

By John Torsiello

# Making the Cut

Toro, Deere and Jacobsen – the dominate “colors” among mower manufacturers – have their most innovative products cutting fairways.

Fairways are ablaze with color, what with all those red Toro, green and yellow John Deere and orange hued (with a slice of green) Jacobsen mowers doing their thing over hill and dale.

John Deere and Jacobsen recently launched new lines of high-tech fairway mowers to capture the hearts and minds, as well as budgets, of golf course superintendents and course managers, while Toro has its proven and highly popular SL 5100 series mowers that were introduced several years ago grabbing a considerable market share.

These grass-kickin’ machines have all the bells and whistles superintendents need to keep their courses in pristine condition and get the job done quickly and efficiently.

So, let’s take a look at what’s going on in the colorful Fairway Wars between these the giants of the grass cutting industry.





John Deere calls its 7500 and 8500 E-Cut Hybrid fairway mowers “the most powerful hybrid models yet.”

The mowers are built on the same platform as the company’s Precision Cut line of fairway mowers that were introduced in 2008, with the E-Cuts designed with fewer possible hydraulic leak points to protect fairway appearance, something demanded by meticulous superintendents. Electric power can offer reduced fuel usage and sound levels, and the hybrids feature John Deere’s Quick Adjust 5 cutting units.

The 7500 E-Cut features a 37.1-horsepower engine, while the 8500 has a 43.1-horsepower engine. John Deere’s GRIP All-Wheel Drive Traction System can be added to either of the mowers, allowing enhanced traction when mowing up and down inclines and on hillsides.

“The E-Cut fairway mowers are the first fairway mowers on the market to use electric drive for the reels,” says Tracy Lanier, John Deere product manager. “The power for the cutting units is generated by an alternator driven by the engine. This allows the reel speed to be independent of the engine speed, which means that we’ve not only removed the hydraulics from the reel circuit, we’ve also made it possible to decrease engine RPM to reduce sound levels for the operator and reduce fuel consumption. The superintendent gets all of the benefits, while maintaining their cut quality and productivity.”

Lanier says the mowers have been well received in the industry.

“The reduction of the hydraulic leak points, sound levels and fuel usage meets requirements that customers have been requesting for years. And at a time when superintendents are trying to do more with less, the fuel sav-



Jacobsen’s SLF-1880 has 82 inches width of cut with 18-inch Jacobson Classic XP Reels. The 18-inch reel follows ground contours without scalping.

ings are certainly a welcome benefit.”

Lanier calls the new mowers “a leap of technology in the electric drive arena for John Deere and the golf industry.” He adds, “With these mowers, John Deere Golf is continuing to support its customers, especially by solving significant concerns superintendents worldwide have been having for many years.”

The company’s electrical product development dates back some 15 years, with the fairway mowers in different stages of development for about five years.

Dan Meersman, superintendent at the Philadelphia Cricket Club in Flourtown, Pa., likes the speed of the John Deere hybrid mower and its quality cut.

“We have seven 7500 models, three of which are four-wheel drive to cut on hills, and we can mow all 36 holes here in three and half hours. Speed is essential to us and we get a quality cut from the 11-blade reels of the fairway unit. All the heads are interchangeable, which is a plus.”

Meersman says it’s all about “adaptability and flexibility.”

“They are very easy to learn to use,” he says. “We did a lot of study before we bought new mowers, talking to private clubs around the state and all the key vendors, and we went to all Deere mowers early this spring. We were pleased with their performance right away. Feedback from our employees has been very positive.”

Quinn Darby, product manager for Jacobsen, says that company’s SLF (Super Light Fairway) 1880 mower was introduced in response to the trend toward fairways and approaches “with more movement.”

“Essentially, it combines the fine cut and contour following ability of the 18-inch reel with the productivity of a fairway mower,” Darby says. “Also, because it is so much lighter than a typical fairway mower and has larger tires than a greens mower, it has the lowest ground pressure of any reel mower, which makes it ideal for stressed conditions.”

The SLF 1880, which was three years in the making, with a majority of that time spent in consumer validation testing, has a ground pressure of only 6 psi, which, says Darby, allows the mower to operate in wet or stressed conditions without marking turf. The mower also features a patented lift mechanism, actually a double pivot lift arm system that maintains spacing between each reel to keep the cutting units on the turf for a consistent cut.

And, the SLF-1880 has 82 inches width of cut with 18-inch Jacobsen Classic XP Reels. The 18-inch reel follows ground contours without scalping, Darby says, and mows in swells and over undulations without marking or leaving uncut grass.

There are a range of accessories for the SLF-1880, from canopy seating options to reel and rollers.

“The SLF has garnered a loyal following among those in the golf course industry,” Darby says. “However, I believe the perceived loss of productivity from a narrower cut has kept some from checking it out. In practice, the increased maneuverability combined with the layout of most courses means the actual productivity loss is pretty negligible.”

Albert Sizemore, equipment manager and assistant superintendent at the Bay Hill Club

From far left, Toro’s 5510; and John Deere’s 7500.





in Orlando, Fl., tested the Jacobsen SLF-1880 when it first debuted and immediately liked the machine.

"I liked it from the get go. We use triplexes to cut the fairways at tournament time and we get superb quality from the SLF-1880. The machines are quick, maneuverable and produce a quality of cut that you just can't get from a lot of machines."

Sizemore says the SLF-1880 is easy to use. "I train all of our people myself and within a few minutes they understand how to operate the mower because it is so user-friendly. It's also a very durable machine and I appreciate that. We don't use any four-wheel drive machines here because we are so flat."

Toro's Reelmaster 5010 series of fairway mowers have been a staple of the company's impressive lineup of machines designed for the golf course industry. A strength of the series, which includes the 5210, 5410, 5510 and 5610 mowers, is the machine's ability to deliver a quality of cut and impressive after-cut appearance.

John Katterheinrich, superintendent at The Bear's Club in Jupiter, Fla., is a believer.

"A huge thing for us down here on Bermudagrass is that the 5510's, which we have four of, have a little fin where grass comes out of the cutting unit and breaks the clumps up.

The Toro 5510 has a 35.5-horsepower engine and 7-inch diameter cutting units for heavy mowing conditions where extra capacity is needed.

"We have seven 7500 models, three of which are four-wheel drive to cut on hills, and we can mow all 36 holes here in three and half hours." —

Dan Meersman, Philadelphia Cricket Club

We used to spend hours raking up clipping clumps when the grass was wet or had dew on it, or we used to have to drag the fairways with chains to break up the clumps. With these mowers, we don't have to do that anymore and it's been a big savings in manpower and time."

Grant Young, senior product marketing manager at Toro, says providing the best grass cutting machines to course superintendents is first and foremost in the minds of the company's R&D staff. "In golf, reel mowing in general is extremely important because it's what is used to maintain the fine playing surfaces," he says. "Without high quality reel mowers it would be difficult to be successful in the golf business."

Superintendents purchase the 5010 series mowers, which were first launched in 2005, for several key reasons, Young says. "It's for quality of cut and after-cut appearance. Again, these are fine surfaces. The machines have a quicker set-up, are easier to use with fewer adjustments, they require less service and maintenance, and have the ability to hold any adjustments. The EdgeMax bedknives mean a retention of cutting edges and less grinding needed to keep them sharp. The machines have easy access to service points and feature superb operator comfort." All are points not lost on Katterheinrich. "You may say they are small things but the Toro machines

have so many features that make them easy and comfortable to use. Most of the guys working on a golf course carry radios and the Toro mower has a radio holder. The seats, steering wheels and pedals can all be adjusted for the size of the person. And, importantly, the 5510s have a schematic on the backs of the seat noting where all the grease fittings are. Something like that can save a lot of time by not having to search through the operator's manual to find where the fittings are."

The Toro 5510 has a 35.5-horsepower engine and 7-inch diameter cutting units for heavy mowing conditions where extra capacity is needed.

"The Bermudagrass can be tough to mow through at times and the 5510 cuts through it with ease," Katterheinrich says.

The 5510 comes standard in two-wheel drive with an add-on CrossTrax all-wheel drive system available.

Katterheinrich has been impressed with Toro's commitment to the needs and desires of golf course superintendents.

"I went to a seminar in Wisconsin that the company conducted where between 40 and 50 supers from around the country were invited to learn about Toro and allow company officials to gather information about our needs. It seems like they pay a lot of attention to things like that and I've seen features added to machines that were recommendations from superintendents."

Offers Young, "We are constantly evaluating how we can better address customer needs and they can always count on Toro to deliver innovation that matters in the context of the ever-changing economic and regulatory environment."

So, whether it's Toro red, Jacobsen orange (and a little bit of green) or John Deere green and yellow, golf course superintendents and owners can rest assured their fairways will be made more colorful and, most importantly, more playable thanks to the state-of-the-art mowers these companies design and produce. **GCI**

