



Palm Beach Trade Winds



By MICHEAL BAILEY
Boca Greens Country Club

The ability of a golf course to be recognized as the best maintained tract of land in town, boils down to one very simple item. It is not necessarily mankind, money, chemicals or water, but the sophistication of the golf course maintenance equipment. This is what separates the pros from the armchair agronomist.

We are not living in the days of bush hogs and rotary push mowers, but, yes, the age of multi-hydraulically driven, hydrostatic reel mowers. Within a maintenance building, one can easily view a quarter of a million dollars worth of equipment. Just the fairway mowing unit alone can cost more than a Cadillac limosine.

Because of the extravagant expense, not just anyone is simply placed on a machine. Proper, thorough training is a must to keep the machinery in excellent operating condition. Jack Cunningham, CGCS, of Eastpointe explains that an operator does not just start mowing greens. "They are taught to operate machinery from areas of lesser perfection, and then upgraded to areas of higher perfection. An operator learns the feel of a triplex greens mower by first mowing tees and collars. Once familiar with the principles, mowing of a green is not so difficult, resulting in fewer scalps and straighter lines."

Mike Perham of Boca Del Mar believes the way to insure safe care of a machine is by educating the operator with a written job description. "This way you know you told the operator everything to do, which proves to be an invaluable tool."

The key to proper operation of machinery is proper management. Many courses are finding themselves developing a dual phase management. Golf course superintendents usually operate with a key right-hand person: the golf course assistant superintendent. The other phase is the mechanic and his machinery. The mechanic maintains service records, places orders, is involved in purchasing, receiving, inventory records and must still keep equipment operating at all times. The mechanic is also becoming a key right-hand person. Country clubs are finding they need two full time mechanics per course, i.e. Boca Del Mar where Phil Bourque and Ed Aris work with seven-year-old greensmowers and produce greens that rank with the finest in the country.

J.D.M. Country Club with its multi-courses employes five full time mechanics under the supervision of head mechanic Sammy Lanier. In such a large complex, a secretary usually places many of his calls and orders to free Sammy to oversee equipment maintenance and repair.

Boca West, another multi-course complex, has a parts man who maintains important service records and places orders to help keep head mechanic Augustine Montes where he is needed most.

A groomed golf course is founded on good machinery backed by an adequate supply of parts. Augustine believes in stocking clutches, head gaskets and even complete sets of reels to eliminate down time. When parts are used, he restocks immediately, just to be ready.

Lanier uses local parts houses on high volume items such as tires, bearings or belts. If the item is more difficult to obtain or the local quality sub-standard, he uses distributors with factory replacements. Lanier believes nothing is more important than quality. "Inferior products result in more labor time for repairs and more occurrences of down time."

Heavily used equipment requires an abundance of parts; however, high wear on the machinery caused by summer growth and the avoidance of down time more than justify inventory expenses. Boca West owns 23 triplex greensmowers. To keep all functioning, Augustine believes the equipment must be worked on correctly. "Most any piece of equipment will get the job done, if you get it right."

Augustine finds cost is not the deciding factor in new equipment purchases. The best way to cut maintenance expense is to find the most durable piece of equipment. The initial cost is meaningless when measured against years of usage. One could almost say a good piece of equipment never dies; it's just parted out until it disappears.

Courses replace fixed assets based on life expectancy and depreciation; however, older equipment remains an asset. A greensmower may be downgraded to a tee mower with age and then even to a summer renovating clean-up machine. Once it's finally pronounced "deceased", it may be worth more as an out-back parts supply than as a trade-in.

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Golf course maintenance equipment has most certainly become more complicated in the last few years; and labor costs for repair dictate close scrutiny of design at the time of initial purchase. Ray Strausberger, head mechanic for Eastpointe and a former government test mechanic, explains that accessibility of key parts demands careful engineering. "A high wear maintenance part, such as a pump, should be designed to be taken right off without disassembling the entire machine. This can mean the difference between minutes and hours."

Other design features, such as back lapping of the hydraulic units, can save precious down time. Mechanics have also been enthusiastic about hydrostatic transmissions. They point to longer durability and improved operator capability. Throttle speeds maintain precise cut, while ground speed can be reduced to prevent marcelling and help reduce abusive tire wear patterns.

Palm Beach County has been blessed with more golf courses than some states and golfers who continually flock to the south are finding a superlative product. Without the technology of refined equipment, we definitely would not be looked upon as the "Golf Capital of the World". ■

Club Management

In our Spring 1981 issue we ran an article, "Down the Golf Cart Path," reprinted from *Club Management* magazine. We failed to give credit to *Club Management* and we sincerely apologize. ■



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Three copies of each issue are sent free of charge to every club in the state: one copy to the superintendent, one copy to the greens committee chairman or manager, and one copy to the pro shop. It is the responsibility of each local chapter to supply the editor with a mailing list. Any problems should be directed to the local chapter secretary.

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