

Deere Unveils Mower Tires that Will Never Go Flat



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LOUISVILLE, Ky. – It's not a tire. It's not a wheel. Let's just call it a Tweel. More accurately[☒], let's call it the Michelin X Tweel Turf. Rather than pneumatic tires, you are going to start seeing X Tweel Turfs on new John Deere ZTrak 900 Series models with 54-, 60- and 72-inch mowing decks.

The Tweel is actually a wheel *and* a tire in one. It will be offered as an OEM option on the Deere ZTrak 900s. Deere and Michelin jointly unveiled the aptly named new product at the 2014 GIE EXPO.

Michelin, which developed the airless, radial Tweel technology, says Tweels eliminate flats, last as much as three times longer than rear tires on commercial mowers and they provide a more comfortable ride.

Chase Tew, Deere commercial mowing marketing manager, explained how and why Deere approached Michelin about developing an airless, flat-free tire for their ZTrak 900s.

"The concept for this really came up in 2008 or 2009 when a couple of our product managers were doing ethnography work on landscape contractors, watching what they were doing on a day to day basis," Tew shared.

☒ "We pulled up alongside a landscape crew in south Florida one morning, and they opened the doors and out came all of the equipment. They're doing an HOA, and they start dispersing all over the HOA, but there is a guy left behind."

That operator, recalled Tew, started the day by plugging a flat tire on his mower. Soon, another operator limped back to the truck with his mower to get a tire plugged, as well.

Coincidentally, and soon thereafter, another group of Deere managers returned

from a military show where they had seen wheel technology similar to the X Tweel Turf. At that point, managers within Deere's advanced innovation program began noodling the problem of flat tires, and also looking for solutions to solve it. "Michelin came to the top of that list. That began the relationship," said Tew.

A dozen contractors, signing non-disclosure agreements, used the X Tweel Turf, in one configuration or another, this past season. The version debuting at this year's GIE EXPO is the product that performed the best, said several managers at the Churchill Downs press conference.

The X Tweel Turf signals Michelin's first product developed specifically for the turf and ornamental market, said Ralph Dimenna, vice president Micheline Tweel Technologies. The process of bringing it to market took about two years, although in October 2012 Michelin introduced the Micheline X TWEEL airless radial for use on skid steers.

Dimenna said the X Tweel Turf has the same dimensions and bolt pattern as a standard 24x12x12 tire, and features automotive rubber technology. He claimed the tread on the new tire will last up to three times longer than standard turf tires. He added that the X Tweel Turf will give contractors increased uptime and lower cost of ownership, enhanced operator comfort and increased productivity.

Nick Minas, product manager, John Deere Commercial Mowing, described the tires as being nearly maintenance free. "These could very well be the last rear tires contractors will ever need for their zero-turn mowers," he said.

Added Jack Olney, commercial director for Michelin Tweel Technologies: "The Michelin X TWEEL TURF is the no maintenance, no downtime, no compromise solution – bolt it on and forget it."