

Fantastic ELEC-TRAK

Runs on Batteries, Powers Your Electric Tools, Too

PS tests the garden tractor that's going to shape up the power-equipment market

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If you're wondering what it will be like to drive an electric car some day, you can get a preview right now by trying General Electric's brand-new electric tractor. And if you've also been wondering when someone was finally going to do something about the air and noise pollution that surround suburban lawn chores, here's your chance to be that someone.

Make no mistake—this is an all-electric tractor that's on the market now! Not a pilot model, not a low-production, market-testing prototype, the Elec-Trak is in the lawn- and garden-tractor market with all four wheels solidly on the ground and with five years of test models behind it to insure bugfree performance.

Even better, the price is right—just about in the middle of the 10-, 12-, and 14-hp price range, depending on the size you buy. You pay no premium for electric power. Here's what you get:

- Full power to equal gasoline.
- Torque better than gasoline.
- Separate motor power on mower, snowthrower, and tiller.
- No starting problems.
- No fuel problems or hazardous gasoline handling.
- No tune-ups, spark plugs, or hot manifolds.
- No noise, fumes, belts, or chains.
- A rolling power source for other yard tools.

What's the catch? If there is one, I didn't find it in test-driving the Elec-Trak. You'll be able to drive one yourself shortly, but hop aboard with me now. I'll take you on a test run so you can see how it goes.

Speed: seven mph. GE says the tractor is designed to fit the human body. You'll find that the seat, leg room, control placement, brake, steering, and visibility seem natural all around. Reach left and thump home the main circuit breaker to make all circuits "go." Turn the safety key that keeps the kids from unauthorized use, and choose your gear.

Low-low is very low indeed. High (D-2, it's marked) will take you over hill and dale at seven mph—faster than needed for most work. As you drive you'll find that even in D-2 you can throttle back to a crawl and still have loads of torque. This torque has a profound effect on tractor operation—more on that later.

For the time being, go ahead, dump the throttle wide open—there's no clutch to fool with. You'll hear a quiet hum as the tractor moves ahead. For a moment, you'll be surprised; this isn't quite the surging power you expected. But within a second you'll hear a low click and the speed will

increase. A quick series of these clicks and acceleration periods, and you're under way at full speed.

GE calls this "programed starting." Why have it? For safety. Talking to Bruce Laumeister, who has headed GE's long-range electric-car development project and is father of the Elec-Trak, I gathered that early tractor models were bombs on takeoff. It figures. Electric motors have maximum torque at stall. Unlike a gasoline engine, an electric can light out from scratch with lots of scramble. Starting up a hill, too sudden acceleration could flip a tractor onto its back. Programed starting prevents that.

The Elec-Trak's little helpers



Electric drill, designed specially to run off Elec-Trak's 36-volt powerpack, lets you make repairs anywhere in your yard.



Electric hedge clipper, like other tools made for use with the tractor, impressed the author with its power and performance.



Garden fogger runs off the tractor's 36-volt powerpack, too. The low-voltage power system is well below the shock-hazard level.



Electric edger makes yard care easy. Standard 115-volt tools can be used, too; you run them off an optional inverter.



You can mow your lawn at night and avoid the heat of the sun. Electric power provides light, and whisper-quiet operation.

Snow clearing is a snap with the Elec-Trak. There are no starting problems, even in winter. Extra-slow speed and a separate motor for the blower assure removal of the heaviest snow.

No hot manifolds and exhaust mean cool operation in the heat of summer. This tiller raises and lowers with Elec-Trak's lift. Like the mower and snow blower, it can be fitted to mower in seconds.



