

First-Of-Its-Kind Mower Uses Center “Power Deck”

You’ve never seen anything like this first-of-its-kind pull-type mower that’s equipped with a “fake” middle deck that looks like a third mower but is actually the power source for the two wing decks.

Tim Schnell, along with Terry and Dale Strickland of Strickland Bros. Engineering of Spring Hope, N.C., came up with the patented machine. Schnell mows with a Deere 17 hp, 54-in. riding mower. With the two 42-in. wing decks he has a total cutting width of 11 ft. 4 in. Each wing deck is equipped with two rotary blades and rides on four 8-in. wide, 9-in. high solid molded plastic tires, while the power deck has a pair of caster wheels on front and two narrower wheels on back.

The center power deck is equipped with a Honda 16 hp engine which belt-drives the wing decks.

The wing decks are connected to the center deck by a rectangular metal frame with three U-clamps under it. By adjusting the position of a telescoping spring tensioner in the frames, the decks can be adjusted to cut anywhere from 9 to 12 ft. wide.

The wing decks automatically adjust up or down to follow the ground contour and also from side to side. Each deck is attached to the frame on the power deck by a metal arm that’s free to swivel up or down on a pipe. A spherical rod bearing allows each deck to tilt up to 20 degrees to either the left or right.

A hand-operated crank is used to raise the wings up vertically for transport.

The operator reaches back from the riding mower seat to a control box located on front of the power deck. The control box is used to start the engine and engage the clutch and throttle.

“It’s a totally new design that works great and results in less cost and less maintenance. Everyone who sees it is amazed at what this

machine can do,” says Schnell. “It does an incredible job of hugging the ground contour which results in a wonderful finish cut. The machine is balanced so well and rolls so easily that I hardly know there’s anything behind me.

“I came up with the idea because my wife complained about our 3 1/2-acre lawn every weekend. It would take us three hours on two riding mowers. I had two discontinued new mower decks that I had bought to pull behind my Wheel Horse 8 hp riding mower. I decided to remove the engine from my wife’s riding mower and mount it on a separate power deck. Now it takes less than an hour to mow by myself. I can mow one acre in eight minutes.

“My wife really likes how easy it pulls. When she hits a tree or post, the mower moves over and realigns itself. Our lawn is hilly and uneven but with the 3-pt. articulation of each deck, contours are mowed perfectly.”

The spring-loaded wing deck arms keep the correct tension on the belts at all times. “The only time I have to adjust the belts is when I move the wing decks in or out, and I do that by simply loosening six screws. The pulleys are wide open with no guides, so there’s nothing in the way if I need to replace a belt,” says Schnell.

Each deck rides on four solid molded plastic tires, while the center power deck rides on a pair of caster wheels on front and a pair of solid foam rubber tires on back. There’s a metal bar on front of each wing deck. “The design allows me to mow up close to buildings so I don’t have to do any trimming afterward. With the caster wheels on the power deck and the arms on front of the wing decks, I can bump up against a tree and the entire machine will slide around and then reposition itself.”



Pull-type mower is equipped with a “fake” middle deck that looks like a third mower but is actually the power source for two wing decks.



Middle deck is equipped with a Honda 16 hp engine that belt-drives wing decks.

Schnell is looking for a manufacturer. He estimates that his current model, if manufactured commercially, would sell for \$4,500 to \$5,000. “I’d like to build a smaller version

and keep the price under \$2,500,” he says.

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Wayne Becker tied together three Swisher 60-in. pull-type mowers, each of which is belt-driven by its own engine. It lets him cut a 15-ft. wide swath across his lawn.

Three-In-One Lawn Mower

With three riding lawn mowers hitched together, Wayne Becker of Blairstown, Iowa cuts a 15-ft. wide swath across his 4 1/2-acre lawn for far less than the cost of a comparably sized commercial mower.

Becker tied together three Swisher 60-in. pull-type mowers, all of which he bought new. Each mower is belt-driven by its own Briggs & Stratton engine. He uses a Steiner 16 hp, 4-WD tractor equipped with wide, lugged tires to pull the three mowers.

“It has reduced my mowing time from five hours to only one hour and 10 minutes or less,” says Becker. “I paid about \$1,200 apiece for the three Swisher mowers and \$5,000 for the Steiner tractor so my total cost was about \$8,600. I’d have spent that much money just for a Dixon or Cub Cadet 60-in. riding mower.”

Each mower is powered by its own Briggs & Stratton 13 hp, electric start engine. “I

chose the Swisher models because they’re equipped with a lever that’s used to manually tighten the belt rather than a more expensive remote system,” says Becker.

“When mowing our lawn I stay one or two ft. away from buildings and use my old Yardman riding mower to do trimming work.”

The hitches that Becker uses all came with the mowers. “I just bought two clamps which I installed on the back corners of the front mower.”

According to Becker, the only problem with the Swisher mowers is their blades run too slow and can’t throw the grass clippings out far enough which leaves the lawn with uneven clumps of grass. “There isn’t enough pitch on the blades. It isn’t a problem on their smaller 40-in. mowers.”

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Loken speeds along at 3 to 4 mph on his White 16 hp mower.

4-Mower Hitch Cuts A 9-Ft. Swath

“It isn’t much to look at,” says Don Loken of his custom-made 4-gang mower hitch, “but it sure beats driving around for five hours on a rider with just a 44-in. deck.”

The Wanamingo, Minn. repairman, carpenter and do-it-yourself inventor built his 9-ft. wide parade of lawn mowers using three decks that are more than 22 years old and cost about \$30 apiece. He pulls it with a White 16 hp rider that he bought several years ago for \$100.

Loken got the idea for his mower configuration while mowing his large yard and doing a commercial job at a neighboring cemetery. “Spending five or six hours mowing lawn every week was getting really boring, and it was taking a lot of gas. I knew my old White rider with the twin 16 Briggs had plenty of power, so I just figured out a way to hook the trailing mowers all together behind it.”

He started by attaching a 3-ft. long piece of 2-in. channel iron to the back of his rider to pull the mowers. Hitching the front mower to this bar aligned the trailing mowers to mow on the left side of his rider. On each push mower he removed the handles and controls and fashioned a triangle hitch for the front. Each hitch moves up and down so the mower

easily follows the lay of the lawn, but doesn’t swivel, so the trailing mowers stay in line. The two mowers at the back hitch onto a 3-ft. piece of angle iron bolted onto the left side of the mower deck directly in front of them. They also have wheel guards so they slide around rocks and tree stumps.

“Once I got the offset figured out and made the rigid hitch on each deck, the mowers trailed in a nice straight line without a problem,” says Loken. However, pulling the three mowers way off to the left, the riding mower wanted to drift and slip as he was turning corners and going up and over ditch banks. Loken’s solution was to put duals on the back wheels of the rider, fill them with fluid and add a 10-in. solid concrete block to the front of the tractor for ballast. Now he speeds along at 3 to 4 mph over any terrain.

“Each of the trailing mowers has a 5 hp motor, two of which I replaced in the past couple years, so there’s plenty of power to mow my regular lawn and the ditches on my quarter mile driveway. Now I can mow more ground in an hour than I could with the rider alone in three hours,” notes Loken.

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