

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN CARE PROFESSIONALS

Kingdom
Quality

THE TURTLE AND THE RABBIT
MOWING'S A BREEZE IN CALGARY
EVOLUTION OF THE WALKER
MOWING IN AUSTRALIA
AND NEW ZEALAND

VOL. 12

WALKER TALK

CONTENTS VOL.12

- 3** **Winning the job time race**
The tortoise and the hare
- 4** **Kingdom Quality Landscape in California**
School's grounds are maintained by one of its graduates
- 6** **On the fast track at Tracy Public Schools**
Walker helps grounds supervisor play catch-up
- 8** **Family-run company was first in Western Canada to own a Walker**
Mowing is a Breeze in Calgary
- 10** **The evolution of the Walker Mower**
An interview with Dean Walker
- 12** **The things that count.... in New Zealand**
- 14** **Keeping it efficient in Canberra**
- 17** **Bob T's tech talk**
- 18** **Walker news/products**

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INTERNATIONAL FLAIR

When our readers noticed the story from France in the last issue and read stories from Australia and New Zealand in this issue, they might think this is a "flair for the dramatic" by talking about international customers — send a handful of machines overseas and make a big deal out of it. Actually, these stories represent a true picture of the worldwide opportunity we've found with the Walker Mower. For over 10 years our **export sales have averaged 20% to 25%** of the total business. In '97, the Australasian market alone took 7.9% of our production.

The international market wasn't in our original planning, but as an opportunity it has greatly helped us stabilize and grow. Also, our customers in North America have benefited by having the product exposed to overseas markets. We are building a better machine from the experience of working in other areas of the world.

Now it's time to make an introduction I should have made a long time ago — the editor of *Walker Talk*, Mr. Rod Dickens. Rod has traveled, interviewed customers and written all of the 40 to 50 editorial and customer profiles for the previous 11 issues of *Walker Talk*. He has excellent credentials for this work as the former editor of *YARD & GARDEN* and *PRO* magazines, and producing newsletters for various landscape contracting companies.



Rod Dickens, editor of *Walker Talk*, and his wife, Ann

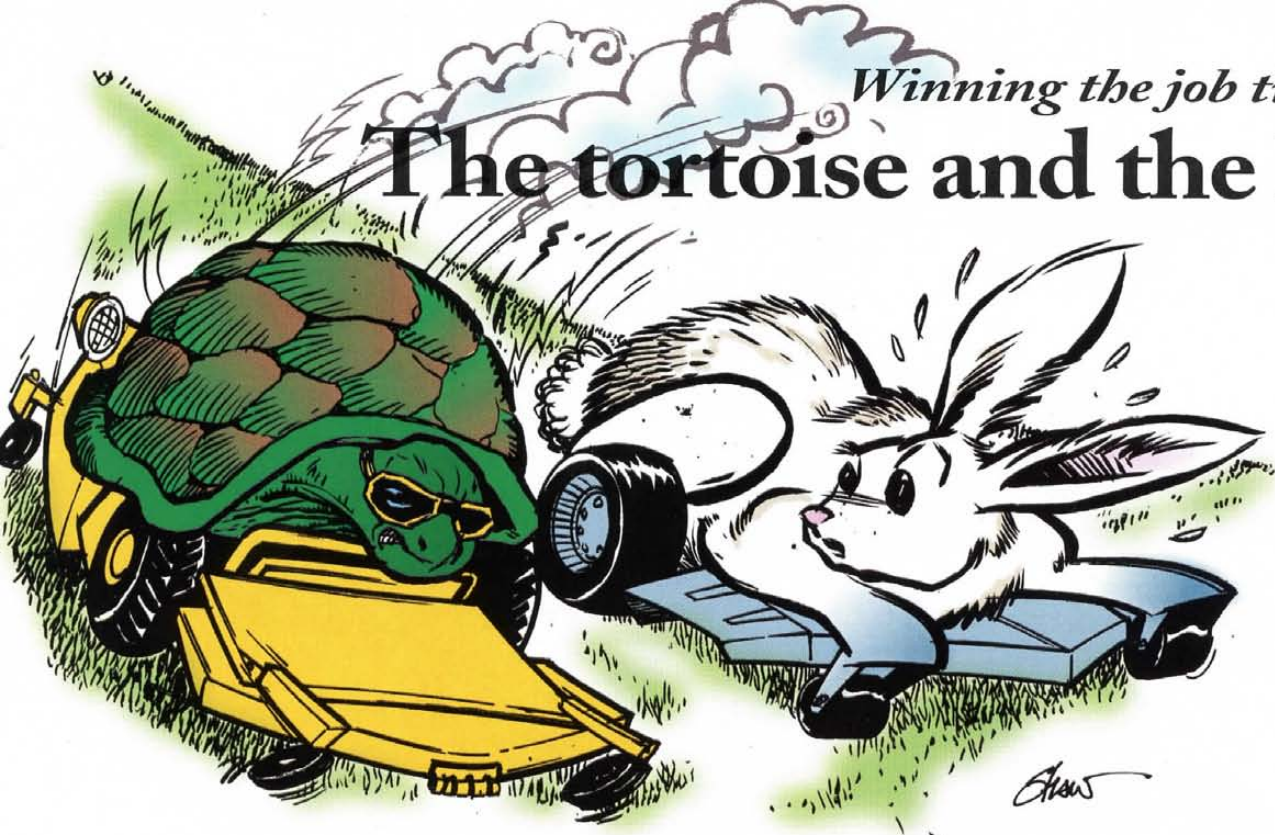
When we started *Walker Talk* six years ago, we began talking about sending Rod "Down Under" to do some customer stories like we were doing in the United States and Canada. That talk became reality when Rod and his wife, Ann, spent two weeks in January visiting Walker customers in New Zealand and Australia — summertime there. In all, they met with 20 contractors, municipalities, governmental bodies and homeowners. Nineteen stories are the result; four printed in this issue and the others in a special "Down Under" edition of *Walker Talk* (special edition printed for Australia and New Zealand market). We hope you enjoy reading about our Walker Mower customers "Down Under," and in Alberta, Canada and California in this issue.

Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President

Winning the job time race

The tortoise and the hare



We're all familiar with the story about the turtle and the rabbit. The rabbit has more speed, but the turtle has more determination, stamina and consistency. The rabbit may get a fast start, but the turtle wins the race.

When it comes to winning the job time race, the fastest mower — the mower with the fastest ground speed — is like the rabbit. It can mow fast, but it will often finish second to a machine that has more maneuverability and trimming capability, and the ability to overall manicure a lawn.

At Walker Mfg., we like to position the Walker Mower as the tortoise. No, it's not the fastest mower in the world (it's no slouch either), but when it comes to winning the job time race, it comes in first almost every time. Here's why.

The job time race begins and ends at the trailer, not at the edge of the mowed turf. One of the true measures of a mower's performance, including speed, is how long it takes a mowing crew to completely finish a job.

Let's position the rabbit (e.g., a compact mower with a belly-mounted deck) at the starting line. The

mower tackles the straight-aways faster than the turtle (e.g., a Walker with a GHS deck). There's no question it is fast, but it can't take turns at 8 mph. If this 1,000-pound rabbit were to reverse direction at top speed, it's good-bye grass.

And having a mid-mounted deck, the rabbit can't trim close to hedges, trees, flower beds and other landscaping elements. In fact, built for speed and not maneuverability, the rabbit is far too clumsy for most trim work, leaving much of it to crew members with string line trimmers.

Meanwhile, the turtle (a.k.a. Walker) is humming along at a near consistent speed. It's fast enough on the straight-aways and trimming — this turtle is built for turning. With its patented combination of Forward Speed Control and steering levers, only gentle fingertip pressure is needed to put the turtle through its paces. Forward and back, side to side, and forward and back again, the machine is like "poetry in motion."

Combine the outfront deck with the compact design of an integrated grass-handling system (GHS), and the turtle seems perfectly content to take a little extra time on the straight-

aways to quickly outmaneuver the hare on the turns.

Back at the race, the turtle's maneuverability has allowed it to close the gap on the rabbit. But just as it was gaining ground, its grass catcher needed emptying. Too bad, the rabbit wins by a nose. Or does it? At the finish line, the rabbit's operator picks up a trimmer to complete the trimming and then comes back for a blower to tidy up the walks, disperse clumps of grass and overall finish the job the rabbit only started. By now, the turtle is long gone, starting on its next job.

The moral of this story is simple: When it comes to mowing, speed is relative. A mower's overall speed should be measured by how long it takes to completely finish a job, not by how quickly it covers the ground. In fact, too much ground speed is a liability because it makes turning more difficult. And decks, even mid-mount decks, lose some of their efficiency at higher speeds.

The next time you see a rabbit mowing, admire its speed, but tip your hat to the turtle — the machine that's already heading to the next job. **WT**

Kingdom Quality Landscape *in* California

The students gather for a moment before going to their next class. They are enrolled in Monte Vista Christian School, Watsonville, California, a co-educational and non-denominational institution for students in grades 6 through 12.

Founded in 1926, the school is nestled in the northern California foothills just 20 miles north of Monterey. A 100-acre campus, small class rooms, and full curricula provide an idyllic setting for its 1,000-member student body.

But visitors shouldn't be deceived by the apparent peace and tranquility of the moment. Even when tucked away in classrooms, students can hear the hum of a mower and the soft whine of a trimmer or blower in the distance.

The maintenance of the campus is the responsibility of Tim Wetzel. A Monte Vista graduate, Wetzel doesn't take his job lightly.

"We have a saying around here," he relates. "In everything we do, we strive for kingdom quality, the quality that God would expect from us." That applies to landscaping, just as it does for education, he adds.

In addition to maintaining the turf and 8 acres of landscaping, Wetzel and his 1.5-person crew prep athletic fields, maintain the irrigation system, and install new turf and landscaping areas as growth dictates.

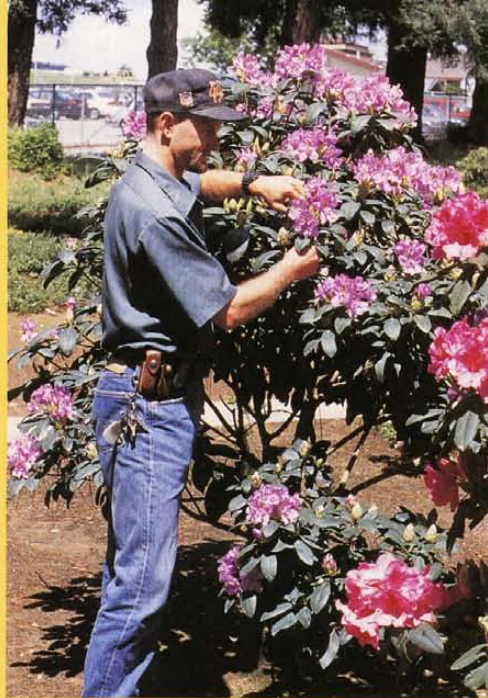
CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Monte Vista has seen some incredible changes. A new library and gymnasium were built in the '80s. More recently, a new administration building, to replace the school's oldest structure destroyed by the '89 earthquake, was completed.

A man with a beard and a baseball cap sits on a yellow lawnmower. He is wearing a green short-sleeved shirt over a blue t-shirt, blue jeans, and brown shoes. A tool belt with various tools is attached to his waist. The lawnmower has a white storage bin on the back with a 'WALKER' logo. In the background, there is a school building and some trees.

Tim Wetzel graduated from Monte Vista Christian School in 1986 and now maintains its landscape.

WALKER TALK



Wetzel inspects a rhododendron garden near the administration building.



Wetzel added a second 4.5-gallon fuel tank on his Walker to allow him to "mow all day."

scaping. About four years ago the school needed a new mower. It needed something that would mow hills, catch grass, maneuver around and between the landscape and, in the process, avoid scalping the grass.

As Wetzel explains, the choice came down to a Walker and two other mowers. "We set up demonstrations with all three mowers. We liked the interchangeability of the Walker's decks and their free-floating design that avoided scalping.

"We also liked the machine's superior grass-handling, and its size and weight, something that has come in handy this year with the wet spring."

The school purchased a 25-hp Walker with a 48-inch grass-handling deck and 62-inch side-discharge deck. The smaller deck is employed primarily on five smaller lawn areas, with the larger deck mowing the rest. The larger turf areas are left to a Jake Turf Cat.

On average, the Walker mows 10 to 15 acres a week from late February through October. There is some pickup in the fall thanks to a grove of sycamores. When clippings and other debris are caught, they are composted with horse shavings from the school's equestrian center.

Wetzel shares Walker time with other crew members except when it comes to mowing the athletic fields. He likes to keep his eye on the field to spot any weeds, broken sprinklers or other potential problems.

FAMILY TRADITION

The grounds maintenance department had done its homework on the new mower, checking references and having in-house mechanics perform an inspection. So when it decided on a machine, it really wasn't

a hard sell. Having family members in decision-making positions didn't hurt, either. Wetzel's father, Clark, is the school's president. His mother, Lynda, and older brother Eric are also employed at the school.

In its early years, the school operated a dairy farm, grew its own food and even had a vineyard. Today, it operates a greenhouse and nursery.

The school also does some of its own design and construction, including the building of a new athletic facility with bleachers. It also maintains its own equipment and even comes up with its own innovations. Wetzel says the addition of a second 4.5-gallon fuel tank on the Walker allows him to "mow all day."

"We liked the interchangeability of the Walker's decks and their free-floating design that avoided scalping."

Of the 1,000 students enrolled in the school, approximately 100 have rooms on campus as do many of the 100 plus staff members. Wetzel lives 25 minutes from the campus, but still gets to work at 6:30 a.m. and leaves between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m.

Striving for a kingdom quality landscape has its challenges in northern California, especially in the wake of an El Nino winter and spring. Monte Vista Christian School has to stay within a budget that is funded almost entirely by tuition. And like most groundskeepers, Wetzel would like to have more people and equipment to help get his job done.

As Wetzel implied earlier, education and landscaping have more in common than one might think. While perfection is the goal for both, the real challenge occurs in how one attempts to reach that goal. **WT**

On the fast track at Tracy Public Schools

Craig Hughes is a man on a mission. As grounds supervisor for Tracy Public Schools in Tracy, California, he is responsible for maintaining 17 school sites.

His crews mow upwards of 230 acres of grass weekly, perform safety inspections at playgrounds, prep athletic fields and overall maintain the school grounds.

"Right now, we're fighting to just stay ahead of the grass," tells Hughes, a 21-year veteran of the department. Heavy rains, canceled athletic meets, and testing at the schools all worked

to keep Hughes and his crews on their toes this past spring.

But playing catch-up is not unusual at the Tracy school system where new construction — to keep ahead of a growing population base — has been the watchword for the past decade. Another school is planned to add to the rolls that already count two high schools, three middle schools and 12 elementary schools.

Keeping the sites maintained is no small feat, tells Hughes. "We could always use more manpower, there's too much rain and too much going on. But despite that, I feel we have excellent equipment and men."

The bulk of the maintenance chores is left to his six employees who operate two Jakes, one Toro and two Walker Mowers, and a complement of handheld equipment.

A recently purchased John Deere reel mower maintains an athletic field planted with a hybrid Bermuda grass.

A man in a green short-sleeved button-down shirt is sitting at a desk, looking down at a calendar. He has a pen in his mouth and is holding the calendar with his left hand. The calendar is a monthly grid with a green header. The text "I never dreamed a mower could do what the Walker did." is printed on the calendar. The background is dark and out of focus.

**"I never dreamed a mower could
do what the Walker did."**

Keeping mowing crews on schedule is a challenge, especially in the spring when heavy rains and the school's testing schedule puts Hughes in a catch-up mode.

The school system is well-equipped today, but it wasn't always that way, Hughes remembers.

"When I first started, I was the only grounds person. I used to mow the fields with a ground-driven mower. When I was finished, it didn't even look like I had mowed it. Oh, we've operated a lot of old mowing equipment over the years."

Tracy purchased its first Walker a little more than 10

"Back in the old days, we didn't even have backpack blowers and line trimmers, not to mention zero-turn riders."

years ago. Hughes says he saw his first Walker at a turf show and asked the dealer to demonstrate it.

"At the time, the grass at a new school was 10 inches high. We mowed it with a 32-inch walk-behind and it just took forever. I never dreamed a mower could do what that Walker did. I wanted it ASAP. The following year I bought another."

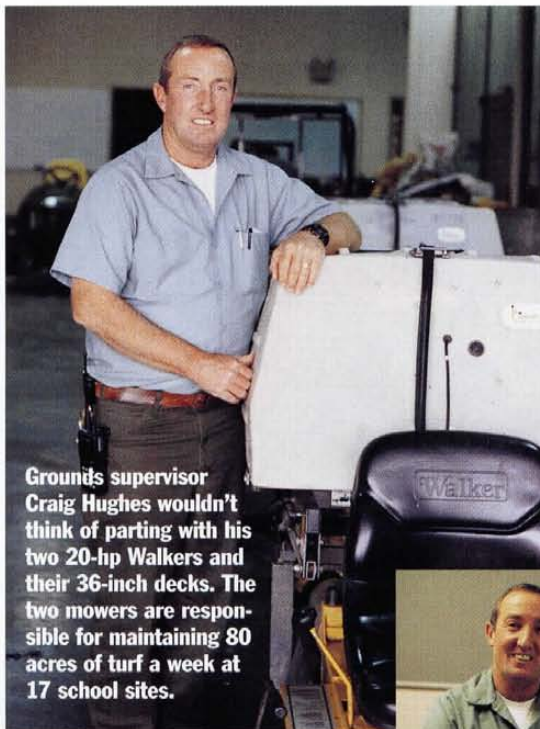
Today, his crews operate two 20-hp GHS models with new 36-inch tilt-up decks. Between the two of them, they mow approximately 80 acres a week. There's only one lawn where crews operate a walk-behind ... because it's rather disruptive to drive the Walker Mower down a hallway to get to the lawn, Hughes notes with a smile.

RAGS TO RICHES

"I keep telling the guys they're spoiled," relates Hughes. "Back in the old days, we didn't even have backpack blowers and line trimmers,

not to mention zero-turn riders like the Walker." In fact, Hughes says the purchase of the Walker Mowers really took the school district from "rags to riches" in terms of equipment.

Now, in addition to the mowers, the school operates a 6-inch-diameter chipper that turns tree limbs into useful mulch. It also plans to pur-



Grounds supervisor Craig Hughes wouldn't think of parting with his two 20-hp Walkers and their 36-inch decks. The two mowers are responsible for maintaining 80 acres of turf a week at 17 school sites.

chase an enclosed trailer to transport mowers and manpower to sites that could be as far away as 5 miles.

But it seems that all of the equipment in the world can't keep pace with growth patterns. The school district is home to thousands of commuters who work in Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay area.

The irony for Hughes? He probably had more time for landscaping and beautification projects back in the early days than he does now. His main mowing crew is busy from March straight through to November. And seemingly more special events than ever before put a

"monkey wrench" into a monthly mowing schedule.

In addition, a big part of Hughes' job is to ensure that playgrounds are safe. Hence, crews don't just police and mow an area, they pick up glass, fill in holes, and make sure there is enough sand under the swing sets and other playground equipment.

The inspection takes time, just as the "million or so" other chores do. When combined with dodging rain drops and mowing around the school's testing schedules, Hughes finds himself almost always playing catch-up.

That's one of the main reasons he likes his Walkers. They save him time.

"I haven't had a stitch of problems with any of them over the years," he explains. "They're efficient and easy to operate, and if we need a belt or other part, we don't have to go to Japan to get it. Handling the clippings has been a breeze, too."



A veteran of 21 years at the Tracy school district, Craig Hughes doesn't have too many fond memories of the old days when he maintained the fields with a ground-driven mower.

Hughes lets out a chuckle, then adds, "I love our Walkers. I don't

think there's another mower on the market that can compare." He's not just saying that, either. When asked what he would do if someone took his Walker away, he said, "I'd quit."

Not that he would if push came to shove, especially in an environment where budget concerns can always be a fact of life. But so far, he has been able to convince his superiors that using quality, time-saving equipment is one of the only ways his department can stay on the same fast track with the schools. **WT**

*Family-run company was first in Western Canada
to own a Walker*

Mowing is a Breeze in Calgary

When Laura Breeze and her family moved from New Zealand to Calgary in 1977, landscaping was the furthest thing from their minds. Laura was a nursery school teacher, and husband Rex worked as a building operator for a property management firm. When the firm's maintenance contractor failed to show up one week, Rex's boss asked if he knew someone who could mow the lawn. Laura volunteered, and she's been mowing ever since.

The year was 1984, Laura remembers, and she started mowing with one Lawn-Boy mower.

"We only had that job and it paid us around \$300 a month," Laura says. "The next year, the same property management firm offered us two shopping centers, and it has been growing ever since."

Today, Breeze Landscaping maintains 65 commercial properties, primarily shopping centers, condominiums, and small office complexes in and around Calgary. The company doesn't advertise, not even on its vehicles, and Laura routinely turns down jobs. Mowing and other maintenance practices, including pest and weed control, provide the foundation for the Breeze operation, an operation that's provided work for the entire family including sons Fred and Dennis, daughter Dulcie and husband Rex.

NO SECRETS, JUST HARD WORK

The mowing season in Western Canada runs from mid-April through October.

During the spring rush, crews are out mowing by 6:00 a.m. and seldom return home before 9:30 p.m.

"We're a tiny company by most standards and we do a lot of work," tells Laura. "Yet, we've never lost an account because the customer was dissatisfied." Keeping the family involved, she adds, helps maintain quality standards, and ensures that there's a direct line of communication between the customer and the workers.

Laura also credits her equipment lineup that includes two Walker Mowers. "About 10 years ago, Fred was mowing a property with a garden tractor and someone stopped by and said he could speed up our mowing operation considerably. We purchased the Walker, reportedly the first one ever sold in Western Canada, and have never regretted it for a moment. From



Laura Breeze with husband Rex and son Fred. Laura attributes much of her company's success to its family orientation.

the very first, I loved their versatility and maneuverability."

Fred likes their quality of cut, reliability, and ease of maintenance which allows him to do 95% of the work on the machines himself. They've also shaved 40% to 50% off his mowing time.

Their first Walker was powered by a 16-hp engine and featured a 36-inch deck. They've since upgraded to 20-hp models with 48-inch grass-handling decks. A 62-inch side-discharge deck waits in the wings for larger properties or when grass is just too wet to catch.

"Walkers are small enough for small areas and big enough for most big areas," tells Fred. "But operators have to be realistic. The Walkers can't do everything."

One of the keys to getting optimum performance out of his Walkers, he relates, is to know when to use them, and conversely, when to use other pieces of equipment. He is sold, however, on using a Walker where he can.

Each of the two mowers operates more than 800 hours a season. After two years they're sold for nearly half the original retail price. Laura says the key to their longevity and productivity is preventive maintenance.

"Mowing conditions up here are really difficult," she explains. "It's so dry and dusty we change the oil on the Walkers every 25 hours, sooner if needed. We also clean the machines thoroughly at the end of every day, blowing them off with a backpack blower and washing them down with a pressure washer."

SAVING TIME AND MONEY

"Nothing beats quality when it comes to saving time and money," tells Fred. "Operators need to look for quality in everything they buy and operate, not just Walkers."

Breeze Landscaping buys quality trim mowers and handheld equipment, and doesn't skimp on pickups as evidenced by a new diesel-pow-



ered Dodge that pulls around a recently purchased enclosed trailer.

A 14-foot-long low-boy dump trailer with 4-foot-high sides will also be purchased. After the mowers fill the trailer by backing in and dumping the grass clippings, the double-acting ramp tilts up, allowing the clippings to fall out. That's quite a change from the company's current mode of operation where crew members toss plastic bags full of grass over the side of a pickup.

One reason Breeze doesn't cater to residential accounts is because they're too time consuming for the return on investment. Laura also makes it clear that the company has no interest in snow removal because employees need time to rejuvenate.

BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

The Breeze family has no intention of becoming the biggest lawn maintenance firm in Calgary. Yes,

Walker Mowers have shaved 40% to 50% off Breeze Landscaping mowing time. The key, says Fred Breeze, is their size and maneuverability. "Walkers are small enough for small areas and big enough for most big areas."



The new tilt-up deck cuts down on cleaning time. When you mow 100 acres of grass a week, anything that saves time will add up in a hurry.



Breeze Landscaping pioneered Walker Mowers in Western Canada. It uses the mowers where it can, but also knows their limitations and when other types of equipment will be more effective.

the company has grown nearly every year since its inception, but growth is controlled.

Controlling growth, however, is easier said than done. When opportunity knocks you either answer the call, or let another company come in.

Hence, Rex is looking to quit his full-time job to work even more hours in the landscaping business. There's also some discussion about adding a third Walker.

Whatever the company does in the future, rest assured there will always be a Breeze and a Walker on every property. "This is definitely going to remain a family operation," tells Laura. **WT**

The evolution of the Walker Mower

By design, the Walker is one of the most compact and maneuverable, commercial-quality mowers on the market. Among its features are an exclusive, integrated grass-handling system, a custom-designed and custom-developed dual-hydro axle, and a near effortless steering/speed control operation that eliminates steering wheels, gear shifts and foot pedals.

If you own a Walker, you're familiar with these features and others that give these mowers a solid reputation. What you may not know is that the person who helped design and build the first Walker Mower is still designing them.

THE MAN BEHIND THE MACHINE

Dean Walker heads up the Walker design team in Fort Collins, Colorado. His approach to engineering really tells the story behind the evolution of the Walker Mower.

"When we designed the first Walker, we wanted a compact machine with a grass catcher," tells Dean. "Over the years, the Walker has evolved, but our original concept is intact. Today's Walkers have the same wheelbase and chassis as the original machine."

This is significant, he adds. The company has been able to take the original compact design, and upgrade and add new components without jeopardizing one of the mower's truly unique features — its size and maneuverability.

THE ORIGINAL WALKER MOWER

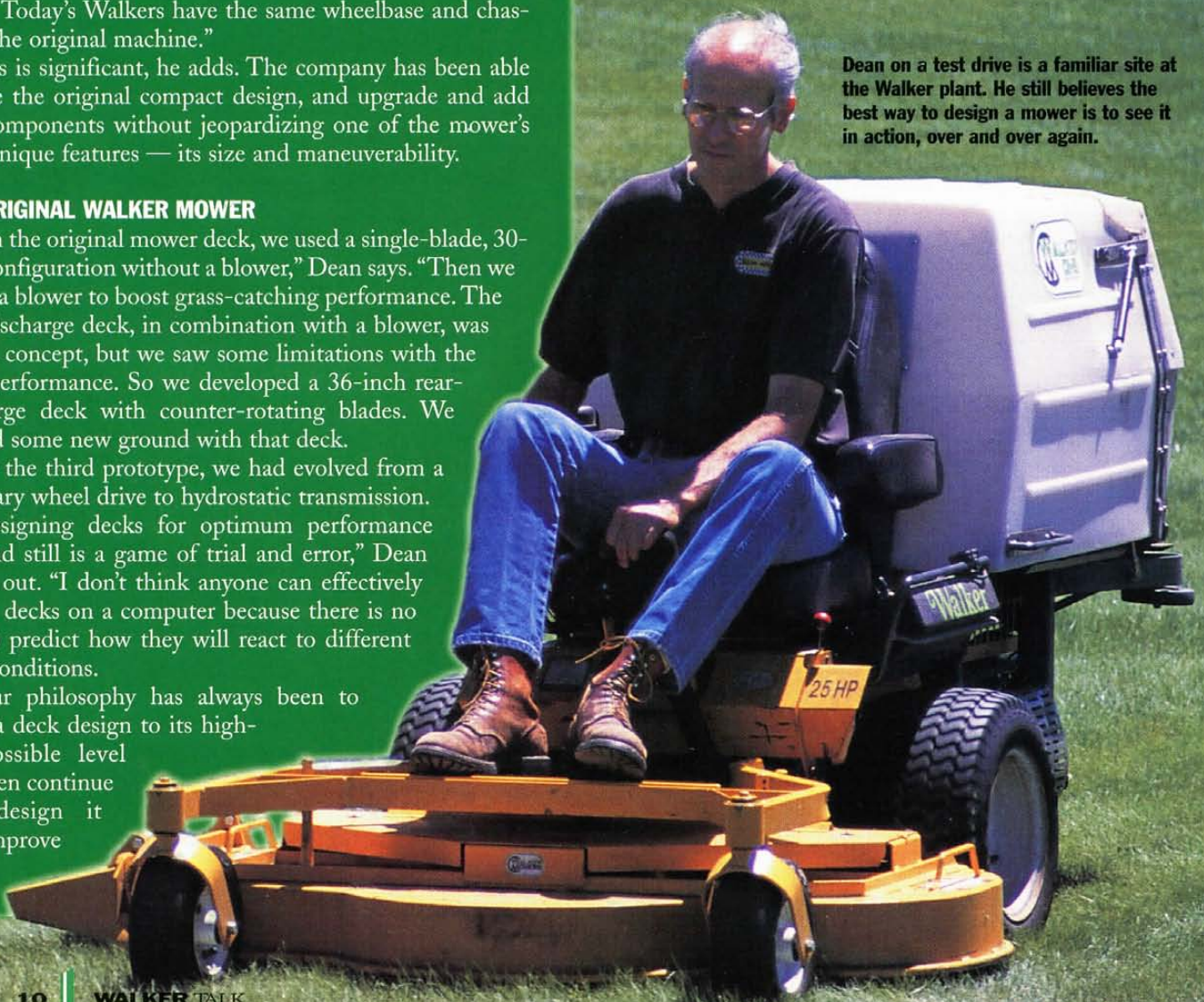
"On the original mower deck, we used a single-blade, 30-inch configuration without a blower," Dean says. "Then we added a blower to boost grass-catching performance. The rear-discharge deck, in combination with a blower, was a solid concept, but we saw some limitations with the deck performance. So we developed a 36-inch rear-discharge deck with counter-rotating blades. We plowed some new ground with that deck."

"By the third prototype, we had evolved from a planetary wheel drive to hydrostatic transmission."

"Designing decks for optimum performance was and still is a game of trial and error," Dean points out. "I don't think anyone can effectively design decks on a computer because there is no way to predict how they will react to different grass conditions."

"Our philosophy has always been to bring a deck design to its highest possible level and then continue to redesign it and improve on

Dean on a test drive is a familiar site at the Walker plant. He still believes the best way to design a mower is to see it in action, over and over again.



it as we receive more feedback from the field."

The same can be said for the tractor, too. The first Walker was built in 1977. That machine was powered by an 11-hp engine. Twenty-one years later, Walker still offers a variation of that first machine in the Model S, again with an 11-hp engine. Today, however, customers may choose from another five engine sizes, nine deck sizes, and a number of attachments and accessories to further enhance a Walker's versatility.

DEAN'S SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Although technology and manufacturing techniques have changed considerably since those early days, he still relies on his hands-on talents to improve on current tractor designs and develop new ones. Dean has built at least one prototype for every Walker Mower and deck.

"One of Dean's strengths is his discipline and focus," says older brother and company president Bob Walker. "In decks alone, he has literally built and tested hundreds of configurations to arrive at the optimum deck design. This is not glamorous work. Many typical engineering types would have become bored and given up on deck design long before arriving at the design Dean developed through long hours of trial and error work."

Another strength, Bob adds, is the fact that his brother is not driven by "pride of authorship."

"Dean originated the product, but he listens to other people, again always looking for ways to improve on his design."

What happens to new ideas? How do suggestions get from that — just suggestions — to production?

"Safety is always our first priority," tells Dean. "Ideas that enhance performance come next, followed by bells and whistles."

Being a small company has its advantages because a consensus is easier to reach, he adds.

Dean's approach to the design process also speeds up the implementation process. He doesn't labor over the drawing board or at a computer screen before trying out an idea. He simply designs it and builds it, and then comes back with drawings and documentation.

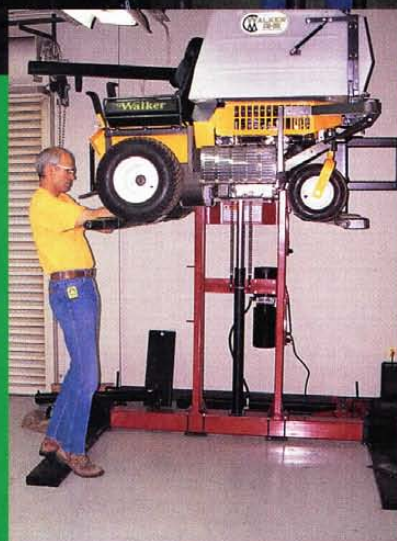
Sometimes it's just a few hours until his idea is coming down the assembly line.

"I start by thinking about different ways to reach a specific goal or to solve the problem," he explains. "I look at different methods and consider costs, too. You have to think about your capability as a manufacturer, as well. Is it something we can do in-house or will we have to out-source it?"

"We're very sensitive about outsourcing. One of our goals has been to bring as much of the production as



In addition to being lead designer for Walker, Dean also designs and builds the tooling used in production.



Dean still relies heavily on his hands-on talents to improve on current tractor designs and to develop new ones.

possible in-house to be able to control quality.

"Throughout the design process, I always look for the best way to solve the problem. When I think I've found it, I build a few working models and let other people try them out."

Next, if the design flies, Dean builds the tooling. In addition to being lead designer,

he also designs and builds the tooling used in production.

He also heads up the production plant, giving him complete control of the Walker design from inception to finished product

"As for myself, I've always struggled with the idea that I'm an engineer. I see myself as a designer, as a hands-on person who simply tries to design and build a machine that people will buy. If I can point to a couple of reasons for our success, I would have to say we've always strived to keep our designs simple, to design and build versatility into our products and to continually improve on what we have." **WT**

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Walker Mfg. has always been open to new ideas and suggestions. As far as competition goes, the company believes the best defense is a good offense. Part of that offense is the design process itself. For Dean, the process begins with the identification of a goal or a problem that has to be solved.

The things that count ... *in* **New Zealand**



Brian and Nell Larsen take on large and small properties alike in Tokoroa. Their secret to success is using their Kiwi ingenuity, and spending money on things that count.

By most accounts Brian Larsen is a late-bloomer in this industry. He left the forest business and a desk job at age 50, and purchased a tractor mowing company. Homeowner inquiries led him naturally to the landscaping industry where he now maintains three large residential locations, 20 to 25 smaller residences, three institutional sites, and four commercial properties.

Larsen's business card lists an array of services, but mowing is the company's strong suit. With wife Nell, Larsen takes on large and small properties alike, delivering a high level of service and responsiveness that customers have come to expect. And that's no small feat in New Zealand where rainfall is plentiful and grass is cut naturally to within an inch of its life.

There are other challenges in this part of the world as well. The soil around Tokoroa where Larsen's Landcare is headquartered is volcanic, comprised of a pumice that literally eats away at mowing decks and blades.

Customers are few and far between, causing contractors to travel 31 miles or more to secure jobs. And costs of doing business are high. Larsen estimates that before he cranks his mowers up, 50% of his revenue is already accounted for in taxes and other overhead expenses. So how does he do it? With more than a little Kiwi ingenuity, and spending money on things that count.

INDEPENDENT BY NATURE

New Zealanders, or Kiwis as they're also known, have always relied on their own creativity to survive. Isolated from the mainstream, they have had to "make do" with natural resources and wit to carry them through.



The Larsens purchased their first Walker in 1988 and two more followed, the most recent a V-twin Kohler-engine-powered Model T. Like most of their accounts, the Larsens mow this horse farm every two weeks, eight months a year.



Larsen is no exception. His self-designed and custom-built trailer is a dead giveaway. This multi-purpose unit carries his hand tools and mowing equipment, and it also doubles as a loading/dump trailer. A spring-loaded platform effortlessly dumps clippings into a box that later tips backward to discard them into a compost pile or other disposal area. The trailer is designed to be towed easily by a 24-year-old Ford automobile. This is not your ordinary tow vehicle. But then again, Larsen is not your ordinary operator.

Among other things he uses a synthetic oil in his maintenance equipment that, he claims, allows him to extend change intervals but still receive optimal performance. Seeing is believing. One of his Walkers has 4,000 engine hours and is still cutting with the best of them.

Larsen also works to protect his mower blades by welding a sacrificial strip on the blade surface. The strip acts as a buffer between the blade and the pumice soil. Each blade receives three such strips before being replaced.

The special oil, trailer and blade arrangement are examples of not only Kiwi ingenuity but what this owner calls "spending money where it counts." His mowing equipment falls into the same category.

POWERING THROUGH GRASS IN PATEA

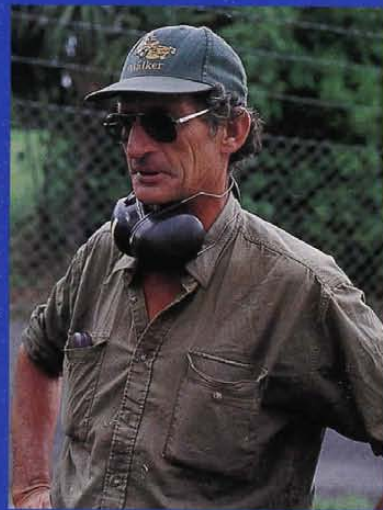
Gary Murphy may not be in any choir, but he sure makes his 21.5-hp, diesel Walker sing. The mower, with its 52-inch side-discharge deck, charges up and down the hills with little regard for terrain or the height of the grass. As this operator says, "You can't waste time cutting grass here because it grows as fast as you mow it."

Murphy, owner of GC Contracting in Patea, has been maintaining properties since 1992. His calling card today would include many of the hydro dams and utilities that line the power-rich Taranaki province of New Zealand.

When he first started mowing, Murphy admits he didn't have the right equipment for the job. The walk-behind mower was too slow and the rider he used, in his words, "cost a fortune in belts." So a friend introduced him to a Walker. He put 1,100 hours on

mows three Maori (aboriginal people of New Zealand) reservations, and a couple of private schools. In total, Murphy contracts to cut approximately 70 acres of grass every two weeks.

His Walkers have been advantageous in several areas over the



Gary Murphy has been maintaining properties since 1992. He mows 70 acres every two weeks in some of the toughest mowing conditions on earth.

"I've never run another mower that does a better job. And I'll never have anything but a Walker."

that first 20-hp, gas-powered model before more work caused him to trade up to a 21.5-hp, diesel-powered unit.

"The diesel is a great machine," tells the colorful Murphy. As he puts it, nearly nothing can stop it. And believe him when he says he has put it through its paces. He has run over just about everything imaginable. To this day, he finds himself poking along grassy areas with a stick before introducing his Walker Mower.

In addition to the power authorities, GC Contracting

years. In one instance, he recalls tending a dam project for 12 hours of mowing and actually completing the job in 4.5 hours with his Walker. He figures using the diesel-powered machine alone saves him approximately \$400 a month in fuel costs. And his 52-inch side-discharge deck? "It literally makes the 'bloody' grass disappear," he exclaims, to the extent that he no longer catches some contracts that at one time called for clippings to be picked up.

"I must admit, I've never run another mower that does a better job," he adds. "And I'll never have anything but a Walker."

Now that's a testimonial coming from an operator who admittedly works in what could be among the toughest mowing conditions on earth.



This multi-purpose trailer features a spring-loaded platform that effortlessly dumps clippings into a box that later tips backward to discard them into a compost pile or other disposal area.

"When customers first asked me to mow, I tried out several machines," says Larsen. "They could all mow grass, but that was about all."

As he reports, many of his customers wanted their grass clippings picked up. The task proved a dual challenge for decks that at one and the same time had to cut close to the ground and pick up the clippings. Added to the mix was a rainy season that often left the grass wet during the day.

A Walker Mower with the GHS deck did the best job of any, he adds. He purchased his first one in 1988 and two more followed. Nell is right at home on one of the Walkers, Brian on another. A "casual" employee uses the third Walker that also acts as a spare.

As Larsen admits, Walker Mowers are not the cheapest

mowers around, so operators have to receive a respectable hourly rate to justify them. But the end result speaks for itself.

"If I can get on the job with the mower and show property owners what it will do, I can get the job," he emphasizes.

Larsen mows his accounts every two weeks for eight months out of the year and backs off during the winter season by mowing them once a month or every six weeks. Although New Zealand grass doesn't turn brown in the winter, it does go through a dormant stage. The slowed growth gives Larsen time to catch up on pruning, and is ideal for planting shrubs and other landscape elements.

But in the spring and summer it's full speed ahead for the grass and operators who mow it. Larsen's team was currently mowing a large horse farm, a configuration that put the Walker's versatility to a test, as well. Wide areas and long grassy strips are complemented by finely manicured parade and viewing areas. The entire project would take Larsen and his wife 10 hours to complete.

Larsen turns his head to give Nell a glance. She's operating the Walker like the professional she is, wasting no time maneuvering around trees and going down the straight-aways.

"Nell does a great job of mowing," says Larsen. "In fact, I prefer women operators to men. They are easier on the equipment and they are more fastidious about the job they do."

After all, the bottom line for any maintenance contractor is getting the job done in the most productive way possible, and having an end-product that can't be surpassed. Whether or not one calls it Kiwi ingenuity, spending money on things that count, or just plain common sense, it all adds up the same way. **WT**

Keeping it

The two diesel Walkers buzz in and out of the gum trees. Owen Reid's crews are precise with their turns, and they waste little time dumping the bark and grass clippings with their high-lift systems.

"We have to be very organized in this business," tells Reid, owner of Reid's Lawnmowing in Kambah, Australia. "The overhead here is incredible. The labor rate is high, around \$10 per hour, equipment is expensive, and the mowing conditions are tough."

A former police officer, Reid started mowing lawns in 1989. Five years later he went full-time in the business, expanding his services to include just about anything and everything a customer could want. Today, he operates with four full-time employees, and services both corporate and commercial accounts, and a handful of residential properties.

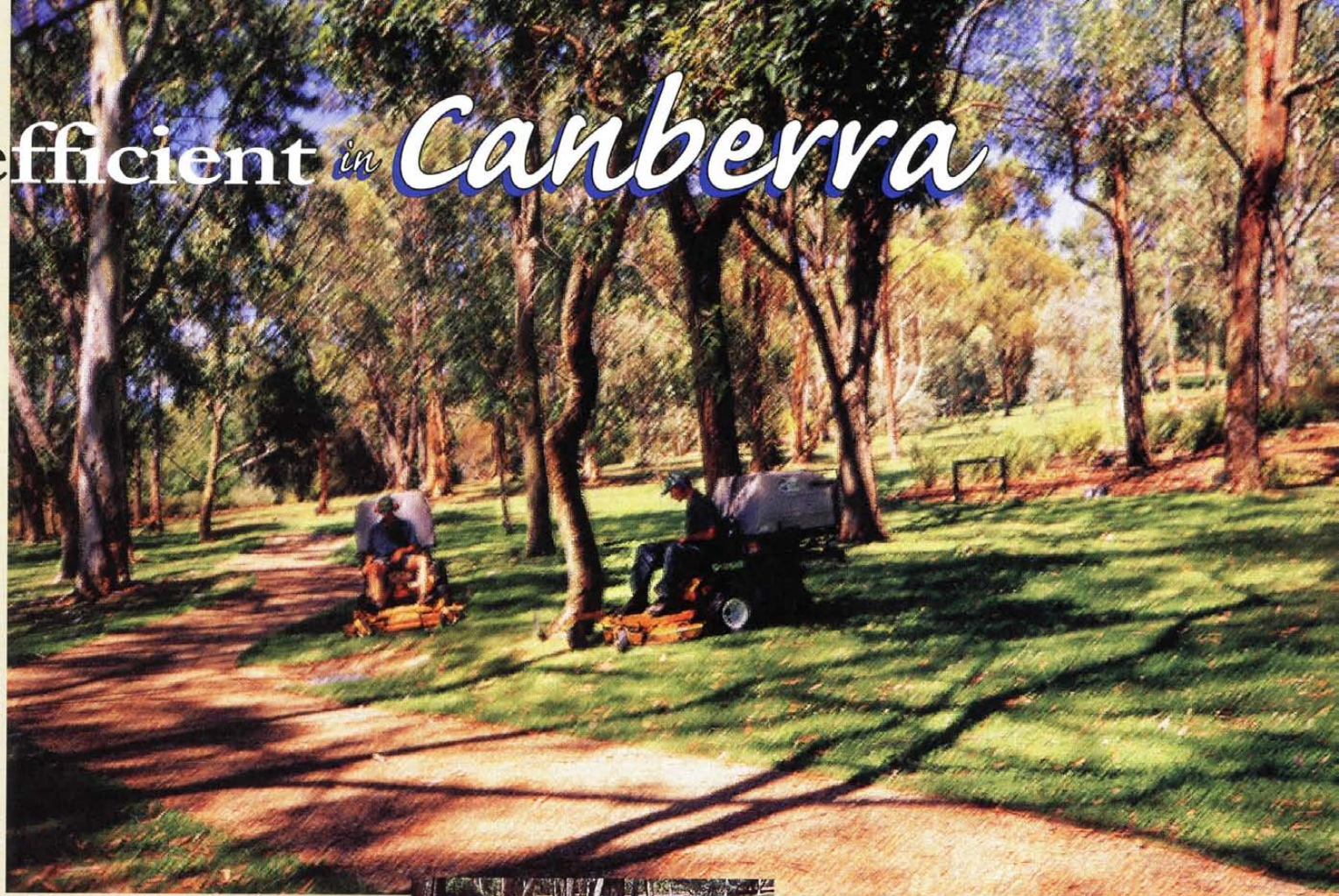
"If we can fit a Walker on a property, we'll use it."

Located about 20 minutes outside of Canberra, Australia's capital, Reid's company finds plenty of work in a city that is growing and privatizing at the same time. In the last 18 months alone, his company has doubled in size and it's still expanding, he emphasizes.

No, finding work isn't a challenge in Canberra and its surrounding suburbs. But making money can be. That's where the Walkers come in.

Reid bought his first Walker, a used model, in 1993. He has since purchased two diesel units equipped with

efficient *in* Canberra



42- and 48-inch grass-handling decks, as well as 52- and 62-inch side-discharge decks. He says he went with diesel because they last a long time and are more economical on fuel than their petrol counterparts. Their value, however, comes through loud and clear at the Canberra Botanical Gardens where the mower's maneuverability and pick-up capability are put to a rugged test.

"The real reason we went with these mowers is because they allow us to do the jobs more efficiently, and they do a better job mowing than other machines," tells Reid. "They are compact, maneuverable, and they clean up so well. If we can fit a Walker on a property, we'll use it."

Even the botanical garden has commented on the look of the property since Reid's been maintaining it.



As he observes his crew members mowing the property, Reid points out how close they get to the trees. Touching or in anyway injuring a tree is something to be avoided on any property, but in the botanical garden, it's not even an option.

He also points out the leaf and bark material that seem to constant-

Above: Canberra Botanical Gardens routinely puts Walker Mowers through a maneuverability and pick-up test.

Left: Reid's Lawnmowing owner Owen Reid pays special attention to the business side of contracting. He can also be found putting a Walker through its paces.

ly shed from any of more than dozens of varieties of gum trees at the garden. "You need a mower here that can really pick up debris," he emphasizes.

Reid compares the mowing conditions in Australia to the United States where he visited last year.

"The biggest difference is the lack of irrigation used over here," he notes. "Irrigation is just too expensive for most properties. Unfortunately, turf that isn't irrigated is tougher on decks than turf that is because of the dust and dirt."

Lawns are mowed much shorter in Australia, he adds, which puts



Reid's custom-built trailer is designed to hold two Walkers with big decks and features a trimmer trap and blower box.

additional stress on the mowing deck and the ability of the machine to pick up the clippings.

Another comparison? "They just seem to do more mowing in the United States, says Reid, using roadsides as a reference which are usually left unattended in Australia. Additionally, contractors employ a lot of intermediate walk-behind mowers, something Reid says never caught on in his country. As he puts it, "Why walk when you can ride."

COMPETITIVELY SPEAKING

One thing that is the same both "down under" and in the United States is the competitive nature of the grounds maintenance industry. Both countries have their share of price cutters. Also in both countries, offering more (e.g., providing full service) is becoming one way to set yourself apart from the competition.

Reid's Lawnmowing is really a misnomer. In reality, Reid's crews also care for gardens and landscape, remove rubbish and do minor landscaping. "We'll even change light bulbs and do some interior cleaning if customers asks," says the owner.

Most of his customers are on yearly contracts, except for the botanical garden which has signed up for three years. The company charges approximately \$35 per hour for its maintenance services, and has to run a tight ship to make that figure a profitable one.

In addition to the equipment and labor overhead, Reid's Lawnmowing also carries a \$5 million public liability insurance policy and workers' compensation. And 5% comes out of employee wages for retirement.

"Smaller operators like myself really have to keep their minds on the business end of things to remain profitable," tells Reid. He takes his equipment to local Walker dealer D & R Hanns for weekly service and maintenance. "In the long run, it works out for us," he explains.

You'll find the owner on a mower, too. And all of his equipment is top of the line, including his Honda

push mowers, Shindaiwa weed trimmers and Toro vacuums.

Even his trailer is something special, custom built to hold two Walkers with big decks, and with convenient features such as a trimmer trap and blower box.

No, mowing in Australia is not like mowing in the United States. Conditions seem a bit more harsh and the overhead seems a bit steeper.

Yet, when all is said and done, the bottom line is the same — get the job done in the most efficient way possible and deliver the best service possible. **WT**

Centennial Park — Adelaide, South Australia

100-ACRE CEMETERY COMPLEX PUTS PUSH MOWERS ASIDE

Imagine mowing a huge cemetery complex with a push mower. That's what the staff at Centennial Park did prior to buying its first Walker 18 months ago.

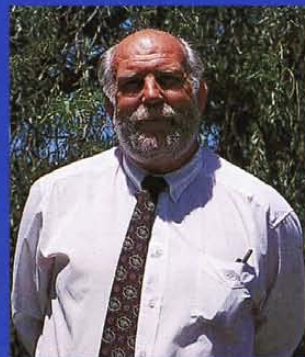
"We had an immediate 50% gain in productivity with our new Walker," tells operations manager Mark Ruthuin.

He goes on to explain how the Walker mows approximately 15 acres out of the 100-acre complex comprised of both burial plots and a memorial garden. During the prime growing season, the staff mows everyday and makes a complete cycle on the grounds every two weeks.

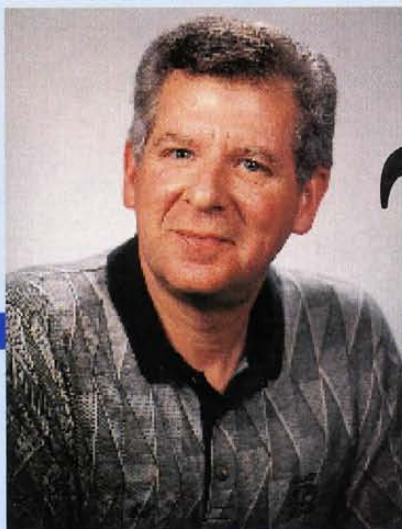
Centennial Park has a rather unique approach to mowing. The Walker, with a mulching deck, mows two complete cycles, taking four weeks. At the beginning of the third cycle, the grass-handling deck is installed. Clippings are picked up and then dispersed on the many garden areas.

"The process saves us incredible time and labor," adds Ruthuin, noting that the mulching deck alone paid for itself in six months. Did he mention how his staff feels about riding vs. walking? No, but he knows they're happier now, which makes the manager happy as well.

Ruthuin, a straightforward person, says it simply, "If I thought this machine wasn't a good investment, I'd tell you."



Centennial Park operations manager Mark Ruthuin:
"We had an immediate 50% gain in productivity with our new Walker."



BOB T'S

Tech Talk

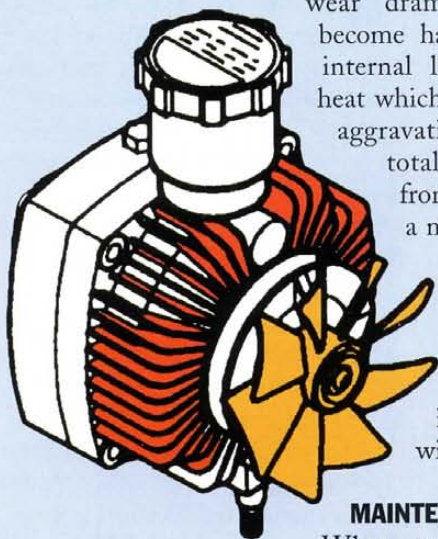
Fins, fans and foreign matter

In this article I will try to dispel some of the mysteries and fears of hydrostatic transmissions, the Eaton Model 7, used in Walker Mowers. The two basic causes of hydro failures are heat and contamination.

Excessive heat will produce a breakdown of the lubricity of the oil and will cause the seals to harden and deteriorate. At this point, a chain reaction occurs throughout the hydro. Lubricity is the protective film the oil gives to the metal components. When the film breaks down or disappears due to heat, the components tend to wear very quickly. The metal particles produced from wear spread

through the whole system and accelerate the wear dramatically. When the seals become hard and lose their function, internal leakage produces additional heat which causes more wear — a self-aggravating destructive cycle. The total destruction of the hydro from overheating will happen in a matter of a few hours, or even a few minutes.

Contamination in a hydro is like placing a piece of sandpaper between the close fitting internal parts. Total failure will happen quickly.



MAINTENANCE TIPS

What causes excessive heat? Where does the contamination come from? How can a person reduce the possibility of a hydro failure?

Before addressing these issues, I want to make it very clear that while the Eaton hydrostat is very well engineered, it will wear out in time. The life expectancy can be from 1,500 to 3,000 hours — depending on the loads exerted on it, the environment it is used in, and how well the transmission is maintained.

The cooling fins are an integral part of the hydro. Their function is to dissipate heat from the oil and internal working parts. When the fins become plugged with grass, mud or other debris, the function of the fins is reduced greatly. The cooling fins should be a part of the daily inspection. Any buildup of debris should be removed immediately. The cooling fins encircle the case. The ones on the bottom are harder to inspect and are often overlooked or ignored.

The cooling fan provides air movement across the cooling fins. A fan with damaged or missing blades should be replaced immediately. Fans are much less expensive to replace than hydros.

There are two places for contamination to enter: (1) the oil reservoir and (2) the fill plug. The reservoir cap should only be removed to add oil. Before removing the cap, clean all around it giving special attention to the bottom edge of the cap. Remove the cap very carefully. The fill plug should only be removed when replacing the oil in the hydro or bleeding off air after the oil has been changed. Likewise, clean around the plug thoroughly before removing it.

The oil in the hydro is its lifeblood. The quantity and quality are imperative. If a hydro is low on oil, you need to ask why. The transmission does not consume oil, so there must be a leak that needs immediate attention. Eaton factory fills the hydros with DTE18M, a Mobil hydraulic oil that may be difficult to obtain. Eaton approves the use of SAE30W or Mobil 1 synthetic motor oil 15W50 - 20W50. We encourage the use of Mobil 1, because of some very positive reports from the field.

Hydrostatic transmissions are a very effective and efficient means of transmitting power with infinite speed selection. Take care of them and they'll keep you mowing. **WT**

Bob Tomasek is manager of customer service at Walker Mfg.

WALKER VOTED #1 BRAND

The readers of *Grounds Maintenance Magazine* have given the Walker brand name "thumbs up" as the most preferred brand for zero-turning-radius mowers. In the 1997 Brand Preference Study, respondents gave their favored brand name for a variety of products using a fill-in-the-blank survey. Since there was no list of brand names furnished with the survey, the results are especially meaningful, as the names were recalled from memory. Among the 27 brands mentioned in the zero-turn mower category, Walker received a 17.4% vote of preference with Toro, Scag, Exmark and Grasshopper rounding out the top five.

Bob Walker, president of Walker Mfg., noted, "After starting with an unknown brand 18 years ago, it is a remarkable achievement for our dedicated team of marketers, distributors, dealers, and most of all, our customers, to make our brand name recognized and preferred."

WALKER MOWERS CUT "OLE MISS" CAMPUS DOWN TO SIZE

In May, the University of Mississippi purchased six diesel Walker Mowers from Pro Power Midsouth, the Walker distributor for Arkansas and upper Mississippi.

According to grounds supervisor Reed Robison of Ole Miss, the Walkers now help the grounds crew mow the entire 350 acres of turf on the campus each week. "The mowing used to be done on a piece-by-piece basis using various riders and walk-behinds, and it usually took a couple weeks to complete the entire campus," explains Robison, "these are our main front-line mowers."



Walker Mower distributor Mark Ebby (Pro Power Midsouth) prepares to leave the Walker Mfg. plant in May with a load of six mowers and eight mower decks purchased by the University of Mississippi.

The Ole Miss crew also enjoys the ability to change from grass-handling decks to larger side-discharge decks. The quick-change decks allow for completion of finer mowing jobs (around student center buildings and dormitories), and wide-open, side-discharge jobs (athletic fields and open spaces) using the same tractor.

TRAINING VIDEO DEVELOPED

A 22-minute "How To Mow" video has been developed to give new Walker operators a video presentation of the operating instructions contained in the Owner's Manual. A copy of the video is now included in the packet of materials delivered with each new Walker.

Landscape contractors with multiple new operators, seasonal retraining of "veterans" and individual new operators will all find the video a valuable training aid. Topics like, "Proper Hand Position on Controls," "How to Make a Sharp Turn," and "How to Use the GHS" enhance safe operation and teach fully utilizing the machine's capabilities.



Bob Walker sneaks a peak at a monitor during the shooting of the 22-minute "How to Mow" video.

Extra copies of the video may be ordered from Walker dealers. English or Spanish versions with VHS or PAL formats are available.

LARGEST PRODUCTION INCREASE SLATED FOR '99

After six consecutive years of increased production and a shortage of Walker Mowers for delivery in the Spring season, the Walker factory is planning for the largest production increase ever. Daily output will be increased 20% starting in October. Additional tooling, employees and equipment will provide the necessary capacity without increasing the size of the 116,000-square-foot factory. Walker attributes the increased demand for the mower to a growing overall market demand for zero-turn commercial riding mowers and Walker's increasing share in that market.

Questions from our Readers and Answers

Q: What are the prices, and where is my dealer?

A: The Walker Sales Program is administered by area distributors who establish both the selling price and dealers within the area. Ask the factory for the distributor in your area and contact the distributor for pricing and dealers.

Q: Why is my GHS blower wearing out too quickly?

A: Blower wear is caused by sand ingestion or dirt buildup in the housing. A bulletin was recently published detailing the cause, symptoms, suggested operating improvements, maintenance and repairs associated with this problem. Ask your dealer for a copy of Advisory Bulletin #98106.

Q: What is the comparison between air-cooled engines vs. water-cooled engines in the Walker?

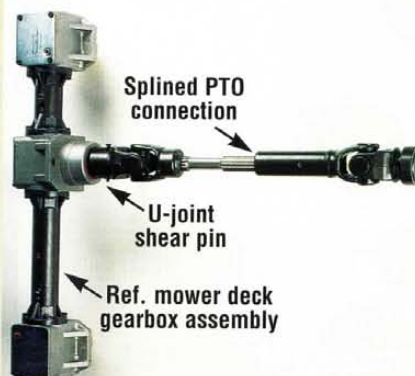
A: Water-cooled engines initially cost more but offer longer life and better fuel economy in return. Air-cooled engines usually last 2,500 hours vs. 5,000 hours for water-cooled. The owner's philosophy on buying and using equipment is a good indication of which engine is best — frequently trading for new equipment favors air-cooled while keeping and "running out" to full equipment life favors water-cooled.

FIVE NEW ITEMS OFFERED ON NEW MODELS AND FOR EXISTING MODELS

1. GHS "No-Catch" Deflector fits in the door opening of the grass catcher and offers quick-change capability to switch from grass-collection to rear-discharge mowing with the GHS model. The deflector offers spreading action comparable to the rear-discharge and convertible mower decks used on other competitive mowers, and eliminates the need to switch to a side-discharge deck for some applications (side-discharge still offers the best spreading action in heavy cutting and is better suited to mowing rougher areas). Deflectors are available for all three sizes of GHS catchers; specify size of catcher when ordering.



2. The PTO drive shaft/universal joint assembly is upgraded two ways.



A shear pin is added to the U-joint connecting to the blade drive input shaft. Shear protection on the U-joint eliminates the individual blade shear bolts from breaking and allowing blades to go out-of-time and strike each other — a common cause of blade and gearbox damage after a blade shock load. The other improvement is changing the sliding PTO connection from a square shaft to a spline — providing more wear surface and smoother operation.

3. A tilt-up latch with locking and manual release action is now used to secure the deck in the tilt-up position. Due to an improvement in safety, all earlier models with tilt-up decks should be upgraded with the new latch (refer to Recall Bulletin #98108).



5. Gas springs replace the extension springs on the GHS catcher door.

The dampening action of the gas spring allows the door to open and close with gentle action, eliminating the "door slamming" from the original design. Due to the improvement in safety and reducing the risk of injury from "door slamming," installing the gas springs on earlier units is strongly recommended, and a retrofit kit is being offered on a recall basis (refer to Recall Bulletin #98109).



4. Steering lever handle grips have an adjustable position to better fit the operator's arm length, and the shape of the grip is changed to give a better "single-handed" control feel.

Man *and* Machine

Discover the Walker Mower

competitive
advantage,
whether your
business is
large or small
or just a dream
that is starting
to become a
reality.



MEET KEN SILVERS from Findlay, Ohio, "Flag City USA."

Five years ago, he started his own lawn care business after five years of experience in the industry.

- ▼ **His BUSINESS FOCUS:** "specializing in high quality residential lawn care."
- ▼ **His COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE:** "outperforming larger crew-driven companies who have lost the personal touch and attention to detail."

That's where the Walker Mower comes in the picture. Organizing as a **one-man** operation required top quality, productive, efficient mowing equipment. It's working! Ken Silvers' little company is growing and prospering and getting the job done...operating Walker Mowers over 3,000 hours.

▼ Walker is proud to have many of the largest landscape maintenance companies around the world using our mowers...but we salute the thousands of professional one-man, one-woman, and small businesses who are using Walker Mowers to build an opportunity for themselves.

*"I will never be too big or busy to service
my customers."* —Ken Silvers



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