

# DIXIE CHOPPER

## Continues Cutting Path to Success

By Anthony Schoettle

The folks running the Dixie Chopper operation in Coatesville know a thing or two about speed.

Ever since Art Evans founded the company on his family's Indiana farm in 1980, Dixie Chopper has laid claim to making the "world's fastest lawn mower." One of Dixie Chopper's zero-turning-radius (ZTR) mowers can cut an area the size of a football field in nine minutes.

"I've talked to a lot of people in the industry, and no one disputes their speed," shares David G. Cassidy, an industry expert and former executive editor of Turf Magazine, a trade publication based in New Jersey. "And they maintain that speed while achieving a clean cut."

The 45-year-old company – as well as its industry – are seeing changes in recent years as rapidly as Dixie Chopper mows through tall grass.

Dixie Chopper's ownership has changed twice in the last decade. Evans sold his company

to Rhode Island-based Textron in 2014. In 2019, Texas-based Alamo Group bought the firm and this year is beefing up Dixie Chopper's sales team and launching new models.

Over time, the company expanded to operate out of facilities in Coatesville and Greencastle. In 2018, the company consolidated operations at the smaller Greencastle facility when Textron temporarily ceased making Dixie Choppers but continued service and support of its existing units. Then after Alamo bought the company, it re-acquired the 130,000-square-foot Coatesville facility and moved its entire operation back there, shuttering the 50,000-square-foot Greencastle outpost. All of the company's assembly, marketing, service and support now takes place in the Coatesville facility where the company first took off.

### Diversification

In addition to its well-known traditional ZTRs, in 2023 Dixie Chopper expanded its line to include the Talon MS, a mini-skid steer used by builders, landscapers and other contractors who do more than mowing, and the Talon RC, a remote-controlled slope mower that keeps human operators out of

dangerous situations.

"We've found a tremendous and increasingly varied market for our Talon products," offers Eli Keane, Dixie Chopper marketing manager. "People in forestry, electricians, plumbing, landscapers, universities, municipalities, departments of transportation all use the Talons. The market is 99% commercial operators."

There's no slowing down at Dixie Chopper. This fall, the company anticipates rolling out at least two new models, including a "stand-on" mower, a model which is gaining in popularity among commercial mowers. "It's easier to get on and off of and can be more efficient to use for a commercial mower looking to take care of numerous clients," Keane explains. "Some of the (human) mowers say it's better on their backs than sitting, and it fits a bit better on a trailer."

The company has 35 employed at its Coatesville operation. Additionally, the company recently added 33 salespeople – with at least two more coming on board later this year – that work with dealers in the field.

### Stiff competition

It's not easy for an enterprise like Dixie Chopper to maintain its position in the crowded mower market, which includes several well-known global brands.

With complete candor, Keane says Dixie Chopper's competitive landscape is "a mess."

"There are so many competitors in this space," he emphasizes. "It seems like every year there are one or two new players. There are over 50 makers of ZTRs. Having a strong dealer network is everything. Developing that can be tough. Dealers are more likely to cancel a line than carry a new one. It's very challenging to stand out."

Additionally, industry experts note, sales in the mower industry, including ZTRs, have been flat of late.

"This (past) year has been hard on our industry," Keane admits. "Everyone is in a bit of a slump. Interest rates are up and sales have been a challenge."

But he adds, "We're looking forward to 2025. We're deploying our sales team and we're showing great signs of growing new dealers and growing within existing dealers that we have today. We're focused on really improving



Coatesville-based Dixie Chopper, which is rolling out new models and significantly expanding its sales staff, is anticipating big growth in 2025.

the support we have for our dealers. With the new models we have to offer and the growing sales team we have deployed, we're very optimistic about the coming year."

Dixie Chopper's residential mowers are in the \$5,000 range and their commercial mowers run about \$15,000. The Talon models sell for just more than \$40,000.

So, what sets Dixie Chopper apart from its many competitors? "Speed, power and performance," Keane imparts. "Our mower can cut grass clean, faster than other models. We don't try to underpower anything, with options up to 40 horsepower. We're also tough to beat on creature comforts."

Dixie Choppers come standard with a shock-absorbing fork, a discharge shoot that keeps clippings clear of the operator and a turbo pre-cleaner that rids the engine of dirt and debris among other extras.

The business' sales footprint spans all 50 U.S. states as well as strong pockets in various global markets including Canada, Puerto Rico and Australia.

### Path to market

Dixie Chopper's background is as interesting as the products it sells.

Evans, who grew up on his family's dairy farm, saw something at the Indiana State Fair in 1973 that knocked his socks off. He stared gob-smacked at the first ZTR he had ever seen. Years later, Evans recalled: "I'd been driving farm equipment since I was 10 years old. I didn't need anyone to tell me what a revolution that was. I knew right then you could make a million dollars with that."

Actually, the company he later founded made a lot more than that.

At its 25th anniversary, Dixie Chopper reported sales of \$80 million.

Evans built the mowers then – like the company does today – to last for many years. And there are still members of Evans' family, including his son Wes, with the company.

The Hoosier business with an awe-shucks persona capitalized on a fair bit of marketing brilliance. For instance, to prove that a stock Dixie Chopper mower could handle a whopping 150 horsepower, Evans built a jet powered lawn mower using a Chinook helicopter engine. The jet mower was made famous by Tim Allen and Bob Vila in a 1993 episode of the television sitcom *Home Improvement*.

One of its mowers was featured as a pace car for a NASCAR race in the heyday of stock car racing. The Dixie Chopper Bike, a motorcycle built by Orange County Choppers for the Dixie Chopper lawn mower company, debuted at the massive Daytona Bike Week in 2004. The ride was created to promote the company's lawn mowers and was featured on an episode of the Discovery Channel show *American Chopper*.

But the company's success wasn't just built on hype. It was – and still is – a true innovator.

In 1996, Dixie Chopper constructed the first twin-engine mower. In 1999, it debuted an unprecedented 50 horsepower diesel-powered mower. A year later, it rolled out one of the first mowers with a liquid-cooled engine. The company later came out with the first propane-powered mower and the first four-wheel drive ZTR mower.

And their mowers continue to get faster, achieving speeds – while clean cutting – of 15 miles an hour or better.

"It's amazing they can get the blade turning fast and smooth enough to cut like a fine manicure at those speeds," Cassidy remarks.

**RESOURCE:** Eli Keane, Dixie Chopper, at [www.dixiechopper.com](http://www.dixiechopper.com)



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