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Plenty of grass has grown since lawnmower's first cut

by Julie Taylor

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The company responsible for the first commercial production of lawnmowers in New Zealand celebrates its centenary this month.

Masport started in 1909 when it was the first company to commercially manufacture push and motorised mowers in this country. It now sells more than 100,000 mowers annually across 30 countries and has reported a 40 per cent increase in international sales in the past year.

But while it is probably best known for its mowers, the company has produced a wide range of goods from grenades in World War II to fridges.

General manager Steve Hughes said 100 years in business was a milestone few Kiwi companies reached and it was the Masport team's ability to innovate and think ahead of the times that had been instrumental in its success.

"The Masport story in New Zealand is a remarkable one, given the dramatic changes that have occurred in the past 100 years. We are fortunate to be here at all, let alone leading the



CUTTING EDGE:
Masport is still cutting it in the international market place after 100 years.

PICTURE / FILE

market." It was founded by engineers Reuben Porter, Harold Mason and Edwin Jones and its first product was a patented valve mechanism for milking machines, which revolutionised the industry.

Products from across the last century include barbecues, New Zealand's first commercially produced domestic refrigerator and, during the war, grenade bodies, armoured vehicle tracks and mortar breech blocks.

The company was also one of the first to implement an equal opportunity policy and began

employing women on the factory floor in the late 1930s.

Mr Hughes said the firm's international success was because of the creative minds and loyalty of its staff, with one of its chief designers having worked there for almost 56 years.

Gordon Boswell started in the drawing and design office in 1953 and is responsible for hundreds of designs. At 82, he still works and his latest project involves a front-wheel drive mulching mower, now on its way to the US.