

# Grooming Reel Guide

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As you know, grooming is an old technique, but the "groomer" is relatively new. It is associated with the golfer's desire for faster, truer and healthier greens. There has been much discussion among superintendents, and articles have been written in trade publications concerning the actual benefits this tool provides. Because this management practice is so new, there has been little, if any, scientific research conducted to determine the long-term effects of grooming. It is difficult, therefore, to make precise recommendations on the use of a grooming reel. This is further complicated by the many variables which play a major role in achieving desired results. Some of the variables which must be considered are:

- General condition of the green
- Variety of grass on the green
- Season of the year
- The turf-management program
- Variation in traffic
- Stress periods, especially heat and humidity

All of these vary from golf course to golf course, and usually from green to green on the same course. The use of the grooming reel, therefore, requires a thorough understanding of agronomic aspects of the turf on the green which, in turn, determines the depth of setting and the frequency of use. It is recommended strongly that the superintendent experiment S-L-O-W-L-Y to achieve best results.

It is also recommended that the following tips be used for best results on the playing surface:

- Frequent, close, visual inspection of the green to determine the depth and/or frequency of grooming.
- Vary the degree of grooming in accordance with the need for each green. This will help to ensure constant ball speed on all greens of the golf course.
- During stress periods, it may be necessary to reduce, or even eliminate, use of the groomer.

## 2. WHAT A GROOMING REEL DOES

- Grooming is performed above the soil level. It cuts runners (stolons) and grass blades at less-aggressive depth settings; but, at more frequent intervals than is done with the traditional methods of verti-cutting.

- Grooming promotes the vertical or upright growth of grass and eliminates grain by cutting horizontally growing grasses and runners.

- Grooming, in essence, removes more leaf area.

- Grooming provides some of the same benefits as verti-cutting. The main difference is that the cutting blades are spaced closer than on traditional verti-cutters, and the grooming reel is used more frequently.

- The more frequent use removes more grass and helps to control thatch build-up, especially during periods of maximum growth. For this reason, care must be exercised during periods when grass growth is reduced — for whatever reason.

- Grooming, in addition to routine turf management techniques, like aerification and topdressing, may permit one to raise the mowing height without sacrificing green speed.

- By maintaining a higher cutting height, the effective rooting depth of the turfgrass is increased and the grass is in a more healthy state. Also, it is better able to withstand wear, as well as environmental stresses.

## 3. WHAT A GROOMING REEL DOES NOT DO

- Grooming is not verti-cutting in the traditional sense; it is for use above soil level. It is similar to light verti-cutting. It provides for a frequent cutting of those elements that contribute to grain.

- Grooming has the potential to replace verti-cutting, depending on the overall management program.

- Verti-cutting will continue to be used for deeper penetration into the soil, for renovation purposes or preparation of overseeding.

- Grooming does not necessarily

achieve, in all cases, increased ball speed. Ball speed is dependent on other factors, i.e., height of cut, frequency of cut, the number of daily mowings, health of turf, grass variety, etc. Some of these factors may make a bigger impact on ball roll than grooming itself.

- Grooming can cause adverse effects, if used too frequently at aggressive settings (especially during environmental stress periods, i.e., heat, high humidity or traffic).

## 4. GROOMING REEL ADJUSTMENTS

A word of advice on grooming reel adjustment procedures. When adjusting a grooming reel, the following steps are recommended for optimal results:

**First:** Set the desired height of cut.

**Second:** Set one grooming reel in raise/disengage position. Set one flush with the rollers and set one 1/32-inch above the height of cut.

**Third:** Make several passes, preferably over the practice green or nursery, before using the unit on a regular green.

**Fourth:** Judge the amount of grass in the basket of number one, two and three, and readjust accordingly.

**Fifth:** Visually inspect the results and decide which setting to use for the best job. Make further adjustments if necessary.

**Sixth:** Set all grooming reels to the same desired depth.

**CAUTION:** A 1/32-inch depth setting can make a very substantial impact on grass removal and, more importantly, on the variety of grooming.

*The user must be aware that the groomer may cause adverse effects if used frequently at an aggressive setting. This is especially true during environmental stress periods, i.e., heat, high humidity or heavy traffic.*

In summary, the grooming reel may be the best tool available to the superintendent for managing the greens precisely and in accordance with the desire of the golfer. However, timing, frequency of use and depth of setting must be managed properly! ■