

TECHNOLOGY TO THE RESCUE

→ Snapper PRO S800x



Out-front mowers feature EFI, electronic deck lifts and ergonomic gains.

BY CURT HARLER

MANUFACTURERS KEEP COMING up with cool new concepts. But one constant question in the mower industry is how much “cool” the landscaper can afford. The good news is there is technology out there that has a good payback. Like almost every other industry segment, the higher costs of fuel and steel have put pressure on prices, even for basic units. However, manufacturers are doing their best to keep costs even more under control.

“There is a careful balance all manufacturers have to tread,” says Tim Cromley, sales and marketing manager for

Walker Mowers, Fort Collins, CO. “The technology we put in has to be allowable for what the market will bear. We can do gyroscopes and all sorts of science fiction technology on our mowers — but it has to make sense for the guy writing the check.”

Fuel-injected

One thing growing in popularity is electronic fuel injection (EFI). Kohler, a major provider of mower power, has made great strides in EFI. Starting with its Command PRO 30 gasoline, twin-cylinder model in March, Kohler

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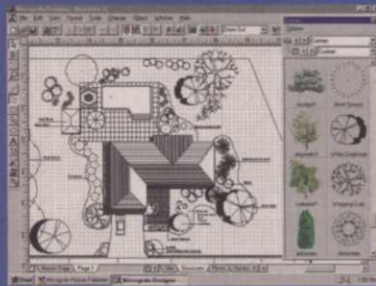


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← Dixie Chopper plans to bring back EFI technology.

continued from page 40 will introduce the first flex-fuel, EFI engine. Over the next two years, Kohler plans to convert its entire Command PRO air-cooled and Aegis liquid-cooled engines to EFI.

This past year, Walker shipped 26% of its mowers with EFI, up from 22% in 2005 — and that share is growing. “About 80% of our machines are Kohler,” Cromley says.

The additional cost of EFI on a 26-hp unit is about \$700 to \$800, including matching up the other electronics on the mower. However, the annual fuel savings of a 26-hp EFI versus a 23-hp carbureted engine is about \$1,000, so the payback period on initial investment is one season of mowing.

Dixie Chopper used to offer a Kohler-EFI engine, but stopped selling it. “We will go back to it,” says Rick Judy, marketing manager for Dixie. “Down the road, it will become more popular.”

The firm’s current model offers an

ergonomic boost thanks to dial on the seat that allows operators to adjust for their weights. “More spring gives a better ride,” Judy says.

ZTRs and ergonomics

Out-front zero-turn radius (ZTR) mowers are making waves, too.

“Zero-turn maneuverability makes mowing far more effective because the mowing deck never has to leave uncut grass,” says Patsy Penner, marketing coordinator with Moundridge, KS-based Grasshopper. Penner says the combination of ZTR maneuverability with the reach of the front-mounted deck lets landscapers trim while mowing, reach into and under spaces quickly and efficiently, and mow areas that could otherwise only be reached with a walk-behind mower. While this is not new, it’s gaining wider attention as mowing operations try to increase efficiencies.

Grasshopper has developed and will soon introduce a new 72-in. DuraMax featuring

its PowerFold deck-lifting and electric cutting-height adjustment technology.

The new Snapper PRO S800x is another ZTR that offers new, ergonomic features landscapers appreciate. The S800x is an out-front ZTR with an electric deck lift that takes the effort out of adjusting cutting height. The electronics take care of height adjustments from 1.5 in. to 5 in. When it’s time to do routine blade maintenance, the electric lift angles the deck up to make the job easier. The twin 6-gal. fuel tanks are equipped with an extra-large filler neck.

Landscapers want to protect their investment, too. One place to look is at the unit’s warranty. Dixie Chopper has extended its warranty to three-year, bumper-to-bumper coverage on all units. The only exclusions are for Dixie’s Kohler and Yanmar engines. **LM**

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