

Power-Lift Puts Down-Pressure On Blade

Add this electric cylinder lift to your ATV and you'll be able to use a snow blade in winter and summer.

"It applies down pressure so you can grade driveways. It fits any ATV and blade," says Brad Fromm, inventor, Mibar Products in Greenfield, Wis. He designed the lift system five years ago after breaking an electric winch when plowing 6 in. of snow.

Frustrated with winch systems that tend to float over the snow, he focused on electric cylinders, which are gear-driven instead of hydraulic. That makes them cheaper to operate and able to work well in subzero temperatures. With the ability to push the blade to the ground, the plow can also be used for leveling dirt and doing other chores. Fromm's uncle uses his ATV-mounted plow to push manure out of cattle stalls.

After using the Power-Lift on his ATV plow for a couple of years, Fromm realized it could be adapted with different brackets to

fit on all major plow models. He started selling Power-Lift and other ATV products on his Mibar Products website two years ago.

"ATV's or UTV's must have a front bumper or brush guard to attach the Power-Lift to a blade," says Fromm.

The Power-Lift's electric cylinder is rated at 300 lbs. and includes a compression spring assembly to absorb shocks to protect the unit. The Power-Lift system retails for less than \$500 through the company's website and at some power-sport dealerships.

Fromm still uses the original Power-Lift he started with five years ago. He's sold to customers as far away as Alaska and hasn't had any reported problems.

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Add-on electric cylinder lets you apply down pressure to blade on ATV.

Business Booms For Wooden Hat Maker

Years ago, when Chris Ramsey's grandfather called him "Knothead," he couldn't have known that he had come up with the perfect name for Ramsey's one-of-a-kind business - making wooden hats.

Imagine a cowboy hat made out of walnut, a baseball cap made out of cherry, or a top hat made from ash. If you can imagine it, the Somerset, Ky., carver can make it.

"Wood hats aren't a new invention," Ramsey says. "These things have been documented since the 1700's." But the thinness of the wood - less than 1/8 in. - sets his work apart and has attracted the attention of entertainment celebrities, NASCAR racers, and even former President George W. Bush, who owns five of Ramsey's hats.

Ramsey owned a successful fiber optics business when he started turning wood bowls as a hobby. When a planter he made looked suspiciously like a bowler hat, he started experimenting with hat making. About 100 hats later he heard about a wood hat craftsman and took a two-day course from him.

"I use a light bulb as a caliper," he says, explaining that the bulb inside the hat allows him to carve the outside until it's translucent. "The trick is to keep the thinness of the wood consistent so it will bend evenly." His 40-hour hat-making process includes cutting, turning, heating, cooling, and then sanding and applying the finish.

By 1999 he was selling enough of his creations to sell his old business and turn to hats and bowls full-time.

"I wasn't ready for the explosion after I went to the White House in July 2003," Ramsey says. He has sold hats to collectors and "wearers" all over the world including Japan, Italy, China, and Australia.

Styles run the gamut from four styles of cowboy hats and outback hats to derbies and 22-in. women's garden hats.

"I've even made a Civil War hat or two," Ramsey says, adding that he's always up to a new challenge. He gets most of his wood free, saving it from being burned or thrown away. He uses green hardwood, which dries



Chris Ramsey makes everything from cowboy hats made out of walnut (above) to baseball caps made out of cherry.



similar to the weight of regular hats.

"I love wormy maple, cherry, walnut, white oak, red oak - any fresh cut hardwood I like," says Ramsey.

While many customers display Ramsey's hats as art, others wear them regularly or for special occasions. Sprayed with 20 coats of a tough catalyzed lacquer, they're waterproof and only need to be wiped with a damp cloth to clean and maintain.

Ramsey's hats sell for \$700 or more, with an additional cost for carved logos and designs. His website includes photos of his step-by-step process, and Ramsey is working on a how-to DVD of the process.

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Tractor Underwear "Sells Like Hotcakes"

One of the most eye-catching exhibits at the National Farm Machinery Show in Louisville this year had a clothesline running through it, hung with custom-stitched underwear featuring farm tractors.

"We can put any tractor you want on them," says Sheila Lenger, who does custom embroidery of all types.

Lenger can put different sayings on the underwear and any brand of tractor. Colors can also be customized.

They sell for \$15 apiece plus \$4 S&H. Sizes available from small to 3X.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Sheila Lenger, Stitches & Inc., 14423 Hwy. 179,



Custom-stitched underwear features farm tractors. You name the brand.

Wooldridge, Mo. 65287 (ph 573 808-0415; stitchesandinkmo@yahoo.com).

"Master" Of Silicone Caulk Finds Exciting New Uses

Michael Meredith is the master of silicone caulk. While most people just use it to fill cracks, Meredith uses it to make transparent porch roofs, sculptures and castings. For him, it's a miracle a material, and he doesn't understand why more people haven't discovered that.

"None of the engineers who work with it have any idea what the life of caulk is. It's guaranteed for 50 years, but early samples have yet to break down," he says. "Plus, it's cheap. I can make caulk roofing for less than \$2/sq. ft."

To make his flexible roofing material, Meredith spreads caulk on light-weight fabric screening laid atop plastic sheeting. Once the first coat has dried, he lays down a second thin layer. After it dries, he pulls away the plastic and checks for thin areas or holes to which he adds more caulk.

He points out that any open mesh fabric will work as screening. He calls the caulk material flexible glass and says it could be used for roofs, tents, greenhouses or even to cover insulated walls of buildings. The bonding fabric determines the basic strength so for the strongest material he uses stainless steel or galvanized mesh.

"You can add any kind of pigment to the silicone, and it holds the color," he says. "You can even add glass beads or metal powders to it or poke objects into it. Metal foil bonds well to it. There's hardly anything that won't stick to it."

As an artist, Meredith has used the caulk in a wide variety of sculptures and other artworks. However, he is convinced that once people start thinking of other uses, there is no limit to caulk's potential. He has used it for several porch roofs, noting that the squirrels don't bother it. He also plans to use it on the side of a deteriorating garden shed.



Meredith used silicone caulk to make a flexible porch roof that lets in light.



Closeup of flexible roofing material made by spreading silicone caulk on lightweight mesh fabric.

"It stinks when you apply it, but it isn't dangerous," he says. "One tube of caulk will cover about 10 sq. ft."

Meredith has a website detailing his ideas and he encourages people to experiment and let him know their results. He believes automating the process will be the key to widespread use.

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