



Lawn mower racing now outdraws tractor pulls in Slippery Rock, Penn., according to racing enthusiasts.

"THE POOR MAN'S INDY 500"

Lawn Mower Racing Catching On Fast

You almost never cut grass at speeds above 5 mph but you can race riding mowers at speeds of 35 to 40 mph, according to Jack Boyer, one of a group of men and women who race riding lawn mowers on an oval dirt track just outside Slippery Rock, Penn.

Boyer has been racing riding lawn mowers for the past five years. He drives a modified 1966 Sears & Roebuck "Suburban", boosting its speed by changing the gearing and pulley sizes.

Most racers use "junked out" riding lawn mowers which they modify and paint. "It's the poor man's Indy 500 and the closest I'll ever come to racing stock cars," says Boyer. "A stock car engine can cost \$10,000 and one season's racing requires thousands of dollars in upkeep. On the other hand, you can modify and paint a riding lawn mower for \$500 or less."

Lawn mower racing was born at Cooper's Lake Raceway near Slippery Rock, which is about 60 miles north of Pittsburgh. The races began as a challenge in 1981 when two men who met at a Slippery Rock gas station argued over whose lawn mower was faster. They settled the bet with a dash across an open field. That event evolved into full-blown races with time trials, heats and feature races, as well as a comprehensive set of rules and regulations.

Races are held every other weekend from May through September in conjunction with fairs and local farm shows. They're divided into three classes: 8 hp stock, 8 hp modified and 10 to 12 hp modified. There are also "powder puff" races for women. Normally, 6 to 8 riders participate in each race. Spectators pay \$2 to watch and the races have become a big hit around Slippery Rock, even outdrawing tractor pulls at local farm shows. "The crowds just love it," says Boyer. "They're amazed that an 11-hp riding mower can scoot around a 1/10 mile oval track like a sports car, with rooster tails flying and tires digging into the dirt."

Drivers pay a \$10 entry fee to cover maintenance and insurance. There's no prize money, but winners get trophies topped

with miniature garden tractors. "It's a good ol' time on Saturday night and we have lots of laughs. But all the drivers are serious about wanting the checkered flag," says Boyer, who has won several trophies.

According to the rules, bumpers and side rub rails are required to keep the mowers from tangling up with each other. Headlights must be removed. Helmets and boots are required.

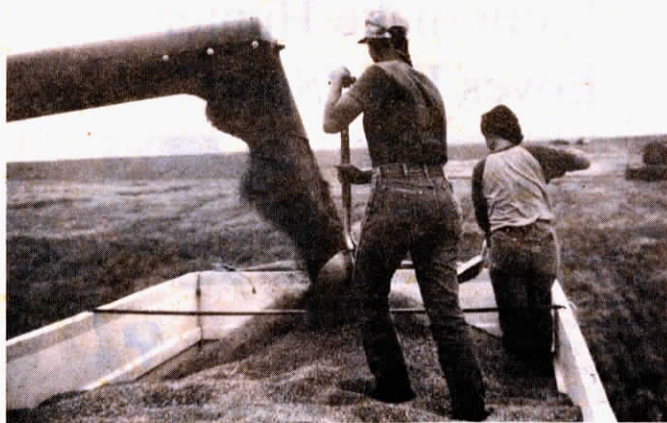
Garden tractors aren't allowed because at 14 to 20 hp they're more powerful than riding lawn mowers which normally have a maximum of 12 hp. "We don't allow modification of the engine or tires," notes Boyer. "Racing on normal riding lawn mower tires makes the mower slide sideways when going around corners at 30 mph. The crowds love to see the waves of dirt spraying from the rear wheels."

There's a real art to making an 11-hp riding lawn mower stay on the track at high speeds. "We use some of the same principles used by stock car drivers," says Boyer. He equipped the front of his riding mower with motorcycle shocks to help keep the mower from tipping over on corners and installed heavy duty bushings and bearings on the mower's trans-axle rear end because it turns five times faster than normal. Mower speed is increased by changing gears and pulleys.

"Junked out" riding mowers are becoming scarce in Butler County, but Boyer says potential lawn mower racers in other parts of the country should have no trouble finding old mowers. "You'd be surprised how many people keep junked out mowers in their yards or behind the barn. All you have to do is rebuild the motor, make a few modifications, paint the body, put a number on, and you're ready to go."

The safety record of the new sport has been good. "We've had some accidents, but no one has been seriously hurt," says Boyer.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jack Boyer, R.D. 3, Box 399N, Slippery Rock, Penn. 16057 (ph 412 794-6566).



"They can handle the strain of the harvest as well as men and they're very responsible," says custom harvester B.F. McCray.

"THEY'RE A LOT MORE PARTICULAR ABOUT HOW THEY TAKE CARE OF MACHINERY"

"Women Only" Custom Combine Harvest Crews

B.F. McCray, a Kansas custom wheat harvester, has hired "women only" crews to work his custom combining equipment for the past 8 years.

McCray, a veteran of 46 custom combining seasons, hired six women last year - three to drive combines, and three to drive trucks. On a good day, the six women can cut more than 350 acres of wheat. They usually take turns driving the Deere 7720's and the 2 1/2-ton trucks. They routinely level the loads and handle the tarps.

"We need operators, not drivers. The girls don't hot rod the trucks or strip the gears like some boys do," says McCray. "They're a lot more particular about how they take care of my machinery. They keep the combines and cabs clean and they always grease the trucks. They're also more careful. Only one woman driver has had an accident in the past eight years and it was a minor one."

McCray thinks women today have a more positive attitude and are more willing to learn than men. "The women I've hired are

always willing to work, and they listen to what I say. They can handle the strain of the harvest as well as the men and they're very responsible."

Most of the women McCray hires are college students and most of them have farm backgrounds. "Women with farm backgrounds are more familiar with the equipment and more mechanically minded," notes McCray.

Christine Croft, a University of Kansas senior in her third year on the harvest, says there's nothing a woman can't do on the wheat harvest except possibly some heavy lifting. She says women can drive a combine as well as a man, adding that when she drives her 1 1/2-ton load of wheat into an elevator she does receive a lot of attention from young, male drivers. "I've never once had to untarp a truck by myself."

Each of the women helps maintain machines and watches for problems. However, McCray's son, Butch, travels with the crew and handles most of the mechanical work.

"THEY DO A BETTER JOB THAN DOGS"

Donkey Guards Sheep For Texas Farmer

Donkeys sometimes do a better job guarding sheep than dogs, according to Texas sheep farmer M.H. Boatler of Big Spring who says his 15-month-old jenny "Millie" does a great job taking care of his flock.

Boatler says Millie looks after sheep like a shepherd. If anything threatens the animals, she gathers them up and herds them into the barn. If it's feeding time and all the sheep are in but one or two, she stands and brays until they come in or she goes out and brings them in.

Millie is an off-white cream color and stands only about a foot taller than the sheep she watches. She was born on a sheep ranch

and raised around sheep. Local extension agent Mike Bragg says many Texas farmers in the area have started using guard donkeys. Jennies, he says, quickly develop a motherly, guardian type of attachment to the sheep. He notes that it's best if donkeys grow up around sheep but not always necessary. And he adds that in most cases male donkeys don't take to shepherding.

Farmers who have switched from dogs to guard donkeys say donkeys make better shepherds because they require less upkeep and are less expensive initially. Dogs must be fed daily and a good one costs as much as \$500 versus \$100 to \$150 for a donkey.