowers are powered by a Kawasaki or Kohler motor, with cutting decks from



### Husqvarna zero-turn, one of six models

42 to 61 in. One model can reach a speed of 9 mph (4 mph in reverse). Another model has a 48-in. cutting deck and can go 7.5 mph. Contact Husqvarna at 704/597-5000 or [www.husqvarna.com](http://www.husqvarna.com) or Circle No. 202

## All-day productivity

Bunton's BZT-3310 zero-turn rotary



### Bunton BZT-3310 features wide wheel base

mower from Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products has a 31-hp Briggs & Stratton Diahatsu liquid-cooled gas engine, a 72-in. cutting deck with electric lift and adjustment system to control cutting height and a wide wheel base for stability. Call 888/922-TURF or Circle No. 203

## Wide-cutting swath

Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products' new Jacobsen HR-4600 Turbo™ mower has a 44-hp Kubota turbo diesel engine for up to 7.5 mph operation and a 92-inch cutting width. Three hydraulically driven rotary decks use twin blades. Available in two-wheel or four-wheel drive, it also has a high-back suspension seat, easy-to-reach controls and single pedal control. Contact C-Graphic, Inc. at 888/922-TURF or Circle No. 204

## Fast and productive

Exmark's LazerZ™ HP comes with a 52-inch deck and either a Kohler Command™ Pro or a Kawasaki engine. It can reach speeds of up to 9.5 mph. Ultra high blade-tip speed, high-lift blades and flow-control baffles allow cutting in any conditions. Floating Trivantage deck allows an operator to mulch, bag or discharge. Contact Exmark Mfg. at 402/223-6300; [www.exmark.com](http://www.exmark.com) or Circle No. 205

## Effortless gliding

Eastman Industries' new HM16R2 Hover Mower™ has a Robin two-stroke engine, ergonomic steel handles and 12-in. impeller. An aluminum cutting disc and three



Eastman Hover Mower rides on cushion of air

stainless blades slice a 16-in. path and use cushion of air beneath the deck. Contact Eastman Industries at 800/760-1680; [www.hovermower.com](http://www.hovermower.com) or Circle No. 206

## MTD's new rider

MTD's mid-mount zero-turn rider (MMZ) is the first sit-down professional mower in the MTD Pro line. Powered by a 25-hp



Kohler OHV V-twin engine, it has a 60-

### MTD mid-mount's weight is in rear for traction

in. floating deck, operator seat adjustment and 10-gal. fuel capacity. Nearly 75% of the weight is in the rear for better traction. Visit [www.mtdpro.com](http://www.mtdpro.com) or Circle No. 207

## Rear-mounted catcher

The new ShortCut™ Bac-Vac™ mounts directly behind the driver and doesn't hinder the zero-turn maneuverability of the ShortCut mower, says Excel Industries. It features three safeguards against plugging: sight glass, fabric feel and overflow. The catcher mounts on the 48-in. rear-discharge mulching deck with an adjustable blower. Contact Excel at 800/395-4757; [www.excelhustler.com](http://www.excelhustler.com) or Circle No. 208

## Better ground clearance

The Kutter Hydro midsize mower from Yazoo/Kees has higher rear decks for better ground and curb clearance, a hydraulic drive transmission system and speeds up to 6.8 mph. Adjustable deck is 10-gauge steel with reinforced 7-gauge side skirts, in widths of 36 and 48 in. Contact Yazoo/Kees at 800/723-9496 or Circle No. 209

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**New mower in Articulator line**

LasTec combines a floating rotary mower with its own hydrostatic drive unit (powered by a Kubota 38-hp diesel engine) to create a new zero-turn radius mower. Four 25-in. articulating mower decks give a cut-path of 8 ft. Belt drive allows the decks to float over contoured turf. For more information contact 317/271-4223;

[www.lastec.com](http://www.lastec.com) or Circle No. 210

**Maneuverability and productivity**

The John Deere M-Series models — the 22-hp M653; 25-hp M655; and 25-hp M665 — have air-cooled Kohler engines, hydrostatic drive, front and rear antiscalp wheels/rollers and heavy duty commercial decks. Baffling system allows grass to stand up before being cut. Contact Deere In-



**Deere M-Series mowers have antiscalp wheels**

quiries, P.O. Box 12217, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709 or Circle No. 211

**Clean, simplified design**

Land Pride's 25 Series rear discharge grooming mower in 60-, 72- and 84-in. cutting widths has a floating 3-point system for ground following, 3/16-in. deck

thickness and heavy duty components. For more information call 785/823-3276; [www.landpride.com](http://www.landpride.com) or Circle No. 212

**Rear discharge**

Woods Equipment Co. introduces three flexible wing finish mowers in the Turf Batwing line varying in cutting widths — 12, 15 and 17 ft. Features include a v-belt



**Woods Turf Batwing mower**



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drive, blade spindles with tapered roller bearings and stagger-mounted caster wheels. Eight low-pressure gauge wheels keep it from slipping on inclines. Contact Woods at 815/732-2141 or Circle No. 213

#### Independent suspension

Ferris' ProCut™ Z features the IS independent suspension system for increased comfort, extended machine life and greater productivity due to quick operations. The mower's dual-point pivoting front axle keeps all four wheels on the ground. A low



Ferris ProCut Z features new IS suspension

center of gravity is the result of a vertical shaft engine and two 4-gal. fuel tanks. Contact Ferris at 800/933-6175; [www.ferrisindustries.com](http://www.ferrisindustries.com) or Circle No. 214

#### Electronic fuel injection engine option

Walker's Model MT mower is now available with a Kohler 26-hp electronic fuel injection engine to give operators a fuel savings of 30% to 40%. Built-in, auto-type



Walker MT with electronic fuel injection

diagnostics for troubleshooting. Contact Walker at 970/221-5614. Circle No. 215

#### Rugged features, modern look

Bush Hog's new SQ-600 5-foot wide Squealer with rounded design and powder

coat paint has vertical masts that are 1/2-in. thick and 5-in. wide. Decks and sides are made of 11-gauge welded steel. Visit the Bush Hog Web site at [www.bush-hog.com](http://www.bush-hog.com) or Circle No. 216

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**Compact Viper package**

Lesco's Viper midmount zero-turn mower is 78 in. long with a welded steel frame for strength and is powered by a 23-hp Kawasaki twin cylinder OHV engine. Articulating front axle, 54- or 60-in. antiscalping floating deck and twin 5-gal. gas tanks enhance it. Contact Lesco at



Lesco Viper features articulating front axle

800/321-5325 or Circle No. 217

**Easy maneuvering**

Scag Power Equipment's "Super Z" zero-turn rider maneuvers well as a result of a smooth pump/motor/axle system. An electric blade engagement clutch and tapered roller bearing spindles build productivity.



Scag Super Z with electric blade engagement

Contact Scag at 920/387-0100; visit [www.scag.com](http://www.scag.com) or Circle No. 218

**Convertible hydro walk**

Rich Manufacturing's "Convertible" is a

hydro walk-behind that, by pulling a pin, converts to a zero-turn rider. It comes with either a Kawasaki or Kohler engine, and a 48-, 52- or 61-in. deck. Contact Rich at 765/436-2744 or Circle No. 219

**Air-cooled models**

Dixie Chopper's four new air-cooled mowers are powered by 19- or 23-hp Kawasaki engines for 42- through 60-in. decks. Contact Dixie Chopper at 800/233-7596 or Circle No. 220

**Five floating decks**

Progressive Turf Equipment's Pro-Flex 120 has five floating 28-in. decks to mow contours not suited for traditional mowers. Decks can be raised hydraulically and locked in place. Contact Progressive at 519/527-1080; [www.progressiveturf-equip.com](http://www.progressiveturf-equip.com) or Circle 221

**Front mount mowers**

Kubota's 2-wheel or 4-wheel drive F60-Series front-mount mowers are powered by E-TVCS diesels. Single-pedal operated hydrostatic transmission is standard. Top speed in forward is 16 mph, 5.6 mph in reverse. Features include a 4-wheel drive and 60- or 72-in. decks. Contact Kubota at 888/4KUBOTA, x900 or Circle No. 222

**Dual drive gearbox system**

Toro's new Z Master® Z350 mowers have a Dual Drive System triple gearbox to maximize power to both blades. Available with 20- or 25-hp Kohler engines, mowers go up to 9 mph. Dense Pak® bagging system condenses clippings for maximum capacity. Contact Toro at 800/476-9673; [www.toro.com](http://www.toro.com) or Circle 223

**Z-machines**

Gravely's two new zero-turns use either a 20-hp Briggs and Stratton engine or a 20-hp Yanmar liquid-cooled diesel. The 50-, 60- or 72-in. deck; ergonomic design; and



adjustable suspension are featured. Contact Ariens at

920/756-2141;

**Gravely zero-turn**

[www.corporate.ariens.com](http://www.corporate.ariens.com) or Circle 224

**Removable fuel tank**

Encore's Premier walk-behind mower has a removable fuel tank to reduce spills and refueling downtime, as well as a front-to-back deck stabilizing bar. They come with 32-, 36-, 48- and 52-in. decks. Contact En-



Encore Premier has removable fuel tank

core at 402/228-4255 or Circle No. 225

**30+ front-mounted attachments**

Power Trac's PT-1430 mower with a 30-hp diesel articulates 45 degrees and oscillates 12 degrees in each direction. Quick-change pins and couplers change more than 30 attachments easily. Contact Power Trac at 800/843-9273 or Circle No. 226

**Lots of moves**

Grasshopper's 700 Series mowers with Quik-D-Tatch™ decks convert from side discharge to mulching to vacuuming. Hydrostatic direct-drives, 18- to 25-hp engines and front-mounted intakes are features. Call Grasshopper at 316/345-8621; [www.grasshoppermower.com](http://www.grasshoppermower.com) or Circle No. 227