

# TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY

One of the most important, often overlooked aspects of a golf turf maintenance operation is reel mower sharpening. A properly ground, and adjusted mower promotes healthier, better looking, more playable golf turf. Cleanly sheared grass blades are less susceptible to fungal diseases than grass blades that are chewed off by a dull, or improperly adjusted reel. A good crisp cut also helps eliminate that late afternoon gray appearance during warmer months.

A dozen years of working as a golf course mechanic has taught me several things about grinding reel mowers. As a novice in the industry, I was taught the line grinding, or single blade technique. This method took the better part of a day to sharpen a set of tri-plex greens reels. Due to wear on the grinding stone each time a pass was made on a reel blade, it was almost impossible to grind a reel in a true cylindrical shape. It did however do a passable job most of the time.

I first saw a spin grinder in operation at a trade show in 1982 or 83, and was immediately impressed with the speed and accuracy with which even heavy duty fairway reels could be ground. I inquired about the price of the spin grinder, and sadly realized that it wouldn't fit into our budget. A year or so later I made a move to another country club with a somewhat larger operating budget. Within a year we had purchased a spin grinder, and a new bed knife grinder for our shop.

Several years and another country club later, I began to realize that turf equipment was becoming much more sophisticated than it had been a few short years earlier. The addition of turf groomers, advanced hydraulics, and the use of multi-cylinder liquid cooled engines, where air cooled single cylinder engines use suffice, were starting to require more time devoted to equipment repair and maintenance, leaving less time to spend on my reels.

Eventually, I wound up as the assistant superintendent, and mechanic at one of the busiest public courses in the Santa Clara Valley. With the additional responsibilities of an assistant I found barely enough time for routine maintenance, and repair let alone grinding reels. In addition our limited shop space really doesn't allow adequate room for a spin grinder, or a bedknife grinder.


To solve these problems we engaged a professional, mobile reel grinding service. This service offers one day turn around time on most makes of mowing equipment. While breaking down reels for grinding, many times the need for additional parts is encountered. Our grinding service usually has parts on hand for virtually any type of reel repair. Generally they do not charge extra for simple repairs.

I also find that not having to deal with maintenance on a spin or bed knife grinder saves additional time, as well as the cost associated with parts for these machines. I once had to wait over a month to receive a replacement traverse motor from England.

Engaging a sharpening service may seem expensive on the surface but when you factor in the cost of grinding equipment, (16 to 25 thousand dollars) plus the mechanics time, and maintenance on the grinders the cost is fairly minimal. Using a qualified professional also eliminates the need for training the golf course mechanic to grind.

Obviously a professional service isn't for every one. Each golf course, and country club has its own unique needs. Working together the superintendent, mechanic, and professional reel service can easily tailor a program suited to your individual mowing needs.

Article by Bob Walker



STEVE PASALICH  
 P.O. Box 129  
 137 MARINE VIEW DR.  
 DILLON BEACH, CA 94929  
 707/878-2727 • 707/795-4199


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