

"My 2005 **Grasshopper** 227 mower has almost unlimited capacity and can mow at speeds up to 10 mph. It steers smooth and can maneuver around obstacles quickly.

"My 2001 **B&W** custom truck bed is a worst buy. I bought it for my new 2001 Dodge 3500 pickup. After about one year the finish began rusting from underneath. B&W said the bed was only warranted for one year and that I was too late. The cab still looks like new, but the bed is an ugly chunk of rust. Apparently, the surface wasn't prepared properly since the rust is coming from underneath the paint."

Tiny Simpson, Kernersville, N.C.: "I like my 2006 **Bobcat** ZT 216 zero turn riding mower. It mows my lawn evenly and about as fast as I can stay in the seat. All mechanical components are easily accessible. It's the most comfortable mower I've ever used.

"My 2004 **Whirlpool** water heater is my worst buy. It's 1 1/2 years into a 12-year warranty, but already the electronic control board failed. The warranty didn't cover the labor charge, and the company charged \$15 for handling and shipping. So the new control board cost me \$178, including installation. The company could just as easily have advertised a 20-year warranty for no more than it cost them."

Tutt Sullivan, Tunica, Miss.: "My **Martens** 42-ft. 16-bar flex harrow is my best buy (Martens Mfg. Co., Fairview, Okla.). It does a fantastic job of finishing a field. When all your neighbors want to borrow it and then hate to bring it back, you know you've got something good. It's a great finishing tool and leaves my land ready to plant."

Gary Mitchell, Pioche, Nevada: "My 2000 **Kawasaki** Mule 2510 4-WD utility vehicle equipped with a diesel engine and posi-traction is both a best and worst buy. When this machine is running, it works great. I told the dealer I wanted a machine that could push 2 to 4 ft. of snow during the winter, and carry a 100-gal. tank full of water during the summer for putting out spot fires. I live at an elevation of 7,000 ft. in a heavily forested mountain property. My Mule does all these things quite well for me, but it has a history of maintenance problems.

"In 2001 the brake assembly was destroyed due to poor installation at the factory - two bolts were missing and two were loose. In 2003 the drive belt drive was destroyed, and the clutch mechanism was damaged when a bolt came out of the clutch drive case. In 2004 the splines on the right rear wheel hub stripped. The same problem happened last year and again this year, taking the brake assembly with it including the axle bearing.

"These repairs were very expensive as nothing on a Mule is easy to fix, not even for the dealers. The last go-around cost me \$854.

"I got no satisfaction from the company. They say we're carrying too much weight on the vehicle but we only fill the tank if we have a fire, and even then the weight is well below what they say we can carry. Now I'm in the market for a different rig."

Meredith Parrish, Eldorado Springs, Mo.: "My 2006 **Dodge** Ram 1500 pickup is my best buy. I bought it after a tornado destroyed my three trucks last spring. It has been trouble-free and gets 22 mpg. I'm well pleased with it."

James E. Baltzy, Beach City, Ohio: "I like my **Dodge** 1-ton pickup equipped with a diesel engine. This is my second Dodge diesel and it's a great truck. I use it for general farm work and for pulling my trailers.

"My **New Holland** BB 940 baler has caused nothing but problems from day one and is my worst buy. The knotters don't tie right. The dealer has adjusted and readjusted them, yet they still don't work right. The slip

clutch on the flywheel has been replaced twice because it's too small. A company rep told me he has never heard of a problem like mine.

"I'd think a company as old as New Holland would work with a customer until a problem is corrected. Last summer I had to pay \$6,500 out of my own pocket for repairs and labor to get this baler working, which I think the company should make right with me. I won't buy another New Holland product again."

David L. Crisp, Lead, S. Dak.: "My employer bought a 2005 **Steffen** big bale processor, and I was hired as production manager to operate it. It's a worst buy. The machine is designed to slice and produce highly compressed 'compact' bales in a variety of sizes. However, it didn't work as advertised and even the factory rep couldn't get it to work right. The machine was built in Oregon for the straw export business, but they claimed it would also work in South Dakota. A separate machine is used to 'strap' small bales, but it doesn't work because of problems with hay dust."

David A. Miller, Smicksburg, Penn.: "My **Pequea** 25-bu. manure spreader works like a dream, with no problems. I use it to haul manure produced by my three horses, one steer, and one Jersey dairy cow. It has never let me down. I've driven it over rough, frozen ground at high speeds. I pull it with a Halflinger horse hitched to a forecart.

On the "worst buy" side, "My **Husky** 455 18-in. chain saw was an absolute lemon. It's made entirely of cheap steel and plastic parts and was a total waste of money. I couldn't get it started on a 70 degree day without choking it to death, and the automatic oiler on it never worked right."

Billy Heiserman, Keosauqua, Iowa: "My 2005 manufactured home made by **Hart Housing** is my worst buy. We had trouble with it from day one. Everything on it from the doors to the toilet bowls broke, and the factory wouldn't stand behind anything."

John Bonebright, Havre, Montana: "My 2002 **Ford** Crown Victoria sedan is my best buy. It has about 40,000 miles on it with no problems."

Elmer Pinkerton, Elmwood, Neb.: "I got burned too many times when purchasing **Harbor Freight** products, so I told the company to remove my name from their mailing list so I wouldn't be tempted to order more junk.

"My best buy is my **Century** 50-amp plasma cutter. It's a 220-volt model that uses compressed air. It cuts right through steel almost a half inch thick and will cut car bodies clean, without distortion. It sure beats buying gas or having to use saw blades. However, beware of light duty models unless you've seen them work."

Merlyn Rieffer, Desoto, Mo.: A 2005 **Ford** Mustang GT car equipped with a 5-speed transmission rates as Merlyn's "best buy". "I saw a prototype of the new 2005 Mustang and liked it. When it finally hit the showrooms, I bought one because it reminds me of the classic Mustangs from the past. I ordered the car, and 14 weeks later it arrived. I haven't been disappointed. It drives great and handles well and gets 24 to 25 mpg on the highway. No problems so far."

Jason Jay, Fort Ripley, Minn.: "I love my 2006 **St. Croix** corn burning stove. It's an inexpensive way to heat my house compared to using propane and is also easy to use. There's no fly ash outside and no stirrer. Also, it's easy to install. I like being able to buy fuel from a neighbor and not from some faceless businessman. It produces real heat, not drafty propane heat, and I don't have to check on it every day. It's a great product.

Coconut Fiber Works Better Than Peat Moss

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Forget about peat moss. A new product soon to be introduced from Australia sucks up water faster and holds it longer. Coir, a byproduct of the coconut industry, absorbs 8 to 9 times its dry weight in water, and does it quickly.

This summer I got the chance to try some coir, and it was amazing. You can watch it expand as it sucks up available water and holds it. By comparison, you can pour water on peat moss all day and all it will do is float away. Compacted blocks of coir practically exploded into piles of organic material, ready to be mixed with soil for pots or used by itself in hydroponic production.

"Coir fibers hold water on the inside, slowly letting it go as the plant needs it," explains Mark Wittman, horticulturist, Casetech Australia. "Our hanging plants can go two or three days without watering in hot weather, where pots without coir have a hard time lasting a single day."

I used my coir, both as added organic matter in holes dug for shrubs and as a starting material for red twig dogwood stems that I wished to sprout. As a part-time gardener, I tend to select for plants based on their "negligence tolerance". While stems started in a mix of soil and peat moss died from infrequent watering, the coir-started stems survived and thrived.

Unlike peat moss, which is mined, coir is a byproduct of the coconut industry. Often simply left to break down, it is a major pollution problem in some coconut producing countries. Casetech obtains its organic coconut fiber from Sri Lanka and markets it for home and commercial uses. The company uses only fresh coconut fiber, processing it indoors to maintain quality and to prevent composting.

"Some companies market coir that has been stored outside and has begun composting," says Wittman. "It will not last as long or provide as healthy a growing medium for plants."

"My 2005 **Frigidaire** front-loading washing machine is a worst buy. We bought a new washer and dryer front-load combination. However, whenever we use the washer it shakes so bad that it moves off the platform. So we called the company and they sent out a repairman with an update kit. The kit helped some, but whenever I put jeans in the machine it still sounds like an airplane is taking off. The company says we're loading the machine too full, but when we bought it we were told we could put our king-size comforter in it with no problem."

Butch Pecha, New Auburn, Wis.: "My 1979 **Deere** 4240 tractor was a best buy. I put about 4,000 hours on it before retiring from farming in 1999. I sold the tractor for about what I paid for it new, and used the money to buy a Corvette. Now that's what I call a good buy."

Mary Auchmaty, Dunnville, Ky.: Mary nominates her 1969 **Ford** F-100 pickup as her "best buy". "Like the Energizer Bunny, this pickup just keeps going and going. Whatever problems it might have are so easy to fix that I can do most of the work myself."

Dave Amble, Menomonie, Wis.: A mill-lathe combination from **Northern Hydraulics** rates as Dave's "best buy". "I bought it used at a reasonable price. It's made in China so it doesn't have a lot of bells and whistles on it. After I had used it for a short time I noticed that a bolt was stripped and that an-



Photo shows half of a coir block before water is added. It's sitting on the other half of the block after it's been hydrated.

Casetech markets coir in lightweight potting mixes, as garden mulch, and as an organic growing media. Products for greenhouse and other commercial operations include slabs, grow pots, mixes, blocks and rehydrated bulk.

Casetech prides itself on the convenient nature of its products. For example, grow pots are plastic bags with blocks of dried compressed coir. They're easy to transport and store. To prepare for plants, the operator unfolds the oversize plastic flaps, adds water and in a few minutes, sets plants. Later the entire bag can be set in a pot or holder.

"We will be introducing many of these same products to the North American market," says Wittman, an American who formerly headed a large greenhouse operation in Minnesota.

Casetech is currently exploring distributorships and marketing arrangements in the U.S. and Canada.

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other piece was broken. I called the company and was able to get parts shipped UPS in less than a week. The UPS fee actually cost more than the parts. I'm well satisfied with the service and cost. This machine does everything I hoped it would do."

Larry Easley, Camden, Miss.: "My 1999 **Deere** 6110 tractor is my best buy. In the past I had owned only Massey Ferguson tractors, all of which had serious fluid leaks and electrical problems. When I took early retirement from my accounting job to farm full-time, I decided to treat myself to a tractor with a cab. So I bought this one and have been well pleased with it. It has a comfortable cab with superb air conditioning, a synchro transmission that's easy to operate, an electric/hydraulic power lift, and plenty of power. Also, it's fuel efficient and uses innovative technology.

"My worst buy by far is my 2004 **Caterpillar** D4GXL dozer. I previously owned a 1980 Case 850B which was a good, dependable dozer, but it didn't have a cab. The dust and bees were killing me so I decided to get a new machine. I had pretty much decided to buy a Deere 650H model, but at the last minute decided to do some comparison shopping. The Cat model was priced about \$10,000 less than the Deere, and Cat has a reputation as the world's largest maker of construction equipment so how could I go wrong?"

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