

“Riding Push Mower” Makes A Splash At Shows

Back in the early 1960’s, Lawn Boy made a powered 2-wheeled cart with a seat on it that was designed to attach behind a 24-in. wide push mower.

The Lawn Boy Loafer, as it was called, had its own 3 hp engine and actually pushed the lawn mower around.

Jeff Willenborg, Dyersville, Iowa, owns one and often takes it to shows.

“People are often confused when they first see it. Some of them ask me what the heck it is, or how I made it. Others ask me if it’s a tractor. I tell them, ‘No, it’s a riding push mower,’” says Willenborg. “The cart and mower were actually sold as separate units so if you wanted, you could operate the push mower by itself.”

The company started making the Lawn Boy Loafer in 1960 and quit making them in 1965, he says. “I don’t know how many Lawn Boy Loafers were ever made, but I don’t think it was very many,” he says. “The big disadvantage was the expense of having to maintain two engines and keep them both running while mowing. I bought mine at an auction and recently found another one, which I bought, too. It’s the only other one I’ve ever

seen.” The cart is equipped with a 3 hp vertical shaft engine, with a 10-in. dia. aluminum plate at the bottom of the engine. The plate spins and comes in contact with a rubber wheel on top of the transmission to drive the unit. The engine slides back and forth for gear selection.

“There’s a lever on the right side of the cart. When you push the lever forward it slides the engine over, causing a wheel to come in contact with the bottom of the plate to drive it,” says Willenborg. “First gear is close to the center of the plate, and fourth gear is all the way to the outside of the plate. To put the transmission in neutral, the lever sets in the middle of the plate so that it doesn’t turn. When I pull back on the lever the engine slides over the top of the transmission wheel, so I go in reverse.”

Although Willenborg regards the unit as a collector’s item, he has tried mowing with it. “It’s kind of weird how it’s set up, because of how the cart is bolted to the mower. The cart doesn’t follow behind like a trailer because of an X-shaped angle iron brace. To make a right hand turn you push the mower’s



Nothing rides like a “riding push mower”, says Jeff Willenborg, owner of a Lawn Boy Loafer. “It has about a 24-in. dia. turning radius. I can’t believe how sharp it turns.”

handle to the left, and the cart you’re sitting on actually swings out to the left to follow. It has about a 24-in. dia. turning radius. I can’t believe how sharp it turns.”

Surprisingly, Willenborg had no trouble finding information on the Loafer.

“When the recoil starter on it broke I went to my local Lawn Boy dealer for a replace-

ment starter, and was surprised to find they had quite a bit of information on the mower. They looked it up on microfiche and made some printouts for me.”

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World’s First Riding Mower?

Vintage lawnmower collector James Ricci loves to show friends and visitors that the first riding lawn mowers were actually powered by horses.

Produced between 1842 and 1942, horse-drawn lawn mowers are now very hard to find, he says. Ricci has only six or seven in his collection, after more than 15 years of looking. They compliment the rest of his vast antique lawn mower collection, which numbers over 600.

“I probably have 150 really interesting ones. I’m amazed by the sheer variety of mower designs that have been manufactured over the years,” Ricci says. “The horse-powered lawn mower was first produced in 1842 in England, and I think it was sometime in the mid-1850’s that it was first made in the U.S.”

Horsepowered “rear roller mowers” were the most common riding lawn mowers. They have a large, heavy drum at the back, which flattens any divots that might be made by the horse’s hooves in soft ground. The operator’s seat is positioned above the roller, with the cutting reel located in front of it.

The large cast iron roller ground-drives the cutting unit through a series of gears on the

left side, according to Ricci.

Ricci points out that today’s self-propelled golf course mowers have essentially the same design.

“The horse lawn mower could do the work of three or four men with hand-pushed reel mowers,” he explains. “The most common horse riding lawn mower widths are 30, 35 and 40-in., and they were manufactured by more than six different companies, with Coldwell being the largest supplier.”

In addition to other styles of horse mowers, Ricci’s collection also includes a few well-worn leather horse boots, which were used in the spring and fall when the ground tended to be wetter. They distributed the animal’s weight and reduced cutting into the turf.

While there aren’t a large number of lawn mower collectors in North America, it’s a hobby that’s gradually growing here, according to Ricci. It’s a huge collector hobby in England, he says.

Ricci has almost finished writing a book about the history of the lawn mower, also.

In addition, Ricci’s seeking old lawn mower catalogs and literature to compliment those he already has.



The first riding mowers were actually powered by horses, says vintage lawn mower collector James Ricci. Horse-drawn lawn mowers are now very hard to find, he says.

“Not too long ago, I was called upon to supply a reel mower and a rotary mower from the mid-1950’s for the movie set of Revolutionary Road with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet. They were filming in Connecticut and needed mowers from that era for a scene, so that was a very interesting experi-

ence for me,” he points out.

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Live Catch Mouse Trap Is Fun

Ed Schweder of Saint Joseph, Mo., makes live catch mousetraps out of Victor snap traps and tin cans.

He says a 1-lb. ham can or coffee can will work well, and the Victor mouse trap is the only brand he’s tried.

“I stand the can up on its end, and pop rivet the trap to the can’s base so that the striker bar extends out in front of the open can when the trap is set,” he explains. “With thin copper wire, I connect a piece of hardware cloth to the striker bar. The hardware cloth needs to be about a half-inch bigger than the opening of the can. I replace the trigger with a thin piece of galvanized metal, making it longer and a little taller, so it sits about an inch right inside the can.”

Schweder attaches a paper clip to the top back of the can, bent into a hook. He hangs his bait from the hook.

Mice walk over the woven wire to the in-

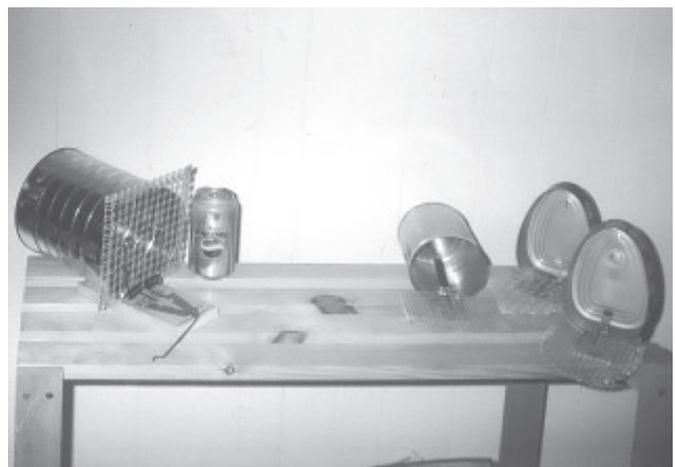
side back of the can and jump up to get the bait, triggering the trap to close. The snapping action of the striker bar coming up 90 degrees knocks the can over backwards, and the hardware cloth closes the can’s opening.

“Kids just love these traps,” Schweder says. “They’re just something that I make to entertain myself.”

“It’s an attention-getter that I take along with me to the threshing shows I attend with my home-made scale model antique stationary farm engines,” he says. “I have people throw a quarter into the trap to set it off, and help pay for my gas.”

Schweder thinks he has “made a better mouse trap,” as the saying goes, but it’s just something he “plays with” to keep his mind busy.

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Trap on left has been tripped while traps at right are “set”.