

Evaluating Golf Course Equipment for South Florida

by DAVID L. DeBRA



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The uniqueness of golf course operations in South Florida is often misunderstood when evaluating turf maintenance equipment. It is a fact that no other part of the United States places the severe demands on turf equipment like the golf course operations in South Florida. The following considerations are often overlooked in evaluating the initial purchase, replacement

and maintenance of turf equipment in the area South of Orlando.

First, the required time of usage of daily operated machines such as mowers, utility vehicles and tractors. These units will be used in South Florida 1,000 to 1,600 hours per year as compared to 750 to 1,200 hours in Georgia and Texas, 400 to 650 hours in Ohio and Illinois, 300 to 500 hours in Michigan, New York and Canada. The element of usage alone illustrates the drastic reduced life expectancy of equipment in South Florida as compared to other parts of the country.

The second consideration is the elements of sand, heat and corrosion. The Florida sand is a problem that does considerable damage to engines, bearings, chains, sprockets blades and other vulnerable areas of equipment. Compounding the problem is the extreme heat and humidity machines are exposed to during the summer causing special difficulty in air-cooled engines. The humid, salt air causes extensive corrosion damage on exposed metal components.

Another consideration that places demands on equipment

is the Bermuda grass used almost exclusively on South Florida golf courses. The Bermuda grass, requiring constant de-thatching and aerating for best playing conditions and appearance, places a burden on specialized equipment designed for these procedures.

A final consideration that is often overlooked is the time available for preventative maintenance. In the Northern States, the winter season allows time for complete inspection and rebuilding of equipment, preventing damage to major components. The winter simply does not allow time for the South Florida courses for major rebuilding because of the continued demand for attention by the golf course.

I have observed that the courses that receive maximum life and efficiency from their equipment have a conscientious and detailed preventative maintenance program for replacing filters and oil, cleaning, lubricating and adjusting equipment. The superintendent has correctly found time to implement these daily procedures to assure maximum benefit and life from the equipment.

If all of the above are properly considered the realistic expected life of equipment in South Florida is as follows:

Greens, tees, apron mowers, 3 to 4 years.

Fairway mowers, 4 to 5 years.

Tractors, 4 to 6 years.

Utility vehicles, 4 to 5 years.

Specialty equipment (aerators, de-thatchers, sprayers and sweepers) 5 to 6 years.

Several variables are involved in life span but the above scheduled has proven to be the proper time element before expecting major extensive repairs to equipment.

It is recommended that a realistic depreciation schedule of equipment would incorporate the lower yearly figure of the above schedule. The unique and demanding elements of a South Florida golf course operation requires a thorough evaluation of turf equipment and a proper comparison to operations in other parts of the United States. Budgets, depreciation schedules, and time of equipment replacement should reflect these considerations.

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A good supervisor, someone once said, is a guy who can step on your toes without messing up your shine.

I have yet to be bored by someone paying me a compliment.

If you wish to make a man your enemy, tell him simply, "You are wrong." This method works every-time.

If life hands you a lemon, make lemonade.

Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.