

# Replacement parts: Part III

## A summary of important points

*(Editor's note: This is the third and final installment of the GOLF BUSINESS Roundtable discussion on replacement parts held in Florida. This installment begins by putting the turf replacement part market into perspective. As it progresses, the sophistication in some areas becomes apparent and a need for sophistication in others is obvious. We hope that this series has been helpful in understanding replacement parts. Just as understanding turfgrass lends the knowledge to cope with adversity, understanding what happens when a replacement part is needed should allow you to better cope with emergencies.)*

The turf equipment business cannot compare with, say, the automotive industry. If you were looking for a part for your car or pickup truck, you might be able to call three dealerships if you

live in a medium-sized city. If none of the three had the part you wanted, you would still have many parts stores to call. By having so many sources for a part, it is hard to single out and criticize any one for not having the part. That's not so with a turf equipment distributor. Many times he is the only representative for that piece of equipment for miles around. If he doesn't have the part, you're out of luck, your equipment is down for the period of time it takes to get the part in, you come under some hassle (or maybe a lot), and it is easy to transfer the bitterness to the distributor. Perhaps that is no excuse, but it is what often happens. So you swear you'll never buy that brand of equipment again.

Some of the companies involved with turf maintenance equipment do have a large organization behind them, the large tractor manufacturers

are a good example. Such a company might have half a million inventory of active part numbers that are serviced through a large network of distribution centers and an even larger network of dealers.

Some of the more sophisticated ones are computerized. Go into one of these dealers with a parts request and if they don't have it on the shelf, you can get a computer search of all their regional warehouses. The part can be found across the country and the computer writes the order and it is on the parts peoples desk who ship it out yet that day. Not only is such a system fast, it is efficient. There are no telephone messages to be misread, no misunderstandings between distributors and warehouse clerks, no searching the shelves to see if you have one. In a few minutes, the dealer can say they have one in Indiana and it's on the way, it'll be here tomorrow

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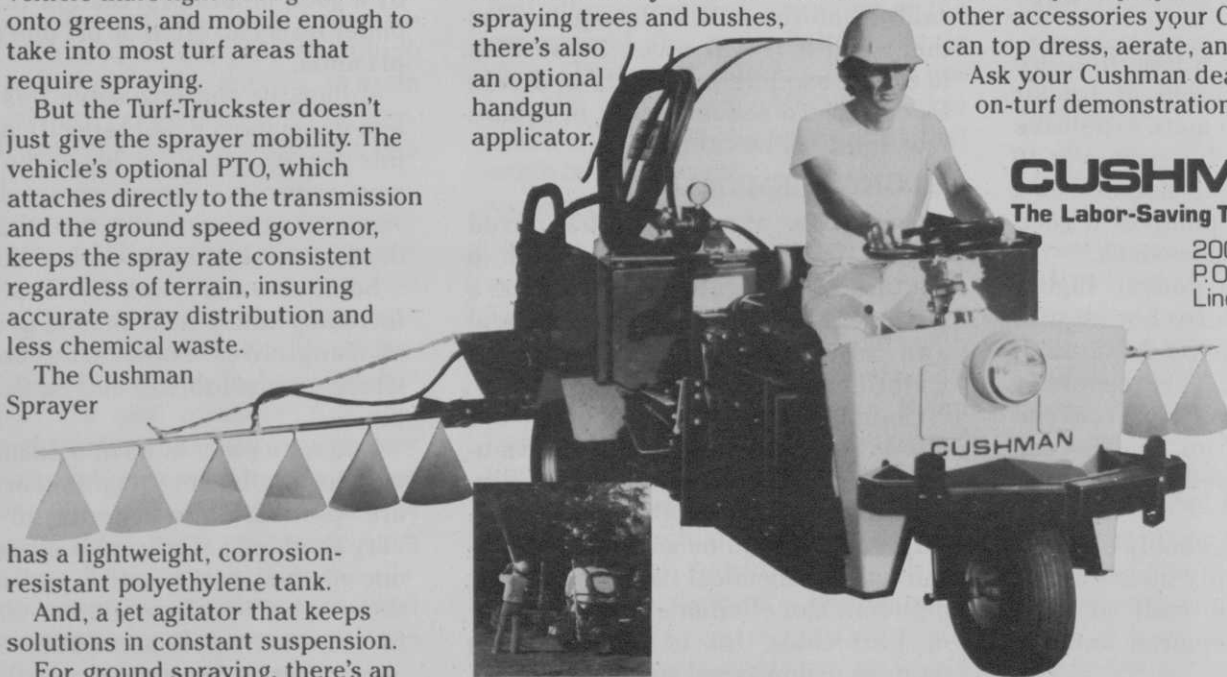
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by UPS or whatever. You know before you walk out whether you're on easy street or have to frantically begin looking for a piece of equipment to borrow until somebody finds out if you can even get a part for your particular problem.

So, if computers are so great, why don't all the equipment people have them? All the money invested would have to be recovered through the price of the replacement parts. When you're dealing with millions of parts you can recover it through only slight price increases. When you only have a few thousand parts, it would be much greater. Most people feel that prices

are too high already. Enough said.

What is a realistic time frame within which you can expect to receive a part that is temporarily out of stock at the dealer level? If you and the dealer are both lucky (you because you need the part, the dealer because he needs your business) it's two or three days at the most. The dealer immediately calls the distributor who has the part, ships it out that day, and depending upon the mode of shipment, the part arrives that day, the next or the next.

You can see what would happen if the distributor didn't have the part, called the manufacturer and the company who casts that part has been on

strike for four months and hasn't even started negotiations yet. What can anyone do? Perhaps try a machine shop if you can afford it.

And speaking of afford, what about the air freight bill for the 150 pound part? What if you tell the parts man just to get it as fast as he can and he hands you a bill that includes more for shipping than the part cost? Do you just kind of shrink up inside or do you lash out at the guy who's just doing what you told him to, trying to help you out? What if the airline goofs and the part ends up in Alaska and you need it in Florida. This is as much a pain to the dealer as it is to you. Most of the people in the turf equipment business are in it because they like it and have made it their life's work. They want to get that part for you, keep you happy with that piece of equipment, and want you to come back and do business with them when you need another piece of equipment. Such a business has a solid foundation and lasts a lifetime or longer.

One of the problems a distributor has, and that eventually winds up being the turf manager's problem, is whether to ship partial orders or wait for completion. If an order is placed for 20 bedknives and there is only 12 immediately available, does he ship the 12 or wait for the other eight to come in? If he ships 12 and then ships eight, the freight bill is larger. Sometimes, however, it requires three, four, five days before the other eight come in. How bad do you need bedknives? If you're down because of bedknives, then you want the 12 right away. Is the dealer or distributor aware of this? Only if you tell him.

Some organizations will ship the partial order automatically. Others will wait unless they hear from you. It is something to be aware of and find out how your dealer handles such a situation.

There are some things available from the manufacturers which can help with routine maintenance. There are the A, B, and C lists available, that were mentioned in a previous article. From the lists, you can determine what parts are likely to go first.

Perhaps the most important message from the Round Table discussion was that you need to be aware in all that goes into getting a replacement part. Be aware of your distributor's methods for getting parts to you. Communicate your needs so there is no confusion. If you have a mechanic, make him aware of the procedure he should take. It may not get the part any quicker if it's not available, but it will let you know what is going on.

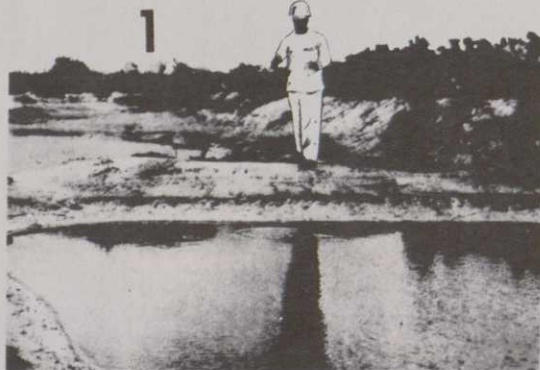
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