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3/4-ton 2-WD pickup equipped with a Cummins diesel engine. "I bought this pickup used in 1998. It's fuel efficient and has never been babied."

James J. Newell, Jonesville, Mich.: "I'm well pleased with my three Milwaukee hand tools which include a 1/2-in. Magnum drill motor, super sawzall, and 4 1/2-in. hand grinder. I've used them many hours with no problems."

"My 2004 Ford F-150 pickup and 2000 Mercury car are also best buys."

Lynn Saxton, Ovid, Mich.: "My 2006 Land Pride Razor Z 52 riding mower is a best buy."

Gerald Shaw, Manchester, Mich.: "My 2005 Kubota L-2800 tractor equipped with an 8 by 4 transmission is my best buy. It works great for heavy duty work. I also own a 1998 Kubota B7300 model with 1,500 hours on it. It runs perfect and hasn't required any repairs. We use it to grade our half-mile long driveway."

Don Hillsman, El Dorado Springs, Mo.: "Our 40 by 60-ft. Sentinal clear span metal building is well constructed. The contractor who built it said there were only four bolt holes that didn't line up in the entire building. It went through a big snowstorm without any snow getting inside the building."

"My Poulan 16-in. chainsaw is a worst buy. It's equipped with a finger-tightening chain, and it doesn't work. I can't keep the chains tight."

Jim Cole, Ottawa, Kansas: "My Parmak 6-volt Solar Pak electric fence charger is rugged and dependable. We use it to keep in Longhorn cattle, horses and goats."

Shad Fincher, Bloomberg, Texas: "My DeWalt Port-A-Band portable handheld metal cutting bandsaw is the best tool I've ever bought. Once you learn how to use it the bands last a long time. When cutting pipe I only cut through one side, then roll it over until all the sides are cut - otherwise the blades will snap. It works so good that I haven't had to use my cutting torch in a long time, even though I've built some major projects."

Ron Yanos: "My worst buy is a Water Right water softener. It hasn't worked right since it was installed three years ago. I spent money on parts that don't work, yet the company seems to care less. We had to replace some of the fixtures because of our hard water. We're totally disgusted with this water softener. It doesn't work."

Norman K. Ensley, Tipp City, Ohio: Norman's happy with the 2004 Cyclone Rake leaf mulcher and bagger that he tows behind his riding mower. "It does a great job and has saved me many hours of labor. We have several large oak trees that produce leaves up to 11 inches long. The Cyclone Rake handles them with ease, as well as small twigs and branches. It comes with a 17-ft. long hose attachment for picking up leaves under bushes and wherever the mower can't reach. The blower has a two-point hookup which makes it easy to back up."

"The downside to the hose is the pickup tube - the handles are positioned too low, which takes a toll on my back. I made some modifications, adding a new handle which allows me to stand more erect."

Fred DesBarres, Canning, Nova Scotia: "My Deere LX 279 lawn and garden tractor equipped with a single stage snowblower is my worst buy. I use it to clear my driveway. My complaint is with the snowblower attachment. It has had problems with broken welds, a stripped pulley, and worn out belts. The snowblower has trouble clearing snow that's the least bit wet or heavy. The blower should

be built heavier, and its single stage design is inadequate."

Lloyd Conrad, Greenfield, Wis.: "My Swisher 40-in. pull-behind mower equipped with an 8 hp Briggs & Stratton engine is my best buy. We operate a small apple orchard and live in the center of it, so my wife wants the orchard to look like a park. We use Roundup around the base of the trees, and by using a low offset mower pulled by a riding mower we're able to get under the trees. Keeping the grass mowed short also helps keep rodents under control."

Grant England, Gales Creek, Oregon: A Kubota 3400 tractor fitted with ag tires and equipped with a model 463 loader and backhoe rates as Grant's "best buy". "This tractor almost acts like a track loader. I used it to dig out a 1/4-acre spring-fed pond. Most of the pond is only 2 to 3 ft. deep, but about one third of it is 6 ft. deep or more. Thank goodness for the ag tires, which along with hydrostatic drive make it easy for this tractor to climb out of the thickest, stickiest mud I've ever seen."

Andrew Burke, Callahan, Fla.: Andrew's the satisfied owner of a 1979 Ford Ranger/Lariat F-350 "camper special" pickup. "I bought this pickup to haul firewood and to tow a trailer. It's the strongest, toughest, and most comfortably stable truck I've ever owned. It's far tougher and more stable than my newer 1998 model."

"My Troy-Bilt commercial walk-behind mower equipped with a 42-in. deck is my worst buy. The blades were timed not to hit each other, using a timing belt that worked similar to a car's timing belt. However, the belt would jump time every time I hit a stick or small rock, etc., which caused the blades to hit each other and get hung up. Another problem is the safety lever for the drive wheel was located on the opposite side of the discharge chute, so I had to keep my hand against the fence if I was trimming close to it."



John Pershing, Westlake, Oregon: "I really like my Mingo Marker for measuring and marking logs for firewood (ph 800 322-4539). It accurately measures and marks on any surface fast. You position the marker at the beginning of the log to be marked and roll the tool's notched wheel down the length of the log. As you roll it, the device clearly marks the log at the precise measured increments with an easy-to-see paint mark. It's a quick and easy way to mark the log so it can be cut to the desired length, and results in more uniform and efficient yields of firewood."

"My 2004 Dodge Ram 1500 pickup is my best buy. It just turned 65,000 miles. I've used it to tow horse trailers and to haul hay and firewood. The only problem was with an engine light that keeps going on, but that problem was resolved when I bought a new gas cap."

On the minus side, "My Ryobi 825R 4-cycle weed/grass trimmer is my worst buy. The problem was the string head would pull the string back into itself. The company wouldn't honor the warranty, even though the string head failed the very first time I used it."

Showman's Pitch Catches Editor's Eye

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

There's something for everybody at most big farm shows but the showmen are what I enjoy most. You know. The guys with the gadgets none of us can live without.

I recently stopped to listen to a pitch for a fluxless brazing rod. The showman said it could mend broken toys, patch a tear in a pop can, or fix bashed thread on a bolt, all with a torch and his fluxless brazing rods.

Buy a package of 25 for \$59.95, and you could save thousands of dollars. Think how happy you can make your kids, your wife, your dad or mother! With a torch, and these aluminum repair rods, you can do almost anything!

Of course like any good showman, he can fill your brain with numbers while bedazzling your eye with skill. Joints made with his fluxless rods have a tensile strength of 45,000 psi, handle an impact of 43 lbs., and have a shear strength of 31,000 psi.

Before I know it, I'm saying "Give me a package. I'm sold."

Do they really work? I take my package home to try. Of course that means I have to get a new bottle of propane for my torch. I can't find the torch head, so I have to get one of those, too.

I rip a hole in a galvanized funnel just to see if I can fix it. First lesson learned. There's a fine line between heating galvanized metal up enough to patch it and melting a hole in it. It seems to melt at the same temperature as the rods. A few more tries and I have the hole patched...with a great big glob of slag.

Copper pipe doesn't melt so fast so I try that. Last year I used lengths of copper pipe for plant stakes. A nail driven through left a pair of opposing holes, which I used as seats for hog rings. The copper didn't look bad in the garden, and twine tied through the hog rings held up the plants.

I figured with my fluxless brazing rods, I could make them look even better. This time



Showgoers check out fluxless brazing rods at a recent show. Editor Jim Ruen could not resist the sales pitch.

I used a chisel to slice the copper pipe open enough for a closed hog ring or washer to set in. All I had to do was heat them up and set a rod against the two hot surfaces. As it melted, the ring or washer would be "welded" in place.

Lesson 2. The metal has to be really hot so the rod melts on contact. If the rod gets too close to the fire first, the pore structure of the metal must be open for the rod material to adhere.

Lesson 3. You need a steady hand to hold the torch with one hand and the rod with the other. Needless to say, laying a bead with the rod isn't as easy as it looks.

My problems with the rods were mine. They actually seem to work very well. The directions that come with them are clear and warn against most of the mistakes I made.

I was very impressed with the strength of the welds I completed. Will I use them again? Whenever I get the chance, and whenever my hand is steady.

Most of all, I can't wait for my next farm show so I can watch the fluxless brazing rod showman showing me how easy it is to do what he does.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Mid-AM Marketing, 3144 Hwy. 159, Nortonville, Kansas 66060 (ph 913 886-2747; fax 913 886-2747; www.mid-ammktg.net).

David Hamilton, New Castle, Ind.: David's happy with his Marcland automatic draw-off system for a maple syrup evaporator (Schroon Lake, N.Y. ph 518 532-7922; marcland@bluemoo.net). The instrument displays pan temperature, barometric pressure, boiling point and syrup draw-off temperature. "This product allows me to produce quality maple syrup without having to constantly watch the evaporator. I just set the desired temperature and the auto draw-off will release the finished product when it reaches that temperature."

W. F. Hohmann, Fredericksburg, Texas: "My Ryobi string trimmer starts easy, but the string is almost impossible to replace. It's impossible to remove the spool. One feature I like is that I can attach other tools by removing the forward part of the shaft. I attached a pole saw and used it to trim tree branches up to 2 in. thick."

Phil Ruzicka, Kaufman, Texas: "My 2001 Kubota M9000 tractor is my worst buy. The problem is the air conditioner was designed in Japan and can't stand up to our hot summers. Whenever the temperature goes above 95 degrees, I forget about using the air conditioner and just open the windows in the cab."

Chris Reinke, Morrison, Tenn.: "My best buy is my 2006 Mahindra 6500 tractor. It's well built and made entirely of metal with no plastic. I bought it to side dress corn and to spray crops, but find that it also works great for cutting and baling hay and for doing other jobs that I'd normally expect a larger tractor to do. It handles all of these jobs with ease."

Elmer Goheen, Hillman, Mich.: "I've

been a pipe smoker for 55 years and have bought several pipes from Thompson Cigar Co. of Tampa, Fla. (www.thompsoncigar.com). They have excellent quality at a reasonable price. It's hard to find any kind of pipe in my rural area. For years I've bought pipes from a K-Mart store 25 miles away, where there's no selection and poor quality. Thompson doesn't offer a large selection of pipes, but what they do offer have excellent workmanship and high quality. Prices range from \$30 to \$40."

Bill Woolley, Caledon, Ontario: "My 1984 Ford 3610 2-WD, 42 hp diesel tractor is the best tractor I've ever owned. It has more than 5,300 hours on it, yet all I've replaced are the tires and water pump. It's now on its third battery. This tractor starts easy during the winter, is well balanced, and burns clean even while pulling a heavy load. Also, it doesn't use any oil."

Ted Luckenbaugh, Abbottstown, Penn.: Ted's impressed with his Kubota L345 DT loader tractor. "I was told that 'blue belly' Kubotas were built like tanks, and they were right. This tractor has 34 hp, but I've used 40 to 45 hp loader tractors that didn't perform as well as this one."

Danny Riley, Greenbrier, Tenn.: "My 1998 DR trimmer/mower equipped with a 6 1/2 hp OHV Intek Briggs & Stratton engine starts easy and works fantastic. I use it to trim borders and cut tall weeds, and I can even use it to mow my yard. The saw blade attachment works good for cutting small saplings or thick weeds and briars."

Doug Foster, Ely, Minn.: "It's a good, well balanced machine with a simple design," re-