

## ASK THE PEOPLE WHO OWN THEM

# "Owner's Report" On Best, Worst Riding Lawn Mowers

Are you satisfied with your riding lawn mower? How could it be improved? Have you modified it in any way? What accessories have you bought for it?

These are some of the questions we asked randomly selected riding mower owners in an effort to highlight those machines 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 the survey shaped up:

"Manufacturers have to figure out that farms aren't always as smooth as a golf course," says Larry Olsen, Mitchell, S. Dak., who owns a 1988 **Dixon ZTR 826**. "We've had problems with the frame breaking from fatigue. We beefed it up where it started to break. We've also had problems keeping the front of the mower straight when on sidehills. The rear drive wheels don't have enough traction to hold the front of the mower before they start spinning. Our dealer says a set of drive wheel weights would help but we haven't tried that yet. We just keep our old Lawn Boy around to mow ditches. One option I'd like to see on riding mowers is a string trimmer mounted on the deck to trim around trees or foundations. It could be operated by a switch so you could easily turn it on or off as needed. One modification I did make was to add a guard around the rear-mount engine to prevent damage if I backed into anything."

Herbert Kuehnert, Ft. Wayne, Ind., owns a 1989 **White Turf Boss**. "We're satisfied. We fitted it with a grass catcher that works good. One thing it needs is more shock absorbing on the seat."

"Everything about our 1989 **IH 1800** Cub Cadet is okay except for the motor. It's hard to start and gets out of adjustment

## "One of the grease fittings is all but impossible to reach."

easily. We own two of these mowers and both have the same problems. Also, some maintenance jobs are hard to do. One of the grease fittings is all but impossible to reach. But we're very happy with the rototiller and leaf bagger. They're great," says Alice Cantonwine, Greencastle, Ind.

John M. Carlson, Buffalo, Minn., is pleased with his 1990 **Toro 1600** rear engine mower with a 52-in. deck. "The motor and deck are balanced over the rear drive axle. That makes it plenty stable with maximum traction. Our old tractor-type mower had the engine up front so that it was tippy when you went downhill and the back wheels would slide. This mower has two transmissions, one for each wheel, so that when you're on a hillside the top wheel doesn't go faster than the lower one. It will cut around a 6-in. pole and you can go down a steep bank without the back wheels sliding. It also has an anti-scalping system under each blade that works good. It's like having a small, round bowl bolted on underneath."

"I'm very satisfied with my 1987 **Deere 165**. Everything works great. I especially like the hydrostatic transmission. All servicing is simple," says Herman Koger, Elmer, Mo.

"I wish they'd come up with an easy way to clean out the deck right after mowing. I have to run the front wheels up on blocks to

scrape it out. Some manufacturers used to provide a fitting to hook up a water hose right after mowing but they don't anymore," says Alvin H. Mausehler, Peotone, Ill., who bought his "best buy" **IH Cub Cadet** in 1976. "It has hydrostatic drive and hydraulic deck lift, which is handy. Prices have gone way up since I bought mine for \$1,942. I overhauled the engine last year for \$400 which is a long way from the price of a new one."

"I use 30 head of Suffolk sheep to mow my lawn (1988 models!). I wish the manufacturer would fit them with shorter legs so they could not jump fences. I put bells on them so I can find them. Wish I had about 10 more of these mowers," says K.C. Livermore, Reeds Spring, Mo.

"My **Deere 755** mower is comfortable and easy to operate. My chief complaint is that it's very unstable. I solved the problem by putting duals on the tractor and weighting the tires. Also, it's a major job to change the transmission oil - the filter is hidden up underneath the tractor so you have to install it by hand," says James F. King, Felton, Okla.

Tony Broshes, Urbana, Ohio, owns a 1990 **Grasshopper**. "We like it very much. Handles well and it cut our mowing time by a third. Very easy to service. The only fault I've noticed is that the mower deck doesn't float from side to side very well."

"We disconnected the seat kill switch. It's a safety joke because every time you go over a rough spot it cuts the motor," says Edward First, Shelbyville, Kent., about his 1982 **IH 982** Cub Cadet riding mower which is otherwise a "best buy". "We've had eight seasons with no repairs. My wife uses it all the time and it takes something tough to stay with her. I never hear complaints so everything must be okay."

"I modified the grass discharge chute by putting a hinging flap over the opening. When going along the driveway I put the flap down to keep rocks from flying out of the chute and hitting someone. It also leaves lawn clippings in windrows so they're easier to rake up," says Byron Allen, Wash-tucna, Wash. He owns a 1975 **Allis Chalmers Scamp 8**.

"We overhauled the engine for the first time this winter," says Ben Pokorny, Wahoo, Neb., pleased with his 1978 **Murray 3667** mower. "It's a good machine for the dollar spent."

"Our 1988 **Honda 3813** has been very dependable and handles well. Other than routine servicing once a season, I haven't had to do anything to it," says Gerald K. Hays, Filer, Idaho. "It works well for picking up leaves in the fall but they could improve the rear bag assembly a bit. When you lift the lid to remove the bags, you lose some grass or leaves back onto the ground. Also, when crossing a small furrow (8 in. wide by 3 to 4 in. deep) sometimes one side of the mower carriage gets hung up so it mows unevenly."

"I bought an add-on pto so I could use my 1983 **Allis Chalmers 916** for grain handling. It's very handy," says Roy Hinton,

Madison, Mo. "I'm generally satisfied with the tractor although it steers too hard. Also, the tiller's not too easy to attach but does a good job once you get it on."

Henry L. Nelson, Towand, Kan., owns a 1970 **Wards 8-hp**. "I've used it for 21 years and it's still going strong. I rebuilt the engine 5 years ago and it still runs good. I used it to pull a 3-ft. wide spring tooth harrow and a 3-ft. disk for 4 years to keep weeds from growing in a 1,200-ft. long, 20-ft. wide windbreak. That really put a strain on it but it got the job done. I also use it to mow my 1 1/2 acre lawn. It still has the original tires and they have good tread."

"I put hitch on both the front and rear of this tractor for moving wagons and trailers around the farm," says George R. Thomas, Radnor, Ohio, about his "best buy" 1977 **Massey Ferguson 14** hydrostatic mower with a 48-in. blade. "Other than regular service, the only parts replaced on the engine have been a single spark plug. The mower has had several spindles replaced in 14 years of mowing an average of 2 acres weekly."

John Baker, Bland, Mo., has been pleased with his 1983 **Snapper 33-in. hi-vac** mower with grass catcher. "It's much better than the Deere it replaced, which would not vacuum up clippings without plugging up. The Snapper bags clippings even when wet. I did have to install a smooth clutch kit (made by Snapper) which eliminated jerky

starts with the original factory clutch. Another problem is that the controls for starting the engine could be grouped together better - the key switch is in front of the operator, the throttle and choke are on the left, and the start button is beside the seat on the right. If I were in the market for a new mower I'd consider a new Snapper but I also like the Husqvarna riding mower."

"My 1986 **Wheelhorse 417A** mower is a best buy. It works good but one improvement would be to make the hydraulics lift higher. We bought the Wheelhorse-made snowblower, tiller, plow, cab, blade, hitch, and weights," says Jason Sikorski, North Liberty, Ind.

"The weakest part of our 1986 **MTD** mower is the 38-in. wide cutting deck. It's built too flimsy and doesn't float over rough terrain. It uses two 19-in. blades and if you happen to run across a high spot with a blade it will bend. But generally, we're satisfied with the mower. It starts and runs well and has plenty of torque and is fairly fuel efficient. It's easy to maneuver and easy to maintain. We've made no major modifications, although we added an hour meter to help keep track of service intervals," says Van Bailey, Pratt, Kan.

"Our 1987 **Deere 910** does a good job mowing and is easy to drive. One improvement it needs is a gauge on the gas tank. I like the power steering and the fact that you can control it with foot pedals. We also like

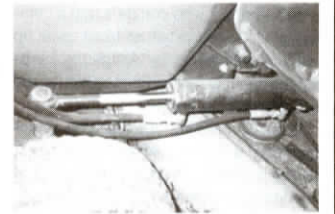


## Deere Mower Has No Steering Wheel

"Getting rid of the steering wheel makes it a lot easier to get on and off," says Jeff Vackiner, Mullen, Neb., who came up with a new way to steer his Deere 317 mower tractor when the original steering wore out.

"The steering gearbox and linkage started to fail. For about \$30, I installed a 1 3/4 by 8-in. hydraulic cylinder which plugs into the tractor's existing hydraulic outlets. I steer the tractor with one of the tractor's hydraulic control levers," says Vackiner, noting that the tractor has two hydraulic control levers on the left side. One is used to raise and lower the mower deck and the other, which controls two outlets at the front of the tractor, he now uses to steer the tractor.

The add-on cylinder is anchored to the frame with a piece of channel iron just above the mower deck on the left side of the tractor. The piston end of the cylinder bolts directly to the left front wheel spindle flange with a special bolt Vackiner made.



"The cylinder replaces a threaded rod that connected the steering gearbox to the spindle flange. I could quickly convert back to manual steering, if needed" says Vackiner. "The conversion was just as simple as it sounds."

It took a while to get used to controlling the tractor with a lever but Vackiner says mowing is now easier than ever before because the tractor's hydraulics make steering quicker and more responsive.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jeff Vackiner, Star Rt., Box 14, Mullen, Neb. 69152 (ph 308 546-2878).