

Owner's Report On Best, Worst Riding Lawn Mowers

Are you satisfied with your present riding mower? How could it be improved? What accessories do you use with your mower? Have you modified your mower in any way?

These are some questions we asked riding lawn mower owners in an effort to highlight those mowers that perform with flying colors and to pinpoint the "lemons" that fail because of poor performance, or failure of the dealer or company to provide service.

Here's how our survey shaped up:

Basil E. Davis, Rockford, Ohio: Basil's disappointed with his 1998 **Ranch King** mower equipped with 42-in. deck and powered by a 14.5 hp Briggs and Stratton engine.

"I'd check it out a lot better before I'd buy another one since there are so many weak points," he says. "For one thing, it has plastic zerks on the wheels, which soon broke off and were lost. When you change oil, it runs back all over the mower, making a big mess. When you back up, it stops. When my wife tries to start it, she has to lean forward on the seat to reach the brake pedal and then there's not enough weight on the seat to keep the shut-off button engaged.

"I've already rewired the machine so I can back up without having the motor quit on me. I plan to change the zerks and oil spout soon."

James C. McGowan, Russell Springs, Ky.: "The blades bend too easily because they're too narrow at one point," says James about his 1996 **Lowes** mower equipped with 42-in. deck and powered by an 18 hp engine. "Also, the gear ratio in reverse is too slow, as are 1 through 4 forward gears. The only gears suitable for mowing are 5 and 6."

Junior Roberson, Brookfield, Mo.: "I have 300 hours on this mower with no problems," says Junior, pleased with his 1995 **Grasshopper** 616 mower equipped with a 48-in. deck.

"It saves a lot of time because of the zero turn radius. I bought it on a winter sale and not only saved a lot of money, but got \$200 in credit for parts and repairs as well. I bought an electric lift kit for the deck with the credit I received and it's been working out better than the hand-operated lever it had originally. It operates with a switch you operate either with your foot or by hand. I had to fabricate a couple pieces to make it fit the 48-in. deck.

"My only complaint with the mower is that it needs better traction on soft ground."

DuWayne Discher, Clinton, Minn.: DuWayne's just bought his third Deere mower, a 1998 **Deere** 425 equipped with 54-in. deck and all-wheel steering.

"It's not cheap, but I couldn't be happier with it," he says. "The turning radius of 7 in. allows

me to do most of the trimming without getting off the mower. It's comfortable to operate and is extremely dependable so I never have to worry about downtime. I can't think of another mower that will cut as much grass as I've got and still do a perfect job."

Dick Combs, Worth, Mo.: Dick has a few problems with his 1995 **Yardman** 20 mower equipped with 46-in. deck.

"It needs more grease zerks so you can lube the wheels and deck," he says. "The steering drag link broke and had to be repaired and beefed up. Also, the end of the steering arm broke twice (I have a rough yard). It's been replaced with an aircraft uniball and shoulder bolt to solve the problem."

Otherwise, he's generally satisfied with the mower.

"The 20 hp Kohler engine delivers ample power and it's a pressure lubed engine. The hydrostatic drive works great, too. All controls are accessible and easy to reach. The 46-in. deck is not too much for the engine so ground speed is variable at the operator's discretion."

Arlan D. Lothe, Sun Prairie, Wis.: "It's fast, fun and simple to operate," says Arlan, the satisfied owner of a 1998 **Great Dane** 25 hp mower equipped with 52-in. deck and zero turn radius (Great Dane Power Equipment Inc., P.O. Box 104, Sellersburg, Ind. 47172; ph 812 246-8770). "It's also built like a tank and the leaf vacuum works great.

"There isn't a thing the manufacturer could do to improve upon it."

James Nelson, Foley, Minn.: James likes the way his 1994 **Dynamark** E 431 mower equipped with 43-in. deck runs and starts, but says there are problems in the way it cuts his 2-acre lawn.

"It has two blades. The one side cuts lower than other, leaving a narrow strip in the middle. The higher side doesn't cut dandelions or white clover tops at all. We've changed blades and sharpened them over the years but that hasn't helped. I had it into the dealer and they measured and told me nothing was wrong and I just had to get used to the two blade cutting system. But we've had two **Ford** 7 hp mowers with two blades for 20 years and they cut great.

Belly-Mounted 80-In. Mower "Turns On A Dime"

"It's the best mowing machine I've ever used," says Ed Hills, who belly-mounted an 80-in. Woods 3-pt. mower under an Allis-Chalmers WD tractor.

The South Haven, Mich., farmer used a 6-ft. Woods pull-type mower before but he didn't like the limited turning radius and the fact that he had to constantly turn around to watch the mower.

"This arrangement allows me to turn on a dime and visibility is great," Hills says.

To mount the 1950's mower under the 1949 Allis, Hills turned the deck around and reversed the direction of the four cutting blades.

He set the pto drive further out to the left of the deck so it runs beside the tractor frame rather than underneath so he can raise the deck. He can raise the deck up to 8 in. off the ground.

He made a lift mechanism for the mower out of heavy 2 by 2-in. angle iron.

Hills uses the rig to mow 100 acres around his farm.

"I'm mowing something every few days."



Hills turned the deck around and reversed direction of the blades.

he says. "It's performed without a hitch since I converted it four years ago."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ed Hills, 10121 60th St., South Haven, Mich. 49090 (ph 616 253-4575).

"Meantime, I make do with criss-cross cutting and going in different directions each time I mow."

Kathy Smith, Brodhead, Wis.: "Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I don't like machinery with a lot of plastic on it," says Kathy, who owns a 1995 **Cub Cadet**. "The hood hinge pins broke and the hood scratches easily. Also, I have to buy Cub Cadet parts - oil filters, belts, etc. - and you really have to pay for the name."

On the positive side, Kathy says the bagger she uses on the tractor works well.

"We cut the safety bar off of the grass outlet so grass blows into bags better and so there's less clogging."

Bill Hendrickson, Winchester, Ind.: "It does the nicest job of mowing of any mower I've ever used," says Bill, who uses a 1955 Ford 660 tractor equipped with a 1994 **Woods** RM660 mower to mow 5 acres of lawn.

"For a 72-in. mower, it hardly windrows grass at all. It's heavily built and I've put no dollars into repairs on the mower in four years."

Irvin Loe, McHenry, N. Dak.: Irvin says the muffler on his 1996 **Craftsman** mower equipped with 42-in. deck and 15 hp motor is a little loud. "Otherwise, it has good power and hydrostatic drive, which is a nice feature."

Boyt D. Young, Dallas, S. Dak.: "The engine's reliable and simple to repair and it cuts grass or weeds like a hot knife through butter," says Boyt about his 1993 **Snapper** 10 hp mower.

"It could be designed a little heavier in the steering system and front end, including the tie rods," he says. "And the muffler should be relocated so it doesn't blow hot air on the tires."

Lester Skinner, Marmec, Okla.: "I'd recommend one to anybody," says Lester, proud owner of a 1998 **Deere** 325 equipped with 48-in. deck.

"I've only got 25 hours on it but I'm extremely pleased with the ease with which it mows."

James Dale, Lynd, Minn.: A 1996 **Dixon** ZTR 3362 mower has given James his share of trouble.

"The design is outdated, the two-lever steering system is tiring to use, and it's built too light to use around anything except the house," he says. "Also, it has a Mickey Mouse system for tightening the mower belt. The belt broke three weeks after the warranty expired. The dealer charged me over \$30 for a belt and another \$30 to install it. I later found out I could have bought a belt at an auto parts store for \$15. I built a better belt tightener for the mower to make belts last longer.

"If all that's not enough, the bagger attachment plugs whenever there are less-than-ideal mowing

"Supermower" Cuts 3-Acre Lawn in 1 1/2 Hours

Jule Jacobson built a zero turn radius lawn mower out of an old hydrostatic drive swather that he says is much more maneuverable than any mower he's ever used before.

The "Supermower", as Jacobson calls it, was on exhibit at the recent Minnesota Inventors Congress at Redwood Falls, Minn.

He started with a 1983 **Owatonna** 260 swather. Jacobson chose the **Owatonna** because it has hydrostatic drive and four wheels, which give it more stability than a three-wheel model. It's still powered by the original **Ford** 6-cyl. engine.

The body of the swather was lowered 13 in. to lower the center of gravity. Both rear and front drive wheel axles were narrowed by 38 in. so wheels would track inside the 7-ft. wide mower deck.

Jacobson bought a new **Befco** mower for the project. In order to push the mower ahead of the tractor (it can be either pushed

or pulled), a 3-pt. hitch was fashioned out of flat iron and square tubing. It's equipped with a turnbuckle-style top link for height adjustment of up to 30 in. The two lift arms operate independently of each other to provide oscillation independent of the swather, allowing the mower to follow contour of the ground.

The **Befco** mower was ideal for the project because it's designed so you can put the drive gear on either side of the driven gear, depending on which direction the pto shaft turns. The swather's header drive rotates in the opposite direction of a tractor pto, Jacobson notes, so he just moved the gear to the opposite side.

"It's a big powerful, highly maneuverable rig that works perfectly," he says. "I can mow three acres in an hour and a half, which is a big time savings compared with the 6-ft. **Woods** mower belly-mounted on an **Allis** C tractor I used before."



Jacobson's "Supermower" consists of a 7-ft. wide mower deck mounted on a swather.

Welding and fabrication of Jacobson's "Supermower" was done by Darrin Hatleveld in his farm shop.

Out-of-pocket expense was \$4,000, includ-

ing \$750 for the swather.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jule Jacobson, P.O. Box 53, Porter, Minn. 56280 (ph 507 296-4514).