

Farmers Nominate Best & Worst Buys

temperatures down to 16 degrees below zero and went right through 4-ft. deep snowdrifts. I used the loader to pile snow 20 ft. high. One time I buried the tractor in a swamp and used the bucket, 4-WD and rear wheel lock to get myself out. This tractor is unstoppable."

On the "worst buy" side, "Three months after I bought my 2013 Sears Craftsman LT2000 riding mower, fuel leaked into the crankcase and I had to order a new carburetor for \$196. The mechanic said the problem is that ethanol eats the seals out of the carburetor. I asked him to install a fuel shut-off valve, but the company wouldn't allow him to do it so I installed one myself."

Dale Jarvis, Theodosia, Mo.: "I bought my 2004 Dodge Dakota pickup used in 2005, and it now has more than 125,000 miles on it. All it has needed is a new battery and tires."

Gerald Johnson, Union, Ore.: "Last April I installed an AutoFlex Air Suspension system on my 2000 Ford F-350 pickup in order to improve the ride and keep the vehicle level whether it's loaded or unloaded. I paid \$4,000.

"I talked to several people who claimed this product was great and made their truck ride as smooth as ever. However, on my first test drive I was very disappointed. I called a company rep and asked some questions, sent photos, and got some advice on how to improve the ride. But after doing everything they said I was still disappointed. They recommended some modifications so I spent an extra \$150 trying to make the system work. Yet when I recently drove the pickup about 1,800 miles, it felt like I was driving a 1950 Mack logging truck."

"The company told me I could send the product back, but that I'd have to pay a shipping fee and a 30 percent restocking fee. I'm extremely unhappy with both the product and the customer service."

Steve Cunningham, Sunapee, N.H.: "My 1984 Stihl weed trimmer still runs like a top. I didn't realize how old it was until I recently had to buy a new-style 'bump' string reel on it. I also tuned up the carburetor and put in a new air filter and spark plug."

On the "worst buy" side, "I've never had a Tecumseh engine that would start without requiring a hundred pulls and a lot of babying. One engine was so bad that one hot, muggy day, after making about 50 pulls on the starter, I went in and came out with the perfect tool – a sledge hammer. It's amazing what one of those can do to an engine block. Now I buy only Briggs & Stratton or Honda engines."

Gary Alford, Edwardsburg, Mich.: "Five years ago I rebuilt the engine on my 1992 Toyota Tercel for about \$1,100. This car isn't much to look at, but at 47 mpg it looks beautiful to me."

"My Deere 105 riding mower is on its second transmission since the warranty expired, and it's real noisy."

Tim Kinney, Falkville, Ala.: "My worst buy is my 2006 Ford F-250 pickup equipped with a 6.0-liter diesel engine. I love everything about this pickup except for the engine, which is unreliable and costly to repair."

Matthias Hilti, Monroe, Ind.: Matthias likes his BCS 722 walk-behind tractor equipped with an 8 hp Honda engine and a rear-tine tiller (ph 800 543-1040; www.bcsamerica.com). "It's built strong and doesn't jump a lot in hard ground. It might be a little more expensive than some others on the market, but it's worth it. Working the ground is a much faster and easier job than with our Honda tiller. Also, many different attachments are available."

Joseph Jonassen, Athens, Wis.: "My worst buy ever is a Snapper rear engine riding mower I bought new 6 years ago with

a 30-in. deck.

"The deck cuts heavy grass well due to its single blade design. However, in order to get a smooth cut I have to adjust the deck very carefully. The transmission uses a rubber drive wheel on a steel disc, and the drive wheel has to be replaced about every 3 mo. The deck can be stood on end, which makes

"When I stand the deck on end the battery leaks acid onto the throttle linkage."

it easy to clean. But when I stand the deck on end, the battery leaks acid that drips onto a plastic part in the throttle linkage. As a result, the throttle linkage has broken twice.

"Whenever the deck hits a rock, the front end gets dented. The mower's shift lever and steering shaft broke, and the plastic bushings in the steering system had to be replaced twice. The alternator quit working about 1 1/2 years ago."

On the positive side, he likes Stihl chainsaws. "Our first one, an 034 model, worked flawlessly for years with no problems. We finally retired it in favor of a new 391 model, which also worked great. Several months ago we bought another 391, but after going through less than 3 tanks of gas the saw began vibrating and making noises. The dealer replaced it at no cost, and the new one has worked great.

"I also like my Efco 8742 Olymptyk 2-cycle industrial weed trimmer (ph 800 800-4420; www.efcopower.com)."

Pauett McDonough, Coon Rapids, Iowa: "I like my DR trimmer/mower equipped with electric start. This is my second DR trimmer. The first one was a pull-start model that lasted more than 20 years. I'm a 65-year-old lady, and the electric start makes me more independent because it lets me start the machine whenever I want."

Harrison Benjamin, Hastings, Minn.: Harrison nominates his FrontPoint home security system as his "best buy" (ph 877 298-2954; www.frontpointsecurity.com). "It took me only 20 min. to install this self-installed security system. It's an entirely wireless system that works with a cell phone. No landline phone is required. It uses sensors that connect wirelessly to a touch-screen control panel. The control panel sends instant alerts to a monitoring center, over a secure cellular network. There are no wires in your walls for burglars to cut."

"The company has great customer service. Extra features are available including a freeze alarm, water alarm and video monitoring."

Todd Heideman, Willow, Alaska: "My 1994 Kenworth W-900 semi tractor has more than 2 million miles on it yet has required only regular maintenance. It's powered by a Caterpillar 3406 engine that responds well to synthetic lubes and starts in all weather conditions. It still gets about 12 mpg fully loaded. I use synthetic grease throughout."

Dave Mertell, Independence, Mo.: "I've had good luck with my 2012 Gravely ZTR zero-turn riding mower equipped with a 34-in. deck. We use this mower hard, yet it has had no problems. It always starts and gets in and out of tight spots easily. It's also easy on fuel and simple to maintain."

Kurt Wasilewski, Perronville, Mich.: Kurt's impressed with his 2014 GM Sierra 1500 SLT all terrain 4-WD pickup equipped with a double cab. "It doesn't handle like any pickup I've owned in the past – and I say that in a good way. The creature comforts, amenities, ride and handling

12 Successful Years Burning Biodiesel

"I started using biodiesel 12 years ago, when the product was just being introduced, and I've never had a problem with any of the diesel tractors or vehicles that I've used it in all that time, other than changing 2 fuel filters, which needed changing anyhow," says Iowa farmer Ed Ulch.

"We get our biodiesel direct from a supplier and use almost 5,000 gal. a year. In the cold weather we use a 5 percent blend, and for the past 5 years in the summer we've gone up to a 35 percent blend. It works the same as petroleum fuel, except that the exhaust smell is more pleasant and the emissions are less harmful."

Ulch and his son use biodiesel in 5 tractors and a diesel pickup. They farm about 2,000 acres near Solon. "Our fuel supplier is telling us all the biodiesel we're using now is made from soybean oil, so that's a big benefit for us as farmers, too." Ulch says about 16 percent of the oil from soybean production nationwide goes into biodiesel and Iowa has 13 biodiesel plants producing soybean oil that's blended with petroleum diesel. About 5.5 billion lbs. of soy oil were used in biodiesel production nationwide in 2013.

Ulch has been a director on the National BioDiesel board for 9 years. In that role he's a constant advocate for a product he helps produce. "I go to Washington 3 to 4 times a year and meet with elected officials to promote the product," says Ulch. "We answer questions and promote a platform that will maintain or increase biodiesel use in the future. There are many favorable benefits to the product like lower harmful emissions, less dependency on foreign oil, and it creates jobs." He says elected officials are mostly in favor of biodiesel, but the oil industry spends millions of dollars annually to discourage its use.

"What we're doing on behalf of the



Ed Ulch uses almost 5,000 gal. of biodiesel a year in his tractors and pickup.

industry is having an impact," Ulch says. "Using soybeans for biodiesel has provided an additional 74 cents a bushel for soybean farmers. This is an important benefit of the checkoff, where a small amount of money is collected from every bushel of soybeans sold to promote soybean use."

Ulch says biodiesel has also reduced the cost of soybean meal, which is beneficial for livestock producers. "Consumers ultimately benefit because it's a healthy product, free of carcinogens that are found in petroleum-based fuel. Biodiesel reduces carbon emissions by 52 to 86 percent compared to straight petroleum diesel."

Ulch says that biodiesel will soon be used more by the marine industry and is now starting to be used by railroads. Most underground mining equipment has switched over to 100 percent biodiesel because emissions are much less. "I noticed early on that our equipment started easier and ran cooler on biodiesel," says Ulch. "Biodiesel has a higher cetane rating, and it provides more lubricity, which is important with the low sulfur diesel."

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on it are impressive, as is the torque and responsiveness of the 6.2-liter direct gasoline engine.

"This pickup pulls like no other and still consistently gets more than 20 mpg on the highway at 60 mph. It has cylinder deactivation that isn't recognizable except for the fact that you can view on a display that it's running on 4 cylinders. If you're in the market for a new pickup, take this one for a test drive."

Donald R. Ritchhart, Lincoln, Ill.: "I like my 2012 Bobcat CT230 utility tractor, but it's a little underpowered. Also, it developed an oil leak in the front wheel drive."

A.E. Parman, Excelsior Springs, Mo.: "Being 84 years old and fully retired, my only need now is for reliable, comfortable transportation. My 2010 Ford Fusion fills the bill. It's also very economical whether I'm going to town, on a long trip, or making a parts run. It pleasantly handles any job."

Sal Spiezie, Port Jervis, N.Y.: "My 1984 Deere 950 tractor has never failed me and still runs like new."

"My 2012 Husqvarna 445 chainsaw doesn't oil the chain adequately, and that caused it to burn up after only 15 min. of use. The saw was brand new out of the box. Unfortunately, I bought the saw 2 years ago but hadn't used it, so the warranty had expired. I called the company but they wouldn't make good on it. I did some research and found that other people are having the same problem with this model."

Bob Halaska, Waupaca, Wis.: "My Red Max backpack leaf blower starts right up every time and works fantastic all year long

(www.redmax.com). I use it to blow leaves, pine needles, and snow and to clean out gutters, barns, and garages. Unfortunately, my wife won't let me clean the house with it!"

Ozie Prier, Fredericktown, Mo.: "My Bad Boy Magnum zero-turn riding mower equipped with a Kohler engine and a 54-in. deck works great and is comfortable to operate. Our lawn is very uneven so it's a challenge. The mower is user friendly and comes with a 2-year complete coverage warranty. It's made in the U.S. and reasonably priced."

Gerald Fedler, Fort Madison, Iowa: Gerald likes tarp anchors from Hay Anchors (ph 970 218-3035; www.hayanchors.com).



"I had been using metal anchors but they were hard to see when I had to take them out. These plastic anchors are bright orange and easy to screw in. Also, they hold good in hay. I didn't have any tarps come loose from the high winds we had last winter. These anchors are well worth the money."

Vance Talley, San Angelo, Texas: "My 2014 Toro Personal Pace lawn mower adjusts instantly to my walking speed. Thick grass,

Continued on next page