

**Editor's
Notebook**



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**Readers Take Issue With
"First-Ever" Mower Claim**

Sometimes when we talk about a "first ever" product in FARM SHOW, readers let us know we should probably have done a bit more research.

Such was the case last issue (Vol. 18, No. 6) when we reported on the "First-Ever Battery-Powered Electric Riding Mower" manufactured by Ardisam, Inc., Cumberland, Wis. (ph 715 822-2415). The ink on the issue was hardly dry when loyal subscribers started calling



Hollis Orr's "Elec-Trak" riding mower.

and writing to tell us where we went wrong. Allen Grote, Decatur, Ind., wrote: "I don't think you did your research very well because in 1968 the company I worked for bought a General Electric electric-powered riding mower. I used it for 10 years and it's still sitting at the plant. That mower, too, was powered by six 6-volt batteries and the mower deck looked just like the one you showed in your magazine. It was not, however, a 3-wheel mower like the one in your article. It had four wheels and steered up front."

Kenneth Fuhrmann, also from Decatur, Ind., wrote: "Perhaps the mower you featured was the first-ever 'zero turn' electric riding mower but it seems to me that General Electric's 'Elec-Trak' mowers were the first battery powered riding mowers. The mowers had a 'pusher-type' up-front deck like the machine you featured, and had three direct-drive motors to power blades. In fact, the deck looked just like the mower you featured. I currently have two of these mowers - one with the pusher mower deck and one with a mid-mount deck. I use them every summer to mow lawn. You can also get normal accessories such as snowblowers, blades, lawn sweepers, etc., as well as unusual accessories like hand-held drills, hedge trimmers, lawn edgers, and chain saws. I have several of these add-ons. These tractors were built in the 1960's and were also sold under the 'New Idea' brand with the orange and ivory New Idea colors. Eventually, General Electric sold the rights to the Elec-Trak mowers to Wheel Horse, which built and sold the electric-powered tractors and mowers for a time.

"I'm happy Ardisam, Inc., is bringing back the electric mower line. It's a practical, efficient and environmentally friendly alternative to conventional mowers."

Finally, Hollis Orr of Cannon Falls, Minn., stopped by the offices of FARM SHOW one day recently and told us we were "15 years too late" with our article on the Ardisam mower. Then he pulled some photos out of his pocket of an Elec-Trak battery-powered riding mower he bought in the late 1960's and used for 15 years to mow his 5 acre farmyard. "It was a great mower. No noise, only the whir of the blades. My wife loved it because she could listen to a radio while she mowed. The 48-in. deck worked beauti-

fully. You could mow 4 hrs. on one charge, enough to cut our entire yard. It had a 7-speed transmission and a 4-speed transaxle for a total of 28 speeds so you could go from a slow crawl to fairly high transport speed. There was a safety shut-off switch if you got off the seat. It had plenty of power for climbing hills and an electric winch to raise and lower the deck. It had 6 big deep cycle batteries like on a golf cart. Over the 15 years I owned it, I bought just two replacement sets of batteries, which I got from a local golf cart distributor. I bought batteries that had already been used for a year since they replace golf cart batteries each season. This was a great mower but for some reason it never caught on. I sold it when I moved and it's probably still working."

Smokers Need A Tax Break?

Smokers who learn about a recent study by Duke University economist Kip Viscusi may start lobbying for a tax break, or at least increased tax rates on non-smokers. It turns out smoking does not impose higher costs on all Americans. In fact, according to the study, smokers are in effect subsidizing the retirement costs of non-smokers.

It's true that smokers on average require 55 cents of extra medical care for every pack of cigarettes they smoke, and they drive up the cost of life insurance for everyone by about 14 cents per pack. But since they tend to die younger, each pack smoked actually saves \$1.19 in pension and social security payments, and 22 cents in nursing-home expenses. (The Shortliner)

The National Debt Watch

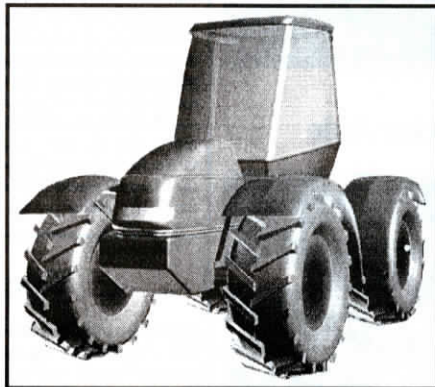
The federal government has managed to run up a national debt of over \$4.7 trillion dollars. In fact, as of November 1st, 1994, the total national debt down to the penny was \$4,728,710,245,046.54. This figure continues to grow at a rate of over one billion dollars every day. If you break that down even further, the debt is increasing \$14,000 every second.

**Look What They're
Doing With Aluminum!**

Your next new tractor or car could well be an ultra-light special made mostly of aluminum.

Researchers at the Norwegian Landbrukshogskule in As, Norway, are in the process of developing an aluminum tractor which weighs 40% less than a conventional tractor. Project leader Jon Kare Boe is hopeful that the first all-aluminum tractor will be ready for public unveiling this fall, and that the first 25 production models will be in production next year.

Construction of the "less compacting basic machine" breaks with the 77-year old concept on which present day



Developers hope to have the first all-aluminum tractor built and in the field by next fall.

agricultural tractors are constructed. Instead of using drawbar pull, the lightweight tractor transfers engine power to the PTO to operate equipment. Consequently, the tractor does not need to be as heavy as conventional tractors. The frame and many of the individual components are built of aluminum so that the 80 hp tractor weighs a little over 4,000 lbs. With its lightweight aluminum construction, broad low profile, and low pressure tires front and back, the tractor compacts the soil far less than conventional tractors, according to Boe. He estimates that retail cost of the all-aluminum tractor will be about \$44,000.

Here, excerpted from the Minneapolis Star Tribune, is a progress report on an experimental aluminum car being developed by 3M and Ford Motor Co. The joint "aluminum" venture involves a Mercury Sable.

"We're trying to help develop a high-volume production vehicle made of all-aluminum," says Dave Gunderson, a 3M senior product development engineer on the project. "Our goal is to figure out how to make it cost-effective. We're working on adhesives that can increase the stiffness and structural rigidity of aluminum. That way, less aluminum, plus our adhesive, can be stronger and more durable."

The experimental aluminum car looks like a Saturn with a new front end. Twenty such cars have been built, and 20 more are coming. The costly development project is intended to help Ford comply with Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards.

Other companies have begun similar projects. Honda built its Acura NSX out of aluminum. Audi has its aluminum A8 sedan, and Chrysler and General Motors are also working with 3M and other companies to try to develop ways to lighten their large cars.

**High Population Hybrid
May Double Corn Yields**

A new high population corn hybrid, available in limited quantities for next season, could double yields for anyone willing to increase inputs and spend the time managing the crop.

"It's not for everybody," admits Duane Bell, plant breeder at Pro Seed, Blissfield, Mich., who's been working on the new hybrid - called 2830 HYPOP - since 1985.

"At the high population levels we're talking about, you've got to be ready for some pretty intense management if 2830 HYPOP sounds like something you'd like to try."

For example, at the 45,000 to 50,000 seed per acre seeding rate the company recommends, the hybrid requires 30 to 50% more N, P and K and secondary nutrients than you'd normally use.

Also, because the corn must be drilled, extra effort is required to calibrate your drill to get population and seed placement exactly even - every 13 to 14 in. in 7 1/2 in. rows. If seed is distributed too sparsely you'll get plants with a few huge ears on them. Plant too densely and you'll get no ears at all.

Also, the hybrid costs \$50 per bag and one bag plants one acre. Altogether, higher input costs mean you'll need to realize about a 15% yield increase to break even, according to Bell.

Still, when everything worked perfectly in on-farm tests last season, the full-season 110-day hybrid's performance was impressive. In one test, yields increased 49%, up to 316 bu/a. Standability was excellent, as was ease of combining.

The hybrid was developed through genetic manipulation and conventional plant breeding. It has a less bushy root, shorter plant inner nodes, and carries an ear about 30 to 36 in. off the ground.

"It's not a panacea and it's not a miracle," Bell says, "but we feel it offers the potential to double yields under the right conditions and management."

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FARM SHOW On Video

Response to our first-ever "Best of FARM SHOW" video, which was announced in the last issue, has been tremendous. Thousands of farmers all over the U.S. and Canada have already received copies of this "bargain priced" first-of-its-kind tape, which features 21 farmer-built machines that have been featured in previous issues of FARM SHOW. Readers who've already watched it have told us it's like taking a personal guided tour across North America for a visit with some of the most innovative farmers in the world. To put the tape together, we used tapes taken by the farmers themselves, and then had professional editors pull them together with narration, music and special effects.

"We bought 3 videos to give for gifts for Christmas and everybody loved them. It's fun to watch and professionally done." Richard Duncan, Sherwood, Mich.

"I just saw your Best of FARM SHOW video at a friend's house and want to buy my own copy. I couldn't believe what I saw on there and I want to have my own copy so I can watch it again. I like the booklet that you packed in with the tape that gives complete information on each machine, as well as the name and address of each inventor." Carl Tong, Scobey, Mont.

To obtain your own copy, see ad on page 39 of this issue or send \$9.95 plus \$2.95 S&H to: FARM SHOW Video, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeview, Minn. 55044.