

# FROM MOW TO SNOW



Operator Pete Roff finishes off one of the wide areas the Kubota F2880 is responsible for. "It can cover large areas quickly and because it's diesel the fuel economy is excellent, it can run all day," Dave Faulkner comments.

## A Warwickshire lawns maintenance contractor's expansion plans include extending the use of his out-front ride-on mowers.

**D**ave Faulkner has always been an outdoor person. Today he is able to indulge his enthusiasm through his business Lawns 2 Mow, based in Shipston-On-Stour. It was not always the case. After 17 years working in a factory, in 1987 "he had had enough". He came out of manufacturing and became a postman. He also started doing gardening work locally: mowing lawns, hedgecutting, fencing and turfing. All the skills were self-taught and he worked to a high standard.

The quality of the work brought rave reviews from his customers, which were

substantiated by the fact that it wasn't long before there was a lot of work coming in. But the impetus to step out on his own came from his family. "My wife's grandmother said 'here's some money, go and set yourself up'," he recalls. "Had it not been for that support I wouldn't have had the courage to give up the security of a safe job," he admits candidly.

In 2006 he established Lawns 2 Mow, operating out of his car with a small 17ins Honda walk-behind mower and a hedge trimmer. The workload expanded year on year, with the money being ploughed back

into the business that today runs two Ford Transits and a wide range of machinery. "We still tend to try and buy outright and keep the money going back into the business to keep the equipment up-to-date and maintain its reliability," Dave says.

### Lawns a speciality

Lawns 2 Mow operates roughly within an eight-mile area in a rough triangle to the south of Shipston-On-Stour, where its 65-strong customer base comprises a mix of residential, council and local authorities. "As the name suggests our speciality is lawn maintenance; from cutting private lawns and verge mowing to maintaining school playing fields," Dave says. "In the winter there is also still a lot of hedgecutting, which we do with two Stihl long-reach trimmers and a short-reach model, and power washing patios.

"We hardly see any of our domestic customers, most of those lawns are mown on a weekly or fortnightly basis. We go in and do the job when it's needed and the conditions are suitable."

A mix of equipment is required for the range of mowing operations. Lawn 2 Mow runs a fleet of Hayter Pro Ranger 53s and a John Deere JD63 Mulch mower for the churchyards. Until four years ago all the work was done with pedestrian mowers. "Some of the jobs were getting too big for the walk-behinds and we bought our first

ride-on, a small collection mower," Dave explains.

Currently the wide areas are mown with a 28hp Kubota F2880 out-front with auto-assist four-wheel drive (which operates in both forward and reverse), power steering and shaft-drive to the hydraulic-lift deck. A heavy-duty, two-range hydrostatic transmission allows infinitely variable speeds forward up to 20kph. It was bought last year to replace Lawns 2 Mow's largest ride-on, a machine of another make, which was stolen. This was soon followed by the purchase of another Kubota, a GR2100-II mower-collector.

Sims Garden Machinery, Stratford, supplied the Kubotas and also provides servicing and maintenance. It also carries out repairs, although it's not a facility Dave has had to call on. "We've not had a single problem with the Kubota machines; we just turn the key and get on with the work," he says. Sims Garden Machinery is a dealer he already had a successful working relationship with; it was also the source of the Hayter walk-behind mowers and the two Husqvarna Pro 21 out-fronts Lawns 2 Mow runs. "They look after us well and their parts and after-sales service is very good," he comments.

"As a replacement for the stolen machine, we needed something strong, reliable and fast, the Kubota F2880 has proved to be just that. It offers excellent straight line pace and because it is road legal when it's practical we can drive it from one job to the next. The GR2100 is for finer lawns where the owners want the material collected and for picking up leaves during the winter."

The Husqvarna Pro 21s "get used an awful lot" mowing the smaller areas where the F2880 cannot get into on the school contracts and the larger residential lawns. Each is in action for some 20hrs/week. "I can't fault them," Dave says. "They give a quality finish if you keep on top of



Lee Baylis (right), Lawns 2 Mow's full-time operator and part timer Andy Fisher on the firm's Husqvarna Pro 21s, which each mow the equivalent of 3.5 days/week non-stop.

the job, they're very manoeuvrable and as they are out-fronts they can get under bushes. They're also comfortable and easy to operate."

### Increasing versatility

One of the Pro 21s was bought in 2008 the other in 2009 and his investment plans include replacing the first machine for the 2013 season. "It is starting to have a lot of breakdowns and to cost in terms of spare parts," Dave says. "But it's three years old and the workload means that it is running the equivalent of 3.5 days non-stop." The mower's successor will be a Husqvarna Pro 524. "It's a professional machine and with its more powerful diesel engine and 52ins cut, we'll be able to increase productivity as we'll be able to cover the ground quicker," Dave says. "And, as it's shaft-driven like the Kubota F2880, there won't be drive belt breakages; we can't afford the downtime."

He also has plans to increase the workload of the Kubota F2880 and takes the business into other areas. "The F2880 does only 8-10hrs/week: it needs more

work; it's sitting doing nothing for too long," he explains. "Last year a lot of our school customers were forced to close because of snow and ice. This winter we are expanding into snow clearance with a plough for the F2880, which will enable it to be used on roads and in car parks. There will also be a plough for the Husqvarnas, so they can be used to clear narrow areas such as footpaths."

These investments are part of a strategy aimed at expanding the business at a gradual pace.

"Our ethos is to do a good job, efficiently at a competitive price," Dave says. "It's how word of mouth gets you more work, or does the opposite! We've only ever advertised on the vans, although the intention is to promote the snow clearance. It will increase the mower power units' versatility and allow us to offer an additional service to our customers; I hope it will lead to more cemetery maintenance work.

"But you can go too far too quickly. We've grown rapidly over the past four years and now it's time to consolidate." ●



"Our policy is to do a job often and keep it neat, rather than wait until its gets untidy," Dave Faulkner says. "It also means that the task is easier on men and machines and can be completed in hours rather than days."