

Mechanically Inclined

Taking Care of Topdressers

Good maintenance starts with cleanliness

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

There are many reasons why topdressers cost up to \$25,000. One big reason is the machines are manufactured so well that not much can go wrong with them. That said, superintendents who own topdressers shouldn't assume that the rugged equipment will operate proficiently without maintenance. Hey, even the most regal Rolls Royce on the planet needs to be serviced occasionally.

The key thing to remember is that a little maintenance will keep a topdresser running smoothly for a long time. "With proper care, any good quality topdresser should provide anywhere from seven to 15 years of relatively trouble-free use," says P. Scott Mason, Ty-Crop Manufacturing's vice president of marketing for turf products.

Manufacturers note that a crucial component to maintaining topdressers is simply to keep them clean.

"Topdressers are all about transporting and spreading sand, which is critical for creating great playing conditions, but not exactly the friendliest of materials on the planet," Mason says. "Sand can be hard on painted surfaces, floor-belt seams and seals, sprockets, gears, chains, rollers, bearings, hydraulic fittings and controls. Properly cleaning your topdresser after each application is a key in helping increase the life of the machine and all of the moving parts."

Scott Kinkead, vice president of Turfco Manufacturing, says winter is a



TY-CROP MANUFACTURING

good time to look inside a topdresser to make sure sand has not built up under the rollers.

"We use self-cleaning rollers on our machines, and they kick the sand out to the side," Kinkead says. "But it's always good to look inside the side panel to make sure sand hasn't built up. [Built-up sand] can cause the belt to stretch and cause a failure."

Sand isn't the only enemy if you use topdresser for other purposes, notes Randy Dufault, account manager for Dakota Peat & Equipment. He says corrosive materials left from fertilizer remnants can corrode topdressers if not washed away. "The important thing is to keep a topdresser clean from corrosive materials, which keeps it from rusting," he adds.

Mason suggests a basic but effective cleaning method. "It's best to blow off the unit with an air hose and then wash it afterward with water and a mild, nonabrasive liquid soap," he says. "Then rinse it and let it dry."

But make sure the rinse water

Topdressers transport and spread sand, which is critical to create great playing conditions. But sand can be hard on a number of the machine's components.

drains out of and away from the topdresser because trapped and standing water will also cause rust, Mason notes. "Rust is one of the biggest factors in decreasing the life of any piece of equipment," he says.

There are more additional benefits to keeping a clean machine. "It's always easier to inspect, service or repair a clean machine and see potential problems before they occur," Mason adds.

For instance, a clean machine might reveal areas on the body that need attention. "Don't let those bare areas on painted surfaces go too long without applying some primer and touch-up paint," Mason says.

About that manual

The owner's manual that came with your topdresser should not be stuffed

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Tips

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and buried in the back of your bottom desk drawer. It contains useful and vital information for servicing the topdresser, says Glenn Musser, product manager for Mill Creek Products. Important monthly and annual maintenance functions that need to be performed are addressed in the manual, such as greasing a unit according to the manufacturer's recommendations, Musser adds.

It might be necessary to remove safety guards or shields to properly service or maintain all areas of the machine, Mason says. "Remember, sand has a way of finding its way into many areas, so be thorough. Keep the fittings clean and use safety caps to prevent sand or other contaminants from getting into or on hydraulic connections or into the hydraulic system," he adds.

On older topdressers, Dufault

advises mechanics and superintendents to perform occasional but thorough inspections to make sure wheel bearings are packed properly and that hoses are in good shape and functioning properly, among other things.

Floor belts should also be inspected.

"Most floor belts need to be tracked to prevent the floor belt from moving too far from one side or the other," Mason says. "Inspect the floor belt before or after each use and make tracking adjustments as necessary. Also make sure to replace any worn or missing inner floor-belt seals."

Musser advises mechanics and superintendents to purchase replacement parts, such as chains and sprockets, from the original manufacturers.

If the topdresser is hydraulically driven, Kinkead stresses the importance of changing the filter in accordance with its hours of use. "If you

don't replace the filter, you could decrease its power or cause it to run a lot hotter," he adds.

Take it easy

Maintenance goes hand-in-hand with operation, Dufault says. A worker doesn't want to drive a topdresser into the ground by running it recklessly. Dufault notes he's seen careless operators roll topdressers into bunkers because they drove the machines too close to the hazards.

"People blame [the accidents] on the equipment, but most happen because of operator error," he says. "What wrecks topdressers the most are inexperienced operators. They do things they shouldn't be doing with the machines. An [inexperienced operator] can do more damage to a machine in five minutes than a superintendent can do in 10 years." ■

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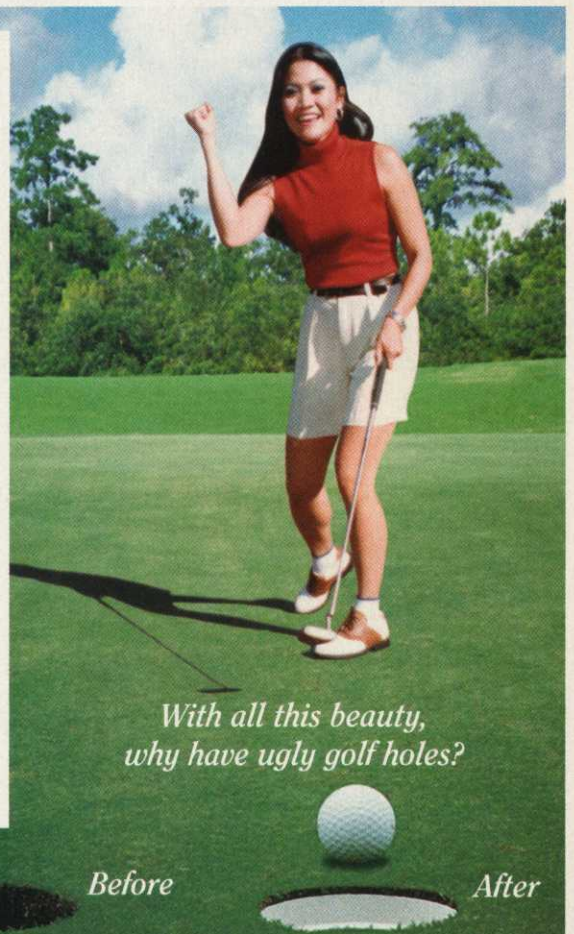
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