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Masport enters its 100th year in business

FROM manufacturing World War II grenades to creating New Zealand's first fridge and lawnmower – iconic Kiwi company Masport enters its 100th year buoyed by a 40 percent increase in international sales in the past 12 months.

Masport was responsible for the first commercial production of both the push mower and the motor mower in New Zealand during the 1930s. Now the company manufactures over 200 models of lawnmower and sells more than 100,000 mowers in 30 countries including New Zealand.

General manager for Masport Steve Hughes says 100 years in business is a milestone few Kiwi companies reach and it's the Masport team's ability to innovate and think ahead of the times that has been instrumental in its success.

This forward thinking was demonstrated as far back as the late 1930s when Masport became one of the first companies to implement an equal opportunity policy and employ women on the factory floor before the start of World War II.

"The Masport story in New Zealand is a remark-

able 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 market," says Hughes.

The company was initially founded by Kiwi engineer and entrepreneur Reuben Porter – his first product a patented valve mechanism for milking machines which revolutionised the industry.

He created Masport alongside fellow engineers Harold Mason and Edwin Jones and quickly established a reputation for quality engineering work – a foundation which is still adhered to today.

While the Masport name has become synonymous with lawnmowers and barbecues, the company was also responsible for the commercial production of New Zealand's first domestic refrigerator in 1938.

From 1941 to 1945 production of grenade bodies, armoured vehicle tracks and mortar breech blocks for World War II also took place at the Masport factory.

Hughes says the company's international success is also due to the creative minds and loyalty of its staff with one of the company's chief designers having worked

there for almost 56 years.

Gordon Boswell was employed in the drawing and design office in 1953 and says he is proud to be associated with a company recognised and respected worldwide for its quality products.

With a degree in physics Boswell, 82, is responsible for hundreds of Masport's innovative designs – his latest design a front-wheel-drive mulching mower which is now on its way to the United States.

Boswell is involved primarily in the development of new products – where he has hand-made prototypes for products like roller mowers, rotary hoes, gas and wood fires and even waste disposals.

"Masport has weathered recessions and times of economic uncertainty but the ability to consistently provide quality products that meet the needs of its consumers has culminated in reaching these hundred year celebrations," says Boswell.

Today the company's product range includes lawnmowers, ride-on mowers, cultivators, shredders, log splitters, patio heaters and barbecues – many of which are sold internationally.