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# Landscape and IRRIGATION



## Mind Over Mower

Balanced approach  
is best for zero-turns

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# Mind Over Mower

## Balanced approach is best for zero-turns

By Sean Dwyer

**I**n the zero-turn market we all have a familiar statement: "We make tall grass short." It seems like a rather simple process, but, in reality, it's a very complex operation when you consider the many different grass types, the amount of grass cut at a time, cutting deck types, ground speeds, soil conditions, and so on. With all of these issues to consider, successful operation becomes a question of balance.

You can't do much about the weather or the type of terrain, but you can make sure your zero-turn is ready to perform and is operated at an effective level. The professional's goal — to complete a quality cut in an efficient manner — is a matter of finding a balance between the external factors and the capabilities of the machine.

### Ground speed considerations

One of the zero-turn mower's strongest attributes is ground speed. However, in some conditions, ground speed can be a detriment to productivity.

The average top speed of commercial zero-turns is between 8 and 11 mph, with some models as high as 15 mph. However, traveling faster than the cutting deck is able to process grass can result in a poor quality of cut. If a second cut is necessary to "clean up," then productivity suffers. In addition, the faster you travel on rough ground, the harder it is on the equipment, as well as the operator.

Ground speed of 8 to 9 mph typically offers a good balance of cut quality and operator comfort in most conditions. A slower speed is necessary if cutting conditions are heavy or grass clippings are being collected.

In the last few years, there has been increased focus in the industry on high-horsepower engines, with the current top end being around 35 horsepower. An obvious advantage to higher horsepower is that a higher ground speed can be maintained even in heavier conditions or when collecting. Unfortunately, in many cases, larger hydraulic drive systems are incorporated at the same time. The added power required to drive these systems often can counter the horsepower gain. Once again, it is a balancing act.

Higher horsepower also comes at the expense of increased initial unit cost, as well as fuel costs, so the price needs to be weighed against the true productivity gain.

All photos courtesy of Husqvarna Turf Care Company



### Setting the cutting deck

Another important, and often overlooked, productivity killer is improper cutting deck set-up. Many of the modern commercial cutting decks feature interchangeable or adjustable baffles or plates that can fine-tune performance to area-specific grass types and conditions.

It is important to understand the cutting deck's performance possibilities and adjust it accordingly. Refer to the product manual or consult with your local servicing dealer for guidance and specifications.

Another good rule of thumb is that if a zero-turn mower is not performing well or seems underpowered, it may need to have the deck leveled or "pitched."

In order for any cutting deck to perform properly, it needs to be adjusted with a slight pitch forward. In other words, with the blades positioned front to rear, the distance from the front tip to the ground should be shorter than the rear by about 1/4 inch.

Because it makes the mower work harder, incorrect deck pitch can affect power, fuel consumption and cut quality. Before accepting a new piece of equipment, check the deck pitch to ensure you have the most productive piece of equipment possible.

### Relationships with dealers and manufacturers

Landscaping professionals have a lot on their plates. Higher productivity requirements, higher overhead and competitive pressure are everyday struggles. When it comes to product, there are many brands from which to choose. In addition to evaluating the features and benefits, take a look at the company behind the product.

Is it an established brand with a good reputation in the industry? Is the company successful, stable and growing? For landscapers, the lesson here is that the longer the brand has been around the more likely it will be there when you need it. Diversity within the company and a broad range of product offerings is also a strong attribute. Being able to buy several different products of the same brand means

one-stop shopping, which saves you time. With fewer brands to keep up with, it can also mean a more efficient servicing dealer.

While on the subject of dealers, don't hesitate to ask to see the service shop and parts inventory when you're in a dealer location. Since time is money, it is important that the dealer has a strong service department and stocks high-demand parts. You might also want to inquire about loaner units in the event that your machine cannot be repaired immediately.

### Looking ahead

As the commercial market matures, I expect that the zero-turn mower market will see advancements in ergonomics, cutting systems and productivity measuring methods.

We are likely to see engine manufacturers shift more and more to fuel-injected engines to improve efficiency and to increase performance and reliability. There will continue to be improvements in deck design to allow for improved cut quality and faster ground speeds, as well as improved ergonomics and comfort features to allow operators to function at higher speeds.

With global positioning systems being commonplace there will likely be tracking methods incorporated that will, with the aid of appropriate software, ultimately be able to record operator performance on specific sites and optimize the technique for subsequent visits — perhaps even go so far as to tell the operator exactly when and where to turn while mowing.

"Making tall grass short" can become complicated with all of these technological advances. That's why it's important to keep the concept of "balance" in mind. Make sure the technology works for you — by improving your efficiency and effectiveness — and will pay for itself over the long-term. You will see "bottom line" improvement on your balance sheet. **L**

*Sean Dwyer is product manager at Husqvarna Turf Care Company.*



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## 1. Husqvarna LZ6130TXP

Husqvarna's LZ6130TXP zero-turn mower boasts an enhanced package of features designed to meet the needs of lawn care professionals. The XP package provides a deluxe full-suspension seat, custom footpad area and a larger horsepower-to-deck ratio (30-hp. Kohler V-Twin engine and 61-inch cutting width). Enhancements include 12-cc hydro pumps for increased performance and durability; previous models were 10 cc. It has Husqvarna's TunnelRam deck design, sure-footed low center of gravity and rock-solid uni-frame construction. The standard foldable rollover protection system has optional work lights. Wide rear tires and oversized front casters round out the package for added stability and comfort.

### Husqvarna

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## 2. Dixie Chopper zero-turn mowers

Dixie Chopper offers a wide variety of commercial zero-turn mowers that boast speed, quality and reliability. Models range from a 22-hp. Silver Eagle with a 34-inch deck to a 54-hp. diesel with a 72-inch cut. Another fuel option is Dixie Chopper's LP 3000 propane mower, which offers an exclusive Generac engine with lower emissions and cost savings over gasoline models.

## Dixie Chopper

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## 3. Grasshopper True ZeroTurn 100 Series mowers

Grasshopper True ZeroTurn 100 Series mowers are available in 41- or 48-inch MidMount DuraMax decks that side discharge or convert to optional mulching or vacuum collection using the same deck. The comfortable operator station — with shock impact reduction system, low center of gravity and operator protection structure — provides stability and responsiveness. OneStep cutting-height adjustment moves the deck to preset heights between 1.5 and 4.5 inches. The 100 Series mowers feature 20-hp. V-twin gasoline engines and design-matched hydro systems, adjustable beverage holders, and 6-gallon fuel capacity. Payment-free period followed by 1.9-percent financing is available with approved credit.

### The Grasshopper Co.

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## 4. Kubota ZD-PRO 25

Kubota expanded its ZD-PRO line of diesel-powered zero-turn commercial mowers to 3 models with the introduction of ZD-PRO 25. The ZD-PRO mowers are powered by 21-, 25- and 28-hp., quiet, low-vibration, 3-cylinder, liquid-cooled Kubota

diesel engines. The integral-type, twin-hydrostatic transmission is hermetically sealed, requiring no maintenance beyond an occasional fluid change. Hydraulic multi-disc wet PTO clutch, pivoting front axle and hydraulic deck lift are standard. The 7-gauge steel fabricated deck offers a quality cut in all grass varieties and conditions. The ZD-PRO 25 features a 60-inch deck, while the ZD-PRO 21 and 28 are available with 60- or 72-inch decks.

### Kubota Tractor Corp.

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## 5. John Deere 757 Z-Trak

Designed for commercial cutters who value productivity, reliability, durability and comfort, the John Deere 757 Z-Trak is a mid-frame zero-turn mower that can handle small, tight spaces and big, open fields. It is powered by a 25-hp. horizontal-shaft, air-cooled Kawasaki engine. It comes standard with a 54- or 60-inch 7-iron II deck, but is available with a Mulch-on-Demand deck as a factory-installed option. Other features include low-effort dial, height-of-cut adjustment with foot-assist deck lift system; 1-piece, high-back, deep-cushioned seat with standard armrests and 9.5-gallon fuel capacity. Regular service is made easy with a flip-up footrest, tilt seat and removable grille.

### John Deere

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