

**I**f you're thinking of purchasing a walk-behind greens mower, you're looking to sport the best putting greens in the neighborhood. Walk-behind mowers are recognized for their high caliber of cutting.

But remember that buying a walk-behind mower is like purchasing a Cadillac. You shouldn't care how much it costs because you desire — and are getting — excellence.

"Quality of cut is the issue for most people who are walk-mowing their greens," says David "Buddha" Brandon, superintendent for Riverwood GC in Mount Pleasant, Mich. "Price is not a consideration."

Many superintendents believe walk-behind mowers are better than triplex mowers, says Peter Whurr, vice president of product management for Textron Turf Care And Specialty Products. They are willing to pay more for the single-unit machines and employ additional labor to operate them.

Helmut Ullrich, a marketing manager for Toro Co., says clipping greens with walk-behind mowers is "the ultimate you can do for your clients."

What distinguishes walk-behind mowers from triplex mowers? For starters, they are better apt to cut severe undulations and contours on difficult-to-groom greens, experts say, and we're talking one-eighth inch here.

But there are points to consider when selecting a walk-behind mower. Bill Williams and his crew use walk-behind mowers on the severely undulating greens at Worthington Hills CC in Worthington, Ohio. Williams warns that if the front rollers on the mower are too far in front of the reel, the mower may scalp the green when cutting at a low height. So Williams prefers walk-behind mowers with front rollers and reels that are well-balanced. Whurr says the mower must have enough weight on its front end to keep it from bouncing on a green.

"The balance of the machine is important, not only from front to rear, but left to right," Whurr adds. "Any inaccuracy from left to right will lead to different shades of green."

Brandon will only purchase a walk-behind mower that features a more durable reel, which transforms into a better-looking and consistent cut, he says.

Speaking of aesthetics, Ullrich notes that walk-behind mowers won't leave behind tire and compaction marks like some riding mowers. Whurr stresses that superintendents should purchase walk-behind mowers that operate with no engine vibration, which can affect cutting performance and, hence, green reac-

tion. Even small vibrations can cause ripples on greens, he notes.

Noise level is also an issue when selecting a walk-behind mower because most course workers are cutting greens in the early morning, Whurr notes.

Some superintendents might not think they have the time to use walking mowers, especially if they're running busy daily-fee courses. But Whurr says they can place lights on the mowers to cut the greens at night.

Whurr suggests purchasing a mower that's versatile enough to add attachments. "If you have thatch on a green, you need to be able to pull it out with a groomer attachment," he says.

Or a small brush might need to be attached to the front of a mower to flick grass up so it can be precisely cut. "Little things like that help superintendents attain the quality of greens they're looking for," Whurr says.

Competition for golfers and tournaments has spurred a renewed interest in walk-behind mowers because superintendents believe quality of cut, not speed of cut, is the main issue, Whurr says. Brandon echoes that sentiment.

"To many superintendents, there's no bigger issue than quality of cut, and what a green is going to look, putt and feel like when you're done mowing it," he says. ■

# Hoofing It?

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By Larry Aylward

