

# Genetic Hybrid

Latest evolution in commercial fills industry gap

BY GILBERT PEÑA

**W**alk-behind mowers have come a long way from when they were small, self-propelled units. Several significant industry trends have continued to make them a necessity in a commercial mower's equipment fleet.

One of the biggest industry improvements for walk-behinds was the introduction of hydrostatically driven machines. Although the cost for a hydrostatic mower is higher than a gear-driven mower, the transmission offers improved productivity.

Another industry trend was the introduction of the velky and sulky attachments, which increased productivity and reduced operator fatigue. A velky is a stand-on attachment that allows the user to ride on a platform that is pulled by the mower. A sulky is a ride-on attachment that performs the same function as a velky, except the user sits in a seat mounted on the platform. Because a walk-behind is limited by its user's walking pace, velky and sulky attachments allow the machine to be operated at a faster pace while the operator simply served as a guide.

The latest industry trend is offering operators even more power and control over their walk-behind mowers. The trend is a new style of machine that commercial mowers might choose to replace their hydrostatic walk-behinds and any velky or sulky attachments. Several commercial mowing manufacturers are offering hybrid zero-turn-radius (ZTR) mowers with integrated stand-on platforms. For example, John Deere recently introduced its 607 Series Commercial Quik-Trak™ mowers (see sidebar).

The benefits of a hybrid ZTR over a velky or sulky attachment include better maneuverability and control for the operator.

With a velky or sulky attachment, the operator stand is separate from the actual machine. As a result, when the machine goes over a bump or makes a turn, there is a delay before the operator stand goes over the bump or makes the turn. This ultimately slows the mower down and can be a hazard to the operator.

The new hybrid ZTR mowers with integrated operator platforms don't have that disadvantage. There is no delay between the movements of the operator and the machine, because the platforms are built into the unit. The operator moves with the machine as one unit, which allows the operator to mow at top speeds.

Although the new hybrid ZTRs may be more expensive than a hydrostatic walk-behind, they offer the power of a hydrostatic mower and convenience of a velky or sulky while increasing productivity and reducing operator fatigue. Although operators "ride" on the machine, they are definitely not "ride-on" mowers. The new machines still have the advantage of a walk-behind mower's trimming capabilities and ability to get into tight areas.

The hybrid ZTR mowers are filling an industry gap between traditional walk-behind mowers and ride-



Hybrid ZTR mowers offer all of the trimming capabilities and flexibility of traditional walk-behind mowers as well as increased productivity and reduced operator fatigue.

on units, allowing operators to indulge in the best of both worlds.

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## John Deere introduces commercial Quik-Trak™ mowers

**J**ohn Deere has introduced its 600 Series Commercial Quik-Trak™ mowers, which are hybrid zero-turn-radius (ZTR) mowers designed to fill a gap between traditional mid-mount, ZTR mowers and traditional walk-behind mowers. The operator doesn't sit or walk; he or she stands on a platform. Each model's compact size requires less trailer space and improves maneuverability and trimming ability.

The three models — the 19-hp 647, the 23-hp 657 and the 23-hp 667 — are all powered by air-cooled, vertical Kawasaki engines. And they are all equipped with the 7-Iron® side-discharge commercial mowing decks. The 647 has a 48-in. deck, the 657 has a 54-in. deck, and the 667 has a 60-in. deck.

Each machine is controlled by dual-loop levers that function

as a ZTR lever system. Ground speed and direction are controlled by pushing the levers forward to move forward and pulling them rearward to go in reverse, which lends itself to operators of all experience levels. A reference bar is

included to reduce fatigue from control lever operation. A separate choke control requires less adjustment and saves time.

The operator platform is supported with suspension springs to absorb shock and provide a smooth, comfortable ride. An insulated, 2-in.-thick pad also absorbs shock and protects against engine heat to increase operator comfort.



JOHN DEERE

—Gilbert Peña