



HE MOWER MAKES IT HAPPEN.

Even when the economy is good, contractors are looking for ways to do more with less. The current economic conditions have simply reinforced the need to run their businesses more efficiently, to find a way to get more productivity from their crews and, of course, from their equipment.

Every year manufacturers try to do their part by releasing new mower models. They find new ways to tweak engines to adjust to rising fuel costs and contractors' demands to get more from their machines — from ease of maintenance to fuel efficiency to run time. And occasionally they come up with a game changer like the stand-on or the zero-turning-radius rider.

But when all the trappings are stripped away leaving only the most basic considerations, there are two factors that take top consideration over purchase price.

“Quality of cut and reliability would be the

two most important features,” says Brett Miller, owner, Brett Miller Landscaping, Ogden, UT.

While nothing at this year's GIE+EXPO suggested contractors will revamp their mower fleets, there were updates and new models that offer contractors and their crews the ability to get more for their time and investments. (For the latest offerings, see our mower roundup beginning on page 18). As contractors are ready to bring new machines into rotation, they will find more mowers that offer alternative fuels and other efficiencies.

Efficiency trends

Contractors face a constant barrage of increasing costs: fuel, labor and materials. But once they've mastered routing and cut the dead weight from their crews and back office staff, there's not much more in the way of expenses to get rid of. And while you might be holding on to the equipment a little longer, sooner or later, maintenance and the associated downtime costs are going to outweigh the value of a new machine.

For the past several years, mower manufacturers have emphasized the energy and time-saving aspects of the their products.

“We're always looking for new technology in everything,” says Jason Laws, landscape manager, Elite Grounds, Pleasant Grove, UT. “It all contributes to the bottom line.”

Like other manufacturers, at Milwaukee, WI-based Briggs & Stratton, maker of Snapper mowers, the focus has been on improving performance, decreasing emissions and enhancing the durability of its mowers.

“All of these trends add up to increased productivity by making sure the landscaper has the right unit with the right features for the job, which results in being able to mow more acres per hour,” says Laura Timm, director of corporate communications for Briggs & Stratton.

While increased efficiency in engines might be de rigueur today, a style introduced several years ago is still making its way onto trucks and trailers.

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Brett Miller



Jason Laws

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For Mark Teegen, the fleet manager at Acres Group, Wauconda, IL, “the stand-on mower is definitely changing our industry.”

One way in which contractors are looking to save money and time is by finding tools that can multi-task or reduce equipment load and space. The

stand-on is that tool for Teegen.

“We’re trending toward stand-on mowers because they seem to be more efficient,” he says. “If we can replace a walk-behind and a rider with a stander, that’s the thing we like.”

Having one mower that can do the job of two means less labor and maintenance, both expenses that drop

straight to the bottom line.

“We cut down the amount of equipment we need to maintain a property by using a different type of mower,” Teegen says. “Functionality is No. 1.”

Attachments

There are several factors contractors consider when looking at new mowers.

One factor that manufacturers have been focused on is versatility. The more jobs crews can get done with one piece of equipment, the more efficient and productive they will be.

“Using zero-turn maneuverability to perform edging, leaf blowing, vacuum collection, aeration, snow removal and spray application in addition to mowing results in maximum efficiency, superior customer satisfaction and saves time, fuel and labor costs for increased profitability,” says Stan Guyer, president, The Grasshopper Co., Moundridge, KS.

“Landscapers can provide full service to their accounts and efficiently optimize labor without having to maintain a myriad of stand-alone implements by using their front-mount mower to power close-coupled implements with all the benefits of zero-turn maneuverability,” Guyer continues.

Of course they can only accomplish that goal if attachments are easy to mount and change.

“Ease of operation is one of the top concerns for commercial operators, as less time training and learning new equipment impacts the bottom line,” says Allen Baird, product manager, Cub Cadet, Cleveland, OH. “New equipment that works on a variety of terrain is also important. For those with customers across a large geographic area, it is very important that tools function properly on all landscapes.”

Alternative fuels

As gasoline prices near and surpass \$3 gallon, there seems to be some renewed interest in alternative energy options.

According to *LM's Mower Survey*, the split on operating mowers that consume alternative fuels is nearly

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COVER STORY

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even. Just over one in 10 (11%) say an alternative fuel is “very important” when they make mower purchasing decisions. Another 38% believe it is “somewhat important.” The remaining 51% say owning a mower that uses propane, electric, bio diesel or some other power source “doesn’t play a factor” in purchasing decisions.

Teegen would like to see electric mowers one day become the norm.

“If they made a stander that could go half a day on a battery and we could charge it at lunchtime and then finish the day with it that would be pretty cool,” Teegen says.

For his part, Miller says he would like to see a more cost effective diesel mower. The general rule of thumb for diesels is that the rest of the mower will wear out before the diesel engine does.

For now, Acres Group is looking to replace some of their two-cycle equip-

Acres Group replaces mowers every 4-5 years, says Fleet Manager Mark Teegen.

ment with electric alternatives. The mowers will have to wait until the technology is more developed.

“We and our customers like to have options and understand that alternative fuels are becoming more popular,” Baird says. “We are researching opportunities to implement more alternative fuel-driven products and feel that our current line of propane, high-efficiency diesel, gasoline and even new lithium ion equipment satisfies the current market demand.”

Grasshopper is looking at the diesel option.

“Diesel is a sensible alternative to ethanol and other alternative fuels because its greater power density allows completing more work in less time,” Guyer says. “This adds to the fuel savings and emissions reduction realized simply by the efficiency of the diesel engine itself. Compared to gasoline,



propane or LNG, diesel uses as little as .6 or .7 gallons per hour and can save up to \$1,750 per 1,000 hours in fuel costs alone when prices near \$2.50 per gallon.”

That said, the most popular alterna-

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tive fuel is still propane.

According to Rob Torango, landscape manager, Elite Grounds, Pleasant Grove, UT, it comes down to making sure an alternative fuel delivers the same performance as gasoline. Environmental impacts and cost are factors in the decision making, but ultimately he wants to know if the mower can stand up to daily workloads. "It comes down to power; if it bogs out going up a hill or cutting through wet grass," Torango says. "We don't want to become complacent. Everything is worth looking at."

Concerning propane, statistics from the Propane Education and Resource Council (PERC) say:

- › Propane is the leading alternative fuel in the U.S., and the nation's third most common vehicle fuel, after gasoline and diesel.
- › More than 29 models of propane-fueled commercial lawn mowers are

available today from more than 12 industry-leading brands.

- › Propane-fueled mowers reduce greenhouse gas emissions by almost 50% over gasoline; and carbon monoxide emissions by more than 80% compared with gasoline-powered mowers.
- › Propane is one of the cleanest fossil fuels. It is an approved clean alternative fuel under the Clean Air Act of 1990.
- › A proven model exists for propane refueling. The forklift market has established a fuel delivery and cylinder exchange structure that is directly applicable to the commercial mower market.

Know when to hold 'em

While the trend toward efficiency has not abated, there are some things the economy has had a direct impact on. It seems contractors are willing to hold on to their mowers a little longer — the economy



Rob Torango

has had an affect on mower purchasing habits. Some 65% of respondents to *Landscape Management's* Mower Survey said budget constraints have impacted their mower replacement schedule.

Acres Group has about 370 rider, stand-on and walk-behind mowers and another 100 push mowers. The company currently replaces its mowers every four to five years, Teegen says. He would like to move that to every three or four years.

Acres Group's replacement time is pretty typical according to the survey. Only 14% of respondents replace their mowers less than three years old. Another 13% change mowers out after three years. The largest majority (43%) replaces mowers every three to five years, while members of the next largest group (30%) keep their mowers more than five years. **LM**

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DIXIE CHOPPER

Dixie Chopper's Xcalober propane-powered zero-turn machine features a 990-cc (approximately 30-hp) Generac LP engine fueled by two 40-lb. cylinders (7.9 gal.) that utilizes higher compression pistons



It's all about productivity. Here, *Landscape Management* offers a roundup of what manufacturers say are their best tools for contractors looking to save time and money.

and advanced timing for fuel efficiency. The Xcaliber, available with a 66- or 74-in. deck, cuts approximately 6 acres per hour.

DixieChopper.com

DIXON

Dixon's lawn tractors include the D22KH46 with a 22-hp, twin-cylinder Kohler engine and a two-blade, 46-in. cutting width; the D25KH48 with a 25-hp, twin-cylinder Kohler engine and 48-in. cutting width; and the D26KH54 with a 26-hp, twin-cylinder Kawasaki FR engine and a 54-in. cutting width. All units have hydrostatic pedal control transmission, electric push button blade engagement, cruise control and comfort features. Dixon-ZTR.com



EXMARK

The propane-powered Lazer Z X-Series mowers, with 29-hp Kawasaki V-twin propane engines, are EPA-certified and feature sealed fuel systems with 43.5-lb. tanks that can hold 10.3 gal. of propane and deliver 5 to 6 hours of run time. They are available with 60-in. UltraCut™ Series 6 cutting decks, and include welded, heavy-duty 1.5"x3" tubular steel unibodies. Exmark.com



FERRIS

The IS 3100Z has an 895-cc Briggs & Stratton Vanguard Big Block V-Twin engine with a 72-in. deck or 61-in. iCD cutting system. 2011 models offer contoured seats with optional suspension platforms. This, combined with Ferris' patented four-wheel suspension system, can boost quality-of-cut and comfort. This propane-powered mower offers reduced emissions (up to 30% less) and is certified to conform to NFPA 58-2002. With a top ground speed of 12 mph, the IS 3100Z can mow up to 7.2 acres per hour. FerrisIndustries.com



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MOWERS DRIVING EFFICIENCY

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GRASSHOPPER

The 226V MidMount mower features a 26-hp, professional series V-twin engine, as well as an advanced debris management system, 12-gal. fuel capacity and forward mowing speeds of up to 9 mph (5 acres/hour). It's also equipped with

a commercial-grade Parker pump and wheel motor drive system said to increase long-term value, and robotically welded, fabricated 5.5-in.-deep cutting decks with optional Down Discharge mulching and PowerVac capability. Other features include a contoured cushioned seat with coil-spring suspension, foldable armrests, HydraSmooth dampened dual steering levers that adjust to the operator's reach, and a shock-absorbing footrest. GrasshopperMower.com



GRAVELY

The Gravely Pro-Ride has a high-volume tunnel deck for mowing tall, thick or wet grass. Made of 7-gauge welding construction, the tunnel deck features a 149-sq.-in. discharge opening, overlapping blades and baffle-free front design. The zero-turn features a 54-, 60- or 66-in. deck with a 27-hp (31-hp for the 66 in. model) Kawasaki FX engine. Twin hydrostatic drives and top-mounted cooling fans are said to keep these mowers 37° degrees cooler. Gravely.com

HUSQVARNA

With the PZ line of zero-turns, Husqvarna focused on five areas: productivity, cut, durability, comfort and serviceability. Propane was used as the fuel source because it's said to have lower costs, reduced environmental impact, fewer engine repairs and potential tax benefits. With a 29-hp Kawasaki LPG series engine and optional dual 33-lb. tanks that hold approximately 14 gal., the PZ6029PFX offers all day operation. Husqvarna.com



HUSTLER TURF EQUIPMENT

Hustler's X-One and Super Z mowers have VX4 deck technology, with four "V's": Velocity: Tunnel in front of blades and wider discharge opening moves grass through faster. Volume: Higher air and grass volume throughput means less material in the cutting chambers and higher ground speeds. Vacuum: Higher cut quality as grass is better lifted during cutting. Versatility: The adjustable front inner wall is said to optimize performance in all grass conditions. HustlerTurf.com



JACOBSEN

The Jacobsen R-311 Turbo triple deck rotary mower works well in challenging, large turf conditions. It features a turbo-charged Kubota V2403-M engine at 60-hp. With a 134-in. cutting width and a 7.7 mph mowing speed, productivity is 10.4 acres an hour. Decks are available at 64-in., 99-in. and 134-in. (all decks down). Jacobsen.com



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