Fast greens a product of technology

BY PETER BLAIS

A seemingly well-placed pitch shot rolls off the back of the green. A 10-foot putt comes to rest nine feet past the hole.

The golfer's fault for misreading the shot? Maybe.

The architect's error for designing greens where it's too difficult to stop the ball? Perhaps.

But it's more than a blame that can be laid on improved mowers that allow greens to be cropped closer than originally intended, and on club members who demand it be done.

Until 15 years ago, most greens were cut between 3/16- and 1/4-of-an-inch, according to Jim Snow, an agronomist with the United States Golf Association Green Section. It was virtually impossible for the equipment available then to cut any closer.

But championship bed knives available on today's mowers allow a cut as low as 1/8-inch. What that has meant is much faster putting speed. Greens need to be kept short to cut the speed of play.

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For instance, a 1976 USGA Stimpmeter (a device for measuring green speed) test of more than 1,000 greens nationwide yielded an average green speed of six feet, six inches. But you're more likely to find an honest politician than a "six-six" today.

"I haven't tested one in the last seven or eight years that's been that slow," said Snow. "Most have got to be between 7 1/2 and eight now. Fifteen years ago it was unusual to find an eight. Today, it's common.

"That's quite a substantial difference. It means that a lot of the older courses styles of play have changed. It requires more skill to hold a ball on the green than it used to.

Sometimes it's the architect who takes it on the chin from the disgruntled golfer who has a hard time playing a course that, before the advances in mower technology, he may have found much faster putting surfaces, said Snow.

"Bentgrass usually creeps along nice. This assures consistent quality of cut you've been striving for. To meet golfers' rising standards, the 223-D combines superior technologies. It begins with an exclusive positive down pressure system. The system, adjustable at 4 positions in 8 lbs. increments, helps to maintain the reels in position over varying contours for a smooth, consistent cut.

Next is the exclusive design of the cutting units. An easy rear roller adjustment changes height of cut from 1/4" to 1/2", while maintaining the correct bedknife angle. This assures consistent cutting quality throughout the height of cut range. Quality golfers can't help but notice.

"Moss is becoming a big problem on short-cut greens," said Ross. "Moss grows where nothing else does. But it's tough for grass to survive with just 1/8-inch of photo-synthetic surface area. Grass cut that low is subject to a lot more stress. Traffic, heat, moss and algae are more of a problem on short greens."

Ross has also noticed more winter kill than ever at Northeast courses over the past five years. The major damage has occurred at the better courses, where greens tend to be cropped closer, he added.

"Bentgrass usually creeps along nice horizontally with the ground. The new mowers make it stand up and let you get a better cut at a greater height. We're getting the new mowers on our walking mowers this year."