

Walk-behind greens mowers

By Peter Blais

Exclusive survey

With golfers constantly demanding better conditions, courses that can afford them are favoring walk-behind rather than riding greens mowers, according to industry experts.

Referring to the modern golfer, Dave Fearis, superintendent at Blue Hills Country Club in Kansas City, Mo., said: "We've created

a monster. They expect perfection.

"There's a definite advantage to walk-behind mowers. You generally get a better quality of cut, less compaction, no triplexing and no hydraulic leaks like you sometimes get with riding mowers."

"We like walk-behind mowers because they generally do a better job," agreed Jim Latham, director of the United States Golf

Association Green Section's Great Lakes Region office. "There's a conversion to walk-behind mowers at some (upscale) courses. But budget constraints keep many courses from buying them."

Price isn't the problem, according to Ransomes, Inc. Director of Customer Service Bud Muser. Walk-behind mowers cost around \$3,000 apiece, a riding unit \$10,000 to \$15,000,

Company	Model	Cutting height (in.)	Bed knife for 1/8-in. cut	Cutting width (in.)	Weight (lbs.)	Mowing speed (mph)	Clutch material	Engine type	Fuel capacity (qts.)
Bunton Co. 4601 E. Indian Trail Louisville, Ky. 40213 W.D. 'Skip' Ewing 502-966-0550 Circle #301	GS13	5/32-1 9/16	Tournament	22	174	3.5	N/A	4-cycle	2.64
	GS26	5/32-1 9/16	Tournament	26	203	3.5	N/A	4-cycle	2.64
Deere & Co. John Deere Rd. Moline, Ill. 61265-8098 Bob Tracinski 309-765-4459 Circle #302	22R	7/64-3/4	Standard 3.0 mm	22	180	4.1	Non-asbestos disk	4-cycle	3.16
	22	7/64-3/4	Standard 3.0mm	22	209	3.2	Belts	4-cycle	3.16
Jacobsen Textron 1721 Packard Ave. Racine, Wis. 53403 Diane Ellsworth 414-637-6711 Circle #303	Championship	5/64-7/16	Low profile, 0.200 thick	19.37	181	2.9	Non-asbestos, friction mat'l	2-cycle	4.24
	Standard	5/64-7/16	Low profile, 0.200 thick	22	183	2.9	Non-asbestos, friction mat'l	2- $\frac{1}{2}$ 4-cycle	4.24
Ransomes Inc. Johnson Creek, Wis. 53038 One Bob-Cat Lane Johnson Creek, Wis. 53038 Maria Large 414-699-2000 Circle #304	Greenspro 22	1/8-1/2	Standard	22	220	4	Dog-type reel clutch	4-cycle	3.16
	Maria Large	414-699-2000	304						
	Greenspro 20	1/8-1/2	Standard	20	203	4	Dog-type reel clutch	4-cycle	3.16
Toro Co. 8111 Lyndale Ave. Bloomington, Minn. 55420 Denny Brown 612-887-8805 Circle #305	Greensmaster 105	5/32-1 1/16	N/A	21	186	3.6	Non-asbestos friction discs	4-cycle	4
	Greensmaster 1000	5/54-1/2	1/8 Tournery or Micro	21	218	3.5	V-belt idler	4-cycle	3.16

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gaining popularity around country

he said.

The problem is the labor needed to run the walk-behind units.

"One guy can do 18 greens in a single morning on a riding mower," Muser said. "It's going to take several workers, with each one using his own walk-behind mower, to do the same job in the same amount of time.

"Most every superintendent would like to

use walk-behind mowers if he could. But most just don't have the budget to do it."

Ransomes' Executive Vice President Dave Fondrie estimated that, overall, about 10 percent of U.S. courses manicure their greens solely with walk-behind units. The rest use riding mowers or some combination of the two. The percentage of walk-behind-only courses increases dramatically, however, at

courses with higher maintenance budgets, he added.

"You get less compaction, less likelihood of scalping and better striping capabilities with the walk-behinds," Fondrie said. "There's a trend back to the walk-behinds at courses where members demand a higher level of performance and appearance."

The mechanics of the walk-behind greens

mower has changed little over the years, according to Dave Buchanan of Jacobsen Textron.

"It's basically still an engine and a reel," he said.

The biggest advances have come in turf-grooming attachments and the thickness of bed knives, he said.

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Brake available?	Number of blades	Traction drive	Number of service centers	Grass cap. (bu.)	Grass catcher material?	Attachments
Yes	9	Chain to drive	31	N/A	Plastic	Brush, thatcher
Yes	9	Chain to drive	31	N/A	Fiberglass	Brush, thatcher
No	9	Single roller chain drive	77	1	Polyethylene	Tournament bedknife, transport wheels
Yes	9	Dual roller chain drive	77	1	Polyethylene	Rotary brush, vertical cutter
Yes	9	Chain in oil-tight housing	80	N/A	Formed plastic, steel-reinforced	Turf Groomer, 3 front rollers
Yes	9	Chain in oil-tight housing	80	N/A	Formed plastic, steel-reinforced	Turf Groomer, power vertical reel
No	10	Chain drive via centrifugal clutch	N/A	1.64	Polyethylene	Verti-groom, brush & comb
No	10	Chain drive via centrifugal clutch	N/A	1.5	Polyethylene	Verti-groom, brush & comb
No	9	V-belt, gear box, differential	48	N/A	ABS plastic	Brush, comb
Yes	11	Positive drive belt, differential, split drums	48	N/A	Polyethylene	Wheel kick stand, turf groomer

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Walk-behind greens mowers more popular

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With golfers demanding lower cuts to get ever faster putting speeds, "having some type of grooming unit is becoming very important in allowing a slightly higher cut while maintaining speed," said Pat Lewis, superintendent at Portland (Maine) Country Club.

Basically, groomers grab hold of horizontally growing turfgrass, like creeping bentgrass, and straighten it up before cutting it, said Jacobsen's Buchanan, whose company introduced its Turf Groomer™ in 1986. Most manufacturers offer some type of grooming unit.

Grooming units allow superintendents to cut grass higher, resulting in healthier turf, while often yielding even faster speeds. Jacobsen, for instance, claims regular use of its groomer attachment increases green speed by 25 percent. It also helps eliminate graining and control thatch.

Grooming units can also be used every time a green is mowed, as opposed to verti-cutting units that perform some of the same functions, but can be used only occasionally because they are "too aggressive to the grass," Muser said. Consequently, grooming units keep putting speeds uniform year-

"Grooming units are probably the biggest advance in the past five to 10 years."

— Dave Buchanan, Jacobsen

round.

"Grooming units are probably the biggest advance in the past five to 10 years," Buchanan said.

Groomers have helped overcome some of the problems presented by the other major innovation, thinner bed knives. The seemingly paper-thin bed knives on the market today allow cuts as low as 5/64-inch. While

that increases green speed, it puts tremendous stress on turf and makes it more susceptible to disease.

The only way to maintain green turf at that height is to apply more chemicals, a practice that puts the golf industry at odds with environmentalists.

"Twenty years ago you didn't

even think about the 1/8-inch cuts that are so common today. People laughed at you if you went below 3/16-inch. With the new bed knives you can go well below 1/8-inch," Fearis said.

"The older bed knives were much thicker," Muser added. "They lasted longer, but you were limited to how close you could cut by the blade's lip height. Now everyone has these tournament knives with virtually no lip. They cut lower, but they don't last as long. You sacrifice blade life for a low cut."

While the life of a bed knife may be short, the walk-behind mower itself is likely to live to a ripe old age.

"If you've got a good mechanic, you can run these things for years," Latham said. "When they get too old to use on greens, they can be used on tees and the approaches to greens. Chicago Golf Club just removed some 20-year-old units from service."

A handful of companies sell walk-behind greens mowers including Bunton Co., Deere & Co., The Toro Co., Jacobsen and Ransomes. How does a superintendent choose the right unit for his course?

"Get a demo of each type," Fearis recommended. "Let the people who cut your greens try them all. Then survey each one. Usually there is overwhelming support for one particular model."

Turf 2nd only to tobacco in N. Carolina

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Turfgrass ranks second to tobacco in economic impact in North Carolina, according to the state's Department of Agriculture.

This body estimates that impact to exceed \$1 billion in the 1990s. An economic impact study in 1986 valued annual turfgrass expenditures at \$734 million.

Turf industry news was discussed at the annual North Carolina Turfgrass Convention and Trade Show.

"The work we have begun this year," said Ray Avery, president of the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina, "shows the importance of turfgrass to our state. We have made real progress in setting up the North Carolina Turfgrass Foundation, which will help support the continuing research efforts of North Carolina State University's Agricultural Extension Service and the Turf Work Group and help all of us provide the best quality turf."

Avery is golf course superintendent at Quail Hollow Country Club in Monroe.

"As the turf industry continues to grow, so will our need to reach all segments of the turfgrass industry — everyone from homeowners to commercial developers, from municipal maintenance to sod producers will benefit from our efforts with the Turfgrass Council," said Sam Linker, immediate past president of the Turfgrass Council and superintendent at Mallard Head Country Club in Mooresville.

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