



Good used equipment is in high demand and prices typically reflect that need.

Kick the tires

Acquiring equipment doesn't have to break the bank. What you need to look for when purchasing used equipment.

by Rob Thomas

Whether the greens mower has cut its last blade of grass or the trusty chainsaw has seen better days, every superintendent is faced with replacing equipment – large and small. With rising costs and tight budgets, used machinery is a terrific option. However,

deciphering trash from treasure in the pre-owned market is the real dilemma.

Knowledge is power, says Paul Danielson, manager, financial marketing at Toro, so superintendents should gather copious amounts of information ahead of the purchase.

“Potential customers should deal with

reputable sellers,” Danielson says. “Research the market. What is the range of pricing you see advertised for a particular product? The old adage of ‘if it sounds too good to be true...’ applies here, as well. Good used equipment is in high demand and prices will reflect that.”

Rick Baker, general sales manager, Baker Vehicle Systems, echoes Danielson’s thoughts on supply and demand.

“We’ve seen demand for good, late model, low-hour used equipment skyrocket in the last two years and as a result, the price of used equipment had risen significantly,” Baker says.

Buddy Wynn, certified pre-owned manager at Jacobsen, works closely with Baker. Wynn assigned numbers to what a superintendent should be seeking in used equipment.

“When it comes to turf maintenance equipment like mowers and utility vehicles, ideally you want a machine that is late model and low-hour, something that still has value and life in it,” Wynn says. “You’re likely going to get the best value



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from a machine that's 3-6 years old and less than 1,500/1,800 hours."

As for the equipment that historically holds value the best ... Jacobsen has seen several standouts of late.

"From a factory perspective, we're seeing a high demand for Tri-King trim mowers and SLF-1880 fairway mowers, and they are holding their value as a result," Wynn says.

Baker shared that Jacobsen large area rotarys and Cushman Turf-Trucksters hold their value very well.

Herman Bloch of Beard Equipment Company, one of the largest John Deere distributors in the Southeast, says his customers will blend a little used equipment with a package of new as a cost-effective strategy.

"Instead of three [new] fairway mowers, buy two new and one used ... same with greens mowers - needing four and buying two or three new and one or two used," Bloch says. "Superintendents should look out for how much reel life is left on the unit. Second, what was done to the unit after it was traded or taken in off lease? Was the unit serviced-engine, hydraulic oil and filters, as well as air and fuel filters?"

"Brakes are a big thing with me as it can be a safety factor if they are not done before being delivered to a customer," he

adds "And, of course, all safety features are in working order."

Trim mowers, tractors and rotary mowers, according to Bloch, hold their value best because there is a larger secondary market for these, such as schools, sports fields and homeowners.

Danielson says several dynamics often determine what maintains value.

"Mainstream equipment that is used by many customers will retain its value better than some 'exotic' equipment that is used by relatively few customers," he says. "Some equipment, vehicles for example, have a market outside of golf, so that widens the scope of prospective customers and this will influence the supply-and-demand equation.

"Equipment that is relatively 'simple' mechanically may retain its value better than equipment that has lots of 'moving parts,'" Danielson adds. "The amount of usage is also a huge driver in this equation and some products - i.e. sprayers and aerators, that are not daily-use items - will have more years of life, compared to products that are in everyday use."

Conversely, Danielson says there is no easy answer to when a superintendent is better off biting the bullet and buying new - referencing the price-versus-value equation.

A customer's budget and capacity to

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- Buddy Wynn, Jacobsen

fix and maintain equipment - either internally or use of a local dealer/distributor - will drive what is best for a particular customer," he says.

When it comes to greens mowers, Baker says he likes to see his customers buy new.

"Greens mowers are out there seven days a week and machine reliability is critical," Baker says. "Greens are the most critical turf on any course and you want to mitigate the risk of hydraulic leaks or other issues that may come with

a used unit. "Plus, the advances that have been made in the last several years with things like the Jacobsen ECLIPSE greens mowers... the new technology alone is worth the investment," he adds.

While turf equipment can be found on the all-inclusive shopping website eBay, Baker warns it's "buyer beware."

"There are websites out there where you can buy used equipment, but you have to be really careful," he says. "It's not like buying books or shoes, these machines need to be serviced. Some of these sites simply take your money, drop off your machine and leave, and you may have little or no recourse in the weeks and months that follow if things don't go well.

"As an authorized dealer, we are held to a high standard by the industry and customers pay a little more for that security and peace of mind because it's worth it," Baker adds.

Speaking of websites, don't expect a computer-generated fox to help force the hand of a seller on the equipment's history.

"If possible, view the maintenance records of the equipment," Danielson says. "The industry has not evolved to a 'CARFAX-type' system given the fact most maintenance is done by the owners, but getting a look at the maintenance records can be extremely helpful (if the previous owner is willing or able to share it)."

Beyond that, examine areas that are readily visible, Danielson adds.

"If the visible items look lacking in maintenance, could that be a clue to what is not readily visible?" he asked. "There are also some tests that can be done (for example, lubricant analysis, compression testing, etc.). Of course, the testing does entail some costs, but could save money later."

There's a certain amount of unknown in any purchase, new or used, but Wynn suggested that avoiding a future headache can be as easy as staying on a tried-and-true path.

The best value over the long-term is always going to be found at an authorized dealer, Wynn says.

"You need to know that there is someone who will back that product up with service and support," Wynn says. "Jacobsen dealers now sell Certified Pre-Owned equipment



Prior to purchasing, consider: What was done to the unit after it was traded or taken in off lease? Was the unit serviced — engine, hydraulic oil and filters, as well as air and fuel filters?

that is rebuilt at the factory and includes a one-year factory warranty."

A Caveat Emptor may protect the seller with an "as-is" proclamation, but that leaves the buyer with no recourse but to foot the bill with any mechanical migraines. What you don't know, can certainly hurt you.

"It's never easy to identify a machine that might be a problem down the road," Baker says. "You may not know where that machine has been the past 3-5 years or how it was treated and maintained.

"I would recommend dealing with a local dealer who is capable of providing a thorough inspection of the equipment, has factory-trained technicians who know how to repair and service it, can communicate with the factory regarding any technical issues or mechanical updates, and will stand behind it after it's sold," he adds.

"As a dealer, we are very careful about the used equipment we purchase or take on trade," Baker says. "It is inspected and evaluated prior to purchase to ensure we are getting what we pay for."

Researching on the Internet for potential problems inherent with certain models of turf equipment can alleviate some stress, as well as talking to fellow superintendents and techs to get their opinions,' Bloch says. Having the dealer leave the unit at the course for a day or two to be put through its daily routine is an ideal scenario, he adds.

Again, knowledge is power when it comes to making a purchasing decision.

Before even considering buying used equipment, you really need to evaluate what you own, Baker says.

"If your equipment is well maintained, late model and has low hours, you might be surprised at what you have in value," Baker says. I wouldn't suggest solving one mechanical problem by replacing it with another, though ... be careful with what you buy and find a local source you trust."

Having a guide and assurances can make navigating the pre-owned market for equipment a lot less frightening. **GCI**

Rob Thomas is a Cleveland-based writer and a frequent GCI contributor.