

James de Havilland takes a closer look at the intricacies of current machinery

The anatomy of...

Second hand machinery



Items such as a mini excavator can make an excellent used buy. Rather than hire in kit like this for a big, long-term project, buying a sound used unit can make better financial sense. Look after it and it will find a ready buyer when it is no longer required.

Is a used buy a financially sound buy? Trawl through the Internet, and it is clear there are some used turf equipment bargains to be had. But James de Havilland asks whether a low up-front cost make a used buy a good buy?



These days, new equipment can be sourced through a raft of schemes that can help spread costs, typically over a pre-set number of years. Even the wealthiest of clubs will exploit some type of 'package' that can 'soften' the blow of funding a new mowing fleet or sustain a rolling equipment replacement programme.

A lease, rental or well-planned finance package can ensure front-line equipment is kept up to date and of course removes the worry of decreased dependability of worn and ageing kit. Add the ability to keep up with the latest developments – and, of equal importance, giving those who use the equipment all the benefits of improved operating comfort – and it is clear that going for new has a whole raft of attractions. So why buy used?

Regardless of how equipment is sourced or funded, there is the simple truth that you do not get anything for nothing and every deal, lease or finance package will impact the bottom line. So injecting a canny used buy may help reduce some equipment costs without compromising the overall quality of kit used by the course. The trick is to know what to source used and how to best fund such a purchase.

Ex-demo – check the true cost to change

An ex-demonstrator mower, sourced via a reputable supplier, may have done very little work and, in effect, be as good as new. In some cases, the model in question may be fitted with costly options, some of which are nice to have but would be not added where a new purchase was being made. So the chance of an ex-demo buy can make a really sensible choice.

But that is not to say all ex-demo kit is equal. Some items, such as an aerator, may be run for several seasons and have been left with numerous potential customers for an extended period. It is not unusual for such kit to have covered a lot of ground and be presented more as a used as opposed to an ex-demo buy. So there may be a limited warranty and any wear and tear will all be part of the deal.

Some kit will also be sold off as ex-demo simply because it is 'new old stock'. In some cases you will only know it is the old model by looking at the decals and model number. In others, the model may have been completely replaced. In either instance, the key is working out if the item you are looking at is what you want and not just to buy it due to an attractive saving. Factor in available warranty too.

The most important point is the true cost to change. Where you may get a good part exchange allowance against a completely new machine, the offer against a lower price 'ex-demo' unit may be less attractive. Do a few sums, and it may show going for new to be a better long-term bet.

Used equipment

A true used buy is just that; an item of equipment that has been used and is now being sold on. If the item in question is sold through a dealer, the equipment will typically have been through the workshop and any obvious faults put right. Extra work may also be carried out. A greens mower, for example, may have a re-grind and some flexible hydraulic hoses replaced if they are showing signs of age. Some manufacturers also have a 'replace by' date stamped on vital hoses. This is to ensure age-hardened

and fatigued hose is renewed long before its integrity is compromised.

A bit of a cosmetic makeover may also be carried out, glossy paint helping to add buyer appeal. But in all cases look beyond the superficial smartening up and instead concentrate on the machine's finer details. Weld repairs, scuff markers caused by impact damage and paint spray over grease points that should routinely see attention are all little warnings that suggest the machine in question may not be all it appears.

Also consider equipment that a club may offer for sale 'privately'. This can be a great way to source equipment. In fact, if your course is on friendly terms with a 'wealthy' club neighbour you could do worse than striking up a relationship that sees about to be traded in kit offered to you first.

It also pays to keep up with local dealers, the nod that a certain item is coming in as a part-exchange often helping you to secure a good deal before the dealer either sells it on or puts it up for auction.

Buying used can allow clubs with restricted funds access to high output equipment. Six years on from when this picture was taken, a mower like this can now make a sound pre-owned purchase. It is worth having a dealer look over the machine before putting it to work and replace age fatigue hydraulic hoses.

Don't be afraid to use your local knowledge to source redundant kit from a neighbouring club. It is surprising how much sound equipment, saved as a back-up, ends up not being used. Also see if any spares are left on the shelf for a specific machine. Bottom blades, bearings, hoses and filters are often different on newer models.





Refurbished equipment

A quality, refurbished mower may well look every bit as good as new. If the same machine is also backed by a warranty, the higher price you will have to pay over a similar used model could be well worth the extra. That said there are genuine refurbishments and those that merely look the part.

A thoroughly refurbished fairway mower, for example, will really be put through a complete rebuild. As an example, all cutting unit bearings will be renewed, regardless of the condition of the originals. Key hydraulic hoses will also be replaced.

Look also for OEM parts, third party fuel, oil and hydraulic filters suggesting other replaced items made also be spurious. This is not to suggest non-OEM parts are always inferior but more that with OEM replacements you know what you are getting.

Know the true value of your trade-in

It is all too easy to get tripped up by the cost of new equipment. When replacing a mower, tractor, top dresser or aerator, for example,

the new kit can seem desperately costly. But it is the cost to change that really matters. Just as new kit prices have climbed, the value of well cared for used equipment has also risen.

It therefore follows that you can only really get the best deal by ensuring you know the value of the kit you may wish to part exchange.

It also pays to look after equipment as you can really get more for it if it makes an easy used sale for the dealer.

And remember, if you do not like the part-ex deal you can consider selling your existing kit as opposed to exchanging it.

If you look on-line you can get a good idea of what used equipment fetches.

It also pays to keep service records of all equipment. Just as you would like to know a mower has had its engine oil changed to schedule, being able to show the kit you are selling has been cared for counts for something too.

Those clubs that currently have a rolling equipment replacement programme can also help themselves by looking after any kit on long-term hire or lease. Service records and a clean bit of kit will always be regarded more highly than that

which has obviously been worked hard and not cared for.

Does a used buy make a sound buy?

For many clubs, the whole reason for keeping key machinery up to date is to ensure the quality of the course is not compromised and that key mowing tasks are not interrupted by equipment downtime.

Modern golf course mowers are for the most part beautifully made and designed for intensive use.

Many courses will swap out kit that still has hundreds of hours of useful life remaining.

And it is sourcing such kit as a used buy that can really help reduce equipment overheads.

If you are on a tight equipment budget – and that will apply to many clubs – then it really is well worth seeking out certain items of used equipment even if you still buy new for certain key items.

But remember the basic rule. It is the whole life operating and ownership cost of any item that matters.

Always do a few sums and work out if a used buy that saves money up front will actually be cheaper than new over a given period.

Certain mowers, such as a wide area rotary, can make a sound used buying choice, particularly where such a machine provides high season back-up. Fresh blades, a thorough service and a good clean can bring a tired mower back into serviceable shape.