MAINTENANCE

GOLF COURSE NEWS

NEWS POLL

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN PURCHASING MOWERS?

- Brand: 8%
- Price: 11%
- Service: 26%
- Reliability: 55%

WHO DO YOU INVOLVE IN THE PURCHASING DECISION?

- Mechanic: 76%
- Assistant superintendent: 63%
- Crew member: 50%
- Owner: 47%
- Green committee chair: 10%

Many people will impact my decision on buying equipment. The owner needs to feel confident about the equipment I am buying. I need to know if the mechanic can work on it and I need to know from crew members if it is usable in the field.

— Pat Shay, superintendent, Thousand Hills Golf Resort

The most single important factor when purchasing mowers is the service. If you don’t receive adequate service from the distributor, no amount of savings will make up for this shortfall.

— Kevin Gooldby, superintendent, The Sportman’s Golf Resort

Manufacturers tweak products

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the same reliability, quality and value for price as models currently on the market.

"I don’t think you could say we are moving away from new technology," Wright said. "It is just a matter of reading when the industry is ready for a big jump. There are a lot of things that can be done, but you have to have an economic model in place to make new technology viable."

Larry Jones, product manager for fairway and rotary mowers for Textron Golf Turf and Specialty Products, agreed.

"We are challenged with creating the latest in technology but also focusing on the customers’ needs and wants," said Jones. "But at the end of the day it has to present value to the customer."

"With that value proposition in mind, manufacturers are making incremental improvements to existing product lines."

"There is a significant risk from the manufacturing standpoint in moving too quickly with breakthrough technology," said Gregg Brenningmeyer, director of sales and marketing for John Deere golf and turf. "So it is not surprising this year to see new products being different iterations of current technology."

JACOBSEN’S NEW LF 1880

Textron’s new Jacobsen LF 1880 lightweight fairway mower features patented new floating lift arms that allow for more vertical movement while keeping cutting units in the same plane. According to Jones, the new mower can handle more undulating surfaces while delivering the same quality of cut.

"It keeps the cutting units from spreading farther apart and leaving uncut grass," he said. "We will be adopting this technology to our rotary mower lines."

The company also made minor improvements on its AR 2500, 9510 and 5111 rotary mowers.

TORO IMPROVES ROTARY MOWERS, ERGONOMICS

Toro also made improvements to its Greensmaster 4500- and 4700-D rotary mowers by adding cutting decks from the Greensmaster 3500 and the engine from the Reelmaster 6000 series.

"If you can use things that you have already developed or introduce fine-tuned products into the market, then your customers are not starting over with a new machine," said Wright. "The idea here is to have innovation with limited newness."

The company also improved ergonomics and operator comfort on its Greensmaster 3150 greens mower.

JOHN DEERE EXPANDS B-SERIES LINE

John Deere’s new B-Series walk-behind greens mowers have also been improved for this year.

"We have made a good product better," said Brenningmeyer. "We have made it easier to adjust the reels and to take them on and off. We also added a true 18-inch machine and a new 26-inch machine to the line. They are the lightest walk-behind greens mowers out there."

Brenningmeyer also said that a major new product is in the works for release next year, but gave no other details other than it would be "riding mower."

FOCUSING ON FOCUS GROUPS

According to manufacturers, these product tweaks and developments are largely a result of feedback sessions and focus groups.

Jones said the LF 1800 was tested on golf courses for two years before its release this season. "Superintendents put the unit to the test and the final design is a result of their input," he said. "This allows us to ensure the reliability and value of the machine when it goes on the market."

In a market where innovation can equate risk, this strategy will be key to the introduction of any new products or changes.

"Toro has the largest install base out there to pull from," added Wright. "We will continue to tweak our products as we learn from our customers about the changes and modifications they would like to see. We will also gauge their response on new products and prototypes."
When Service Matters

- Concise technical information and project development
- Creative bridge solutions by in-house engineering staff
- Proven ability to meet design, fabrication and delivery time lines

Mower technology

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operator on course all day. According to Larry Jones, product manager for fairway and rotary mowers for Textron Golf Turf and Specialty Products, the electric market is unexploited and the company plans to add more on the electric end. He declined to specify what models are being considered for electric conversion.

AUTONOMOUS MOWERS

John Deere is also considering adapting its autonomous technology from its agricultural division to the golf and turf division.

“Autonomous mowing is interesting with the labor issues and rising costs for golf courses,” Brennigmeier said. “We are investing in it and see the need, but we have to decide if it is feasible. We are using it in the agricultural business right now, but golf courses have more obstacles like trees and golfers.”

Wright said Toro is evaluating autonomous mowing technology to come down,” he said. “It is not like computers where more technology is needed. Our golf courses, “we have to decide if it is feasible. We are seeing a shift towards hybrid and alternative fuel options, but that any new products are at least five to 10 years off.

“It will take time for the price of technology to come down,” he said. “It is not like computers where more technology is cheaper. In our business, more technology means higher costs, and I am not sure superintendents are willing to pay for it yet.”

— Andrew Overbeck