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Engine side panels remove easily on Massey Ferguson tractors.



Deere tractors have 2-range transaxles for high and low operating speeds.



Model 1925 Boomer tractor powered by 34-hp diesel from New Holland. "Boomers" also available in 25, 27 and 29 engine hp.

# TRACTORS

By CURT HARLER, Contributing Editor

There are a lot of factors to be considered when buying a tractor. Trash can be one of them, says J.L. Davis of Waco, TX. Davis, who owns a contract mowing and landscaping business, maintains a fleet of 18 tractors — all Massey Fergusons.

"People will trash about anything along the road," he says. Hitting old tires and other large items is, unfortunately, a commonplace test of the tractor's engine, body, driver's platform and PTO unit. That's why reliability and economy of operation are the top factors on Davis's checklist when shopping for tractors.

While most of the tractors Davis uses are equipped with mowers, landscape operators purchase tractors to do a variety of jobs and handle a variety of attachments. When buying a compact tractor, keep in mind that power can be delivered from the engine at three separate locations: the drawbar, the PTO (power take-off) shaft or through the hydraulic system. The drawbar is the simplest and usually works with pull-type equipment like a rake. The PTO delivers rotary motion at a constant speed, generally 540 rpm. The advantage of hydraulics is that they provide total control over output speed and easy reversal of motion without clutches or other overload devices.

Hydraulic systems generally are found on only the larger tractors in this size range. While they are wonderful for operating a range of equipment, they do present a whole new series of maintenance challenges, including pumps, fluid and hoses.

Davis has a final tip for any operation: maintain a good preventive maintenance program. "We change the oil and filter every 200 to 250 hours, regardless of how busy we are," he says. "And we're careful to keep the radiator airway clean."

If it's time to trade your old tractor in, here are several compact tractor models, designed with landscape operations in mind. Larger than riding mowers but smaller than farm equipment, these machines generally have an output in the 15-35 hp range.

-----  
**AGCO CORP.**  
**770-813-6000**  
**www.allislawn.com**

Agco Corp., Duluth, GA, produces the Massey Ferguson 1200 series of turf tractors. All feature quiet-running 3-cylinder diesel engines for power



and efficiency, with engine hp ranging from 15-38. Engine side panels remove easily, providing access for routine maintenance. All service points are conveniently located. The 1200 series comes with a variety of transmissions including 6 forward/2 reverse, 9 forward/3 reverse and 8 forward/2 reverse mechanical, plus a 16 forward/16 reverse synchro shuttle transmission.

Circle No. 250

**JOHN DEERE**  
**800-357-8233**

**www.deere.com**

Three diesel models — the 755 with 20 engine, 15 pto hp; the 855 with 24 engine, 19 pto hp; and the 955 with 33 engine, 27 pto hp — all offer hydrostatic transmission with infinite speed selection. These compact utility tractors from John Deere are assembled in Augusta, GA. They have 2-range transaxles allowing high and low operating speeds, and offer dual-pedal, speed-and-direction control which leaves hands free for steering or operating other controls. Steering-assisted brakes are located on the left to allow independent wheel braking while right foot operates hydrostatic control.

Circle No. 251

**INGERSOLL EQUIPMENT**  
**920-582-5000**

**www.ingersoll-inc.com**

The 3000 and 4000 series tractors from Ingersoll Equipment Co., Inc., Winneconne, WI, come with 14-20 hp engine options. Two of the models are offered with power steering. All come standard with hydraulic lift, and have a full line of hy-



**Ingersoll tractors come standard with hydraulic lift.**

draulically driven attachments available. Tillers, chipper/shredders, snow blowers, brush cutters, vacuums, log splitter, rear PTO's and mowers with mulching kits are available for all models.

Circle No. 252

**KIOTI TRACTOR**  
**919-291-7050**  
**www.kioti.com**

The Kioti LK2554 is a 4WD compact tractor from Daedong-USA, Wilson, NC. It comes with a 3-cylinder, water-cooled, 4-cycle diesel that delivers 26 hp. Unit has eight forward speeds and two reverse, a 2100-pound 3-point hitch and 7.34 gpm hydraulics. ROPS, power steering, differential lock, front and rear pto, hand and foot throttles and adjustable drawbar are standard. Options available include front end loaders, backhoes, mowers and snowblowers.

Circle No. 253

**KUBOTA**  
**888-4-KUBOTA**



**Kubota's 20-hp (at the PTO), 4WD tractor features single-pedal control**

New for 1999, with 20-hp at the PTO is the 4-wheel drive B2710HSD from Kubota, Torrance, CA. It is powered by a 4-cylinder E-TVCS diesel engine. Innovative combustion chamber design delivers maximum power with minimum noise and low emissions. This unit allows single-pedal control of tractor speed and direction change between forward and reverse without clutching. Its hydrostatic transmission, color-coded controls and backlit instrument panel and ISO-mounted full floating deck add to operator comfort. Both rear-

and mid-live PTOs are standard. Tandem hydraulic pump boosts power levels to that of larger tractors.

Circle No. 254

**NEW HOLLAND**  
**717-355-1371**  
**www.newholland.com**

The new 25- and 30-series Boomer compact tractors from New Holland, PA, are powered by 3-cylinder diesels and offer fingertip controls. Made at a new factory in Dublin, GA, they come in 25, 27.3, 29 and 34 engine hp.

Pictured on page 32 is the top-of-line Model 1925, powered by a 34-hp diesel and available with hydrostatic live PTO or 9x3 gear-drive transmission, 540-rpm PTO, and 4-WD. All units are available with fixed or folding ROPS.

Circle No. 255

**POWER KING**  
**800-262-1191**

The 1600 series tractors from Power King, Mendota, IL, are all shaft-driven, so there is no belt slipage. The 1620GV is a 20-hp, 4-



**Power King tractors are shaft driven. The UT 622HV is powered by a 22-hp Kohler engine.**

speed model; the 1622HV is powered by a 22-hp Kohler Command V-Twin engine and has a hydrostatic transmission; the UT 622HV is a feature-rich 22-hp unit with foot-control hydrostatic transmission, front hydraulic ports and a front PTO to drive a broom, blower or shaft-driven mower deck. Frame is made

of 2x3x1/4-inch channel steel and the unit has 15.75-inch clearance for the roughest terrain.

Circle No. 256

**STEINER**  
**330-828-0200**  
**www.steinerturf.com**

From Dalton, OH, comes the Steiner 525. Powered by a 23.5-hp Kubota water-cooled engine, and



**Steiner's Quick-Hitch system allows easy attachment of equipment like mowers.**

equipped with four-wheel drive, it is operated by foot pedals to keep the hands free to do other tasks. Unit

weighs 1,520 pounds and has a turn radius of just 63 inches. Works with Steiner's Quick-Hitch system which allows easy attachment of a range of equipment from mowers to bucket scoops to snow blowers. Also available are a series of 16- and 20-hp models designed for the turf market. **LM**

Circle No. 257



# Landscape Management's

# MOWING

## Negotiate to save big

*Before buying your next commercial mower, read this. It could save you thousands of dollars.*

By ROBERT E. REAVES

**M**owers are essential for landscape management. With the trend toward the use of larger mowers, astute negotiation between contractors and dealers is more important than ever. When it comes to buying mowers, what is negotiable? Does the size of your business give you leverage? How can you prepare for the final negotiation?

"Virtually everything is negotiable," says George Koratko, manager of Ramsey Waite Company in Eugene, OR. "A deal breaker is at about 10%, but it also depends on the size of the item. If we are looking at a \$600 to \$700 walk-behind mower, I am going to walk away at 15 to 16%. On the larger items it is going to be 10%."

"I would say there is nothing that is not negotiable," adds Bill Jordan, general manager of Industrial Vehicle and Turf Sales in Pontiac, MI. Jordan says there are many ways to be creative during your negotiation. "Dealers can offer a financing program that does not kick in for seven months. This would be attractive to a contractor who purchases a mower in winter."

Jim Sherman, manager of Turf and In-

dustrial Equipment in Santa Clara, CA, says price is always negotiable. "Contractors are going to compare and shop around, especially with larger mowers."

Tom Glikes, manager of Garden Rental and Sales, Inc. in Gainesville, FL, believes price is the number-one concern of landscapers. But they're also interested in financing deals. "In the past, there was not a finance option, but now it's of major importance," he says.

Ron Weingartz believes a fair price is more important to contractors than the lowest price. Weingartz is general manager of the Farmington Hills, MI branch of Weingartz Supply Company. "We try to sell the whole package, which means a fair price backed up by parts and service," he says. "We explain to contractors that a fair price is important, but it's only a small part of doing business."

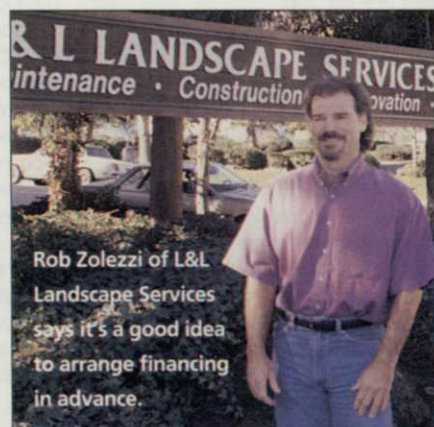
What's the best way to negotiate a mower purchase? Follow these steps the experts use:

### **Step one: do your homework**

Before you set foot in a dealer's showroom, take an inventory of your mowing equipment. Make projections for the next two to three years.

A complete mower inventory does three things. It allows the contractor to get an accurate picture of equipment needs and set realistic goals for the future. It gives you negotiation leverage with dealers and lending institutions. And it sends a message that you will be coming back for additional purchases, services and loans in the future.

"About 10 years ago, I figured out how



Rob Zolezzi of L&L Landscape Services says it's a good idea to arrange financing in advance.

much equipment we bought during the year from each vendor," recalls Rob Zolezzi, co-owner of L & L Landscape Services Inc. in Campbell, CA. After he projected his mower purchases for the next two or three years, he met with several dealers. "I said, 'If I buy 100% of my mowers from you, what kind of deal will you offer me?'" He says once a contractor establishes this pattern, he's likely to stay with the same vendor over the long haul.

Good planning works well for R.B. Stout Inc., an Akron, OH-based landscape contractor with 21 maintenance crews. "Every year, we put together an equipment budget based on our projected growth," says

Mike Roberts of R.B. Stout Inc., Akron, Ohio, likes being able to give new mowers a trial run under real work conditions.





# GUIDE

Mike Roberts, production supervisor. "Last year, we projected the addition of two maintenance crews, which required the purchase of additional equipment."

## Step two: know the product

Product knowledge is essential. Contractors need to know the advantages between brands and types of mowers, says Dennis Williams, field manager for Park Landscape Maintenance Inc. in Las Vegas, NV. "Make some phone calls for recommendations from other contractors, read trade magazines, attend equipment shows and examine manufacturer Web sites."

Product knowledge is power when you are meeting with your dealer. It sends a message to the dealer that you know what you're talking about.

Probably the best way to learn about a mower is to use a demonstration model. "Today's landscape contractors are stepping up to larger pieces of equipment, and it's more expensive," says Kevin Haines, vice president of sales at California Turf Toro's Southern California distributor. "More dealers need to provide demos for their customers." Unfortunately, Haines says many dealers don't have trailers to move equipment around.

"It's always helpful for dealers to bring by new mowers for us to use, but they need to let us test them during May when the grass is growing," says Roberts. "A test drive on the driveway during January doesn't do much for a contractor in Ohio."

Roberts cautions against quick decisions. Generally, any new piece of equipment will work great for the first month, he says. It's after the first month of service that you can really tell.

## Step three: learn negotiation skills

Strengthen your negotiation skills.

Books are an excellent tool prepare yourself for the process. *Give & Take: The Complete Guide to Negotiating Strategies and Tactics*, by Chester L. Karrass is a great book on negotiation. Thousands of dollars have been left on the table because buyers were not savvy enough in negotiation.

Remember, negotiation is not just a face-to-face matter. Special strategies for phone conversations and conflict resolution will help you.

Don't forget the most important negotiation skill of all — listening. We all like to talk (usually too much), but learn to listen. According to Chester Karrass, "Listening is the easiest way to recognize needs and discover facts. If you take the time to listen, you can't help learning. Listening is the one concession you can give that is guaranteed to get you more than you gave."

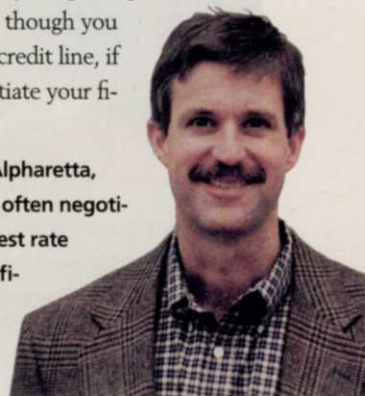
## Step four: arrange financing

Establish credit *before* you buy or lease your mowing equipment. Contractors with less than perfect credit who wait until the last possible moment could be looking at a horrible 18% interest rate. "Rather than financing your equipment through various institutions, try lumping your financing through one institution," advises Ben Gandy, landscape management division manager with LTI, an Alpharetta, GA-based landscape management company. "You can often negotiate a better interest rate by consolidating purchases."

With a new business, start by establishing a relationship with your banker. Explain how your business operates, its growth rate and goals for the coming years. Provide your banker with recommendations from your customers and a list of your key accounts. Stress that you want a long-term relationship.

"Before you meet with your dealer, set up a line of credit with the bank exclusively for equipment purchases," says Zolezzi. "That way, if you want to go out and buy a \$10,000 mower, all you have to do is call your banker and let him know. The whole point is to get everything set up in advance. Even though you may not use the credit line, if you wait to negotiate your fi-

**Ben Gandy, LTI, Alpharetta, GA, says you can often negotiate a better interest rate by lumping your financing through one institution.**



nance rate the day you buy the equipment, count on a higher interest rate."

The same thing applies for equipment leasing he says. In this case, you may be dealing with companies like G.E. Capital or SAFECO. "Set up financing with them in advance. If more contractors negotiated credit lines and financing in advance, they would save a great deal of money."

Dealers agree. "Unfortunately, many contractors do not have a close relationship with their bank," says Weingartz. "A strong relationship is especially important for the small and medium-sized contractors."

Bill Jordan sees a great deal of variability in interest rates — another reason to work things out in advance. "We work with several leasing companies, as well as several financing companies. The financing companies range from a high of 18% to a low of 11% interest," he says. "We find that established contractors usually work out their financing beforehand."



## Step five: lease or buy

Only you can make the right lease or buy decisions for your business. "Leasing may be the best option if a contractor puts a lot of hours on the equipment, while a conventional loan is usually a better choice for someone who really takes care of the equipment," says Weingartz. "A big plus for leasing is less capital is invested up

front; however, you are locked in with leasing and there are drawbacks for early pay out."

lease a lot because it means a lower monthly payment," says Zolezzi. "With leasing, you are paying 50% of the principal instead of the full principal in purchasing."

## Step six: visit the dealer

The next step will be the dealer. "If this is your first trip, let the dealer know you are interested in a long-term relationship," says Williams. "You also need to bring up

options are essential to your decision.

Here are few value-added items to ask about: pre-season discounts on parts (filters, belts, blades, etc.); discounts for volume purchases; return policy on unused parts or special orders; dealer pickup and delivery for service of mowers under warranty.

Training programs for your crew (safety, mower repair); no-charge delivery service for parts; in-field repair service; purchase bonus (for example, a catcher with every mower purchase); free loaners during repairs; discount for drop shipment of unassembled mowers.

Finance incentives (no pay, no interest for 90 days); open charge accounts for parts and service; dealer advice on new products and technology; demo models from the dealer and discounts for on-time payments.

## Step seven: choose the best bid

After you have received all your bids, examine each one. Make sure each dealer has provided you with a list of value-added options, along with his best price. If the dealer offered his financing program, compare interest rates and terms with your lending institution's finance arrangement. If the interest rate is lower than bank financing, ask your bank to meet it or offer you a lower rate.

This program has worked well for L & L Landscape. "After establishing this pattern, I've generally stayed with the same vendors year after year," says Zolezzi. "A lot of the large contractors are afraid to commit to one vendor, but I find if I commit all my mower business to one vendor, the result is better service."

The last phase of Step Seven is making the buy, possibly the easiest part of the whole process. By using a systematic approach to negotiation, you'll save money and keep your piece of mind. □

—Robert E. Reaves is with Irricom, a public relations and communications firm based in Austin, TX.



By buying smart, landscape contractors can keep their crews working with dependable commercial mowing equipment like this employee of LTI, and still stay within their equipment budgets.

front; however, you are locked in with leasing and there are drawbacks for early pay out."

"It seems like more people are leasing than purchasing for mowers in the \$15,000 plus range," notes Haines. "There are a number of lease packages out there, with interest rates from nine to 21%, depending on the state and the contractor's credit."

"The first thing you have to examine is how long you expect to have a piece of equipment," says Williams. "Based on the service life, ask yourself whether it is better fiscally to lease or buy." However, he urges contractors to be very careful about residuals in leases — things like damage, excess mileage and hours. "A lease makes sense when you are going to replace that mower within two to three years. Beyond that, purchasing is a better choice," advises Gandy.

Some contractors, like R.B. Stout, purchase all their mowers, while others like L&L Landscape Services prefer leasing. "I

some of the vendors you deal with and landscape projects you have worked on."

What if you need to purchase only one mower? "In this case, make sure you discuss your total purchasing plans for the year," notes Gandy. "This way, it gives the dealer an incentive to offer you a better deal to keep you coming back."

Here's a checklist for your meeting with the dealer:

- ▶ Discuss your current equipment status, along with your projections for the future.
- ▶ Tell the dealer you have arranged financing through your bank or leasing company.
- ▶ Ask about financing available through the dealer and compare with financing offered from the bank.
- ▶ Do not let low price be your single focus throughout the negotiation process.
- ▶ Ask the dealer to give you a bid.
- ▶ Assure the dealer that you are very interested in a fair price, but value-added





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## Buy mowers with maintenance in mind

*Don't wait until you buy equipment to decide how you'll maintain it. Whether you choose in-house or out-source, your strategy can pay off with longer life and higher efficiency.*

By MARK H. NEIDICH

**B**uying a mower isn't a simple decision. You have to match the equipment to your needs, budget and type of work you perform. Look at the properties you service and determine these before you decide:

- ▶ Characteristics of the work to be performed (large or small, easy or hard to maintain, mostly mowing or additional services needed, etc.)
- ▶ The size of the properties
- ▶ The type of terrain
- ▶ How quickly you want the work completed on each property
- ▶ How much capital is available.

When you have determined the type of mower you need and how much you can afford, it's time to make the next critical decision — how you will maintain it. Depending on the size of your operation, the type of equipment you buy and the state of your business, this decision can have a huge effect on how profitable and efficient you are.



### Buy for easy maintenance

Purchasing too large of a piece increases cost, while too small of a piece increases maintenance and reduces productivity. You'll get longer use and better return on investment by selecting the right piece of equipment for the job. This also will ensure a satisfactory maintenance history.

A good way to start is learn about your dealers and the type of equipment available to do the work. Take note that most manufacturers have distributors between them and the dealer, so look for dealers that have a strong relationship with their distributor, good parts people and a service department with qualified technicians to

**You have to make a decision about how to maintain your expensive mowing equipment, either in-house or contracted.**

perform warranty and/or service work.

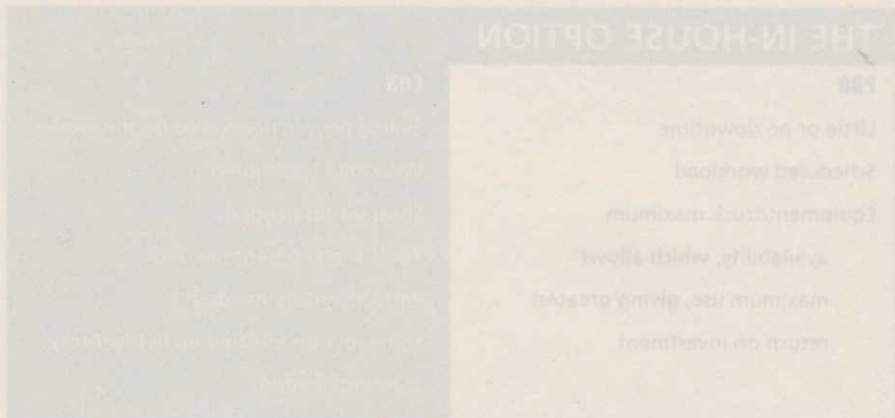
When you pick your equipment, it should be one of your dealer's most popular models. This helps to assure parts availability by the dealer. He also knows the machine, so he can tell you the pros and cons. His service department will also be familiar with that model.

### Standardize your equipment

I recommend you stay away from first-year equipment. Invariably, there will be engineering and production problems re-



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Dimension <sup>b</sup>	■	●	■	●	■	●	●	●
Team <sup>c</sup>	■	●	●	●	●	●	NR	NR
Ronstar <sup>d</sup>	●	■	NR	●	●	NR	NR	NR
Surflan <sup>e</sup>	■	■	■	●	▲	●	■	■

Level of control    ● Medium    ▲ Medium-High    ■ High    NR Not registered

<sup>a</sup>Novartis    <sup>b</sup>Rohm and Haas Co.    <sup>c</sup>Dow AgroSciences    <sup>d</sup>Rhône-Poulenc



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# MOWING guide

lated to new designs. And as the owner, you will be in the middle of warranty problems, increased downtime and lower employee productivity, which may all result in higher costs for you. When looking at brands of equipment, commonalty allows you to standardize maintenance proce-

can be strengthened

- ▶ parts life can be monitored
- ▶ parts interchange can be increased and inventory costs lowered
- ▶ vendor repair can be more easily measured
- ▶ mechanics can be trained as a group

turer recommendations to initiate scheduled maintenance intervals and apply historical data on breakdowns and use to fine-tune the maintenance cycle.

## Maintenance: In-house or outsource?

There are many reasons pro and con for in-house or outsourced fleet maintenance: the size of your fleet, the type of equipment, complexity, expected life, warranty and hours operated per year. Does your equipment dealer offer a service agreement for your particular type of equipment? Do you have a shop area, tools and equipment available for repair, parts inventory and qualified people? All this plays a part in determining if you will outsource completely, do it part-time, or make it full-time in-house.

The best method is a balance between in-house and vendor maintenance. While I think in-house maintenance is more desirable than outside, remember that work tends to expand to fill the allotted time. With in-house maintenance, time limits must be set. Also, a complete maintenance shop is expensive — the space, tools and people all add to the cost. Peaks and valleys in the workload complicate scheduling and may add to the costs.

Also consider that certain technical skills are increasingly harder to obtain and more expensive to hire.

The best alternative is to evaluate your current capabilities and survey vendor locations that will complement and support your operation. This will reduce your shop costs, reduce your need for technical skills and allow you to use your in-house operation in the most productive manner. □

*Mark Neidich is fleet manager at Groundmasters, Cincinnati, OH, where he is responsible for a 45 trucks and 400 pieces of equipment, including tractors, turf spraying equipment, commercial mowers, small power equipment, snow plows, salt spreaders, trailers, and landscape renovation equipment.*

## THE IN-HOUSE OPTION

### PRO

- Little or no downtime
- Scheduled workload
- Equipment/truck maximum availability, which allows maximum use, giving greatest return on investment

### CON

- Skilled people needed to do the work
- Workload variations
- Shop set-up needed
- Tools & equipment needed
- Parts inventory needed
- Some investment tied up in inventory
- Training needed

## THE OUTSOURCE OPTION

### PRO

- Don't need highly skilled technical people
- No training necessary
- Warranty on work performed
- No special tools, parts required
- Parts inventory dollars free for other uses

### CON

- Time travel adds to maintenance costs
- More complex scheduling
- Downtime
- Need to qualify vendor

dures, stock fewer parts and train and monitor in-house or vendor labor.

Standardization also helps hold costs your constant. If and when abnormal repairs occur, you can apply this to your other units and inspect for similar features. Specific advantages to standardization include:

- ▶ operators can be trained as a group
- ▶ productivity can be more effectively measured
- ▶ manufacturer support in warranty

▶ short-term costs are more easily measured and long-term costs are more accurately predicted.

▶ cost comparisons can be made with similar types of equipment.

Once you have the right equipment, maintaining it for maximum performance is integral to low life-cycle cost. Planned maintenance, whether it's performed by a vendor or in-house, will give you equipment availability and maximize use, at minimum cost. Fleets should use manufac-