

Mower Collection Includes Toro's Best

Until 2006, Rob Leiser was a Toro dealer, like his father. He has a collection of 25 mowers that include the oldest and some of the best mowers Toro ever made. All are cleaned up and ready to go with the addition of a little gas.

"I have found stuff the people at Toro Corporate don't even know exist, like a Toro golf cart," says Leiser. "I'm always looking for something new. A few years ago, I found two 1965 Toros on eBay. They had been in the basement of a hardware store that closed. Both were brand new. One was a FlyMo hover motor and the other a standard crank, 21-in. push mower."

Leiser used to pick up mowers at auctions and estate sales, including one he bought for \$1. In recent years, he has found most of his mowers on eBay.

"Auctions take too much time out of the day," he says. "The only problem with eBay is the shipping. I got a mower for next to nothing, but shipping it to Pennsylvania from Phoenix cost \$160."

The cost of the mowers was another reason Leiser decided to collect Toro mowers. Most of them cost him less than \$50. They are still fairly inexpensive compared to older Wheel Horse, Cub Cadet and other more popular brands.

Leiser's favorite is a Powerlawn, the first powered Toro. His father started selling them

in 1948. Leiser likes it for its Continental engine, one that was popular for use in go-carts. He also has a Silver Flash, Toro's first push-reel mower, introduced in 1925.

"I collect some that aren't that old, like a Toro rear bagger with a Suzuki two-cycle engine," he says. "It was an engine and mower that we sold a ton of in the 1980's. I found one that was in new condition."

As most collectors report, shrouds and covers are the most difficult parts to find. Leiser found a deck and wheels from a 1950's mower in his own parts inventory. The best buys he makes are the ones that don't require many parts.

"I found some real freaks," he says. "One was a rear engine riding mower that was a forerunner to zero turns. New, it was very expensive, and not many were sold. I found one for \$150, and all I had to do was put in spark plugs, and it started right up."

Leiser is setting up a showcase for his mower collection in a garage behind a one-room schoolhouse museum. Like the schoolhouse, it will be open once a month. In the meantime, he keeps some of them in the showroom of his business, Rental Barn.

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Rob Leiser's Toro mower collection includes the company's first push-reel mower called the Silver Flash (left) and the Starlawn and Starlawn Pony.



His favorite is the Powerlawn, which was the first powered Toro. Photos show before and after restoration.

Start Your Own Little Library

Anybody can build a mini library, says Cal Moe, and you'll likely get to know your neighbors better because of it.

Last winter, the Nevis, Minn., resident built the 5,162nd neighborhood library for Little Free Library, a volunteer-run, grassroots organization started in Wisconsin that now has registered "libraries" throughout the world.

Moe's 12 by 20 in. log cabin style library holds just a few books that people in the neighborhood can borrow or add their own books to.

While the organization sells Amish Cabin and other style libraries on its website (www.littlefreelibrary.org) it also offers free plans, detailed information and encourages volunteers to create their own designs.

He read about Little Free Library and followed directions on the website.

"They give you an idea on the size. Some are painted to look like barns. Some are two stories. One in Minnesota has birch bark siding," Moe says, who decided to go with a cabin theme.

He built a box out of scrap plywood and covered it with tarpaper. He peeled and split cedar sticks to create log siding and purchased a few cedar shims to make shingles for the roof. He built the front out of plywood, with a door made of treated lumber and a purchased piece of Plexiglas.

He mailed in \$35 to register his library and received an official plaque and promotional material.

"I live on a frontage road so a lot of people walk by or are on bikes or inline skates," Moe says. "Once they know it's there, they stop and look."

His library holds about 20 books that he and friends provide. While most libraries request readers put books back, Moe says it's common for summer visitors to take the books with them. Often people take one book and leave three.

As a reader himself, Moe has been pleased at the response to his library.

"It's a community builder kind of thing," he says. "I'm kind of surprised how much it is used, and how people stop to talk to me now. I'm meeting my neighbors."



Cal Moe's 12 by 20-in. log cabin-style library holds just a few books, which people in the neighborhood can borrow or add their own books to.



He added that the libraries can also be placed in public locations, with permission-such as township halls, churches and businesses.

"In a country setting you could make it look like a feed store, implement dealer, country store, barn, etc.," Moe suggests. "I think it's helpful to have it eye catching so people will wonder what 'that thing is' and upon investigation discover it has books in it."

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Gus Haag designed his own 10-ft. long, 4-ft. wide ladder-style chassis to build this self-propelled wagon.

Little Red Wagon Powers Itself

Gus Haag built his self-propelled wagon from the ground up using parts from old lawn mowers and a few new parts like bearings and wheels.

"I had seen a picture of a red wagon a guy from Seattle had built on a Toyota pickup chassis and running gear," says Haag. "I didn't want to use a pickup, so I started doing drawings and designed my own chassis with 1-in., heavy-wall, square tubing."

He soon had a 10-ft. long, 4-ft. wide ladder style chassis. He found a 14 hp Briggs & Stratton from an old riding lawn mower. He tore it apart, redid the valves, replaced the rings and cleaned up the cylinder bores. He also rebuilt the electronic ignition and carburetor. After reassembling and bench testing, he mounted it behind the area where the seats would go.

Haag found a nearly new Peerless Model H 2000 hydrostatic transmission on the internet. It was mounted in place behind the engine and the two connected with a belt drive. The axle stubs on the Peerless had to be extended to match the width of the chassis. Haag machined new hubs to mount a set of wheels from Harbor Freight, fabricated a clutch and brake pedals, and a clutch release pivot mechanism.

Haag had planned to use straight pipes, but decided they were too noisy. Instead, he adapted mufflers designed for a Ford 9N.

"They added a nice throaty sound," he says. Since he planned to drive the wagon in local parades, he knew the slow speed could cause the hydrostatic to overheat. To protect

it, he added 12-volt muffin fans.

For steering, Haag rebuilt a Ross steering sector and a steering axle from a Deere model 214 tractor. He cleaned up the steering gear, added new bearings, and relocated the Pitman arm portion. Then he cut the axle in the middle and extended it to match the chassis width.

"I covered the chassis floor with marine plywood and made side panels with 16-gauge sheet steel," says Haag. "I bought boat seats from Fleet Farm and mounted them in front of the engine."

Marine plywood was also used to cover the engine, a 3 1/2-gal. boat gas tank that he mounted in front, and for cowling. For the 12-in. sides, Haag first mounted uprights to the frame to which he drilled and riveted the sheet metal. He also bent electrical conduit and mounted it on the top edge of the sheet metal for the classic "Radio Flyer" rounded-edge look.

"I added a rear seat that will hold 2 adults or 3 little ones," says Haag. "The back rest folds down, and the entire seat folds out of the way to access the transmission belt."

For finishing touches, Haag fabricated a wagon tongue, making three before he was satisfied. Boat fenders were cut down and mounted over the rear wheels. He also painted everything red and added Radio Flyer decals sized to the wagon.

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