

Rough

IN THE

Golfers' expectations for improved turf have extended to the rough. Mower manufacturers are responding to superintendents' needs with better machines

By Larry Aylward, Editor

Remember Doc Brown, the eccentric scientist who invented time travel in the film *Back to the Future*? Roger Kisch, superintendent of Southview Country Club in West St. Paul, Minn., doesn't look like the beedy-eyed and bushy-haired doctor, but he thinks a little like him.

Kisch, who celebrates his 39th anniversary at Southview this month, has always been an inventive superintendent. "Gadget" is his middle name. "I'm always looking for a better way to do things," he says.

Back in the mid-1980s, Kisch sought a better way to mow his course's rough. He invented a quirky-looking mowing system that combined three 21-inch rotary mowers. Kisch's system worked so well that National Mower, a St. Paul-based mower company, began manufacturing Kisch's invention last year. It's now called the I-Gang 3 tow-behind rotary mowing system.

Stan Kinkead, president of National Mower, says superintendents are impressed with the I-Gang 3's quality of cut. That's good because the rough is getting more attention these days because golfers expect wall-to-wall maintained turf. Like ivy unfurling rapidly up the side of a brick house, golfers' expectations have spread from the greens to the fairways to the roughs.

Todd Ford, superintendent of Lakes of the Four Seasons Country Club in Crown Point, Ind., notices the trend. "I've been at this club for a year and a half, and the roughs seem to be more important than anything," he says.

Like National Mower, the nation's other mower manufacturers are implementing improvements in their machines to keep up with the trends in the rough — from good-looking turf to quality of cut.



National Mower's Stan Kinkead and superintendent Roger Kisch show off the I-Gang 3 earlier this year at the GCSAA Show.

"There's no question that roughs are becoming an area where there's more demand for quality of cut," says Mike Koppen, group product manager for John Deere and Co. "If your roughs aren't up to par, you're probably going to get negative comments."

Jeff LeFever, The Toro Co.'s senior marketing manager for golf, likens what's going on in turf maintenance to a homeowner refurbishing his house.

"When you improve one room, the next room looks like it needs more work," he says. "We're seeing increased attention everywhere on the course, and roughs are every bit as much a part of that as the fairways and greens."

Better mowers

Southview Country Club, built in 1919, features a lot of undulations in the rough and areas near tees and greens. Kisch and his crew were forced to hand-mow the turf with 20-inch rotary mowers. "But we found we didn't like pushing those mowers up and down those hills," Kisch says.

That's when Kisch got to thinking like Doc Brown. His idea was to hitch three rotary mowers together and tow them behind a golf car or a four-wheeler to cut the rough. "It worked fairly well," he says.

Occasionally, a superintendent from another course would stop by Southview and see the course's nice-looking and

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NATIONAL MOWER

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unscalped bluegrass rough. "He'd ask, 'What did you use to cut around the greens?'" Kisch says.

Area superintendents began asking Kisch how they could get their hands on the three-mower contraption. Finally, Kisch told his friend Kinkead that other superintendents were interested in his mowing creation. That's when Kinkead decided to manufacture Kisch's invention — with a few modifications — resulting in the I-Gang 3.

"We took Roger's original design and beefed up everything," Kinkead says. "We made heavier decks and put a good set of wheels under them with double-bearings."

Kinkead also made the mower more user-friendly. The original design had three mowers with separate gas tanks and rope starts. National Mower's design has three mowers but only one gas tank and a remote starting system.

Kinkead says he was attracted by the simplicity of Kisch's creation, which didn't feature a super-sophisticated hydraulic drive or other fancy components.

"It only weighs 450 pounds, so it can be pulled with a lightweight piece of equipment," Kinkead says. "I thought it would be a good opportunity to present a lightweight machine for mowing around greens and tees."

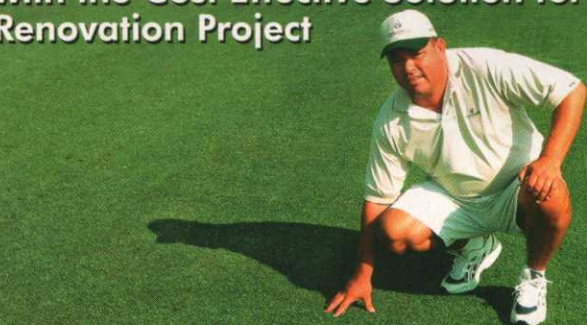
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THE TORO CO.

Toro's Groundmaster mower is a popular rough mower. Jeff LeFever, Toro's senior marketing manager for golf, says superintendents want rough mowers that offer a consistent cut and are able follow the contour of the turf.

Princess 77 Provided Cimarrón Golf Course with the Cost Effective Solution for Their Renovation Project



Mario Aguiar, Golf Course Superintendent for Cimarrón Golf Course in Cathedral City, California kneels on a renovated fairway of Princess 77.



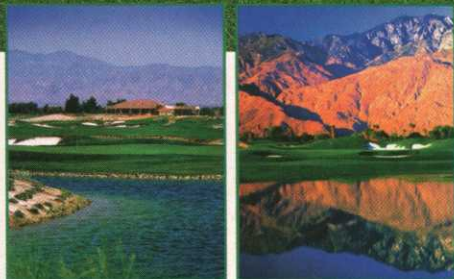
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*Response of Bermudagrasses and Zoysiagrasses to Applied Water Using a Linear Gradient Irrigation Design, Sean Reynolds, 2000, Master's Thesis

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Kinkead also likes that the I-Gang 3 can mow over lumps and bumps with the consistency of a reel mower. While giving demonstrations of the mower this summer at various courses, Kinkead says he received funny looks from superintendents regarding the mower's peculiar design. "They just kind of smirk," Kinkead says. "But then they see what it can do."

With the I-Gang 3, which features a 56-inch-wide swath, superintendents can cut down on the time and labor it takes to walk mow the rough. Yet the rough still retains a walk-mown look, Kinkead says.

Toro, Deere and Jacobsen also offer rough mowers for improved quality of cut in the rough.

Toro offers its Groundsmaster 4500-D and 4700-D, which have five and seven free-floating Contour Plus rotary cutting decks that follow the contour of the turf.

Deere offers its 3245C Independent Rotary Deck Mower, which features five 21-inch rear-discharge independent rotary decks for a cutting width of 90 inches.

Jacobsen offers its redesigned AR-5 fine-cut rotary mower. The lift arms on the AR-5 were redesigned to keep the cutting decks in the same vertical plane continuously. This allows the decks to float straight up and down independently to deliver improved ground-following capability over irregular contours.

Ford says frequent rains lead to fast-growing turf, so he prefers using a rotary mower in the rough and on banks around greens and tees. Ford recently purchased the Jacobsen AR-5, which he says is productive and powerful in thick turf. Also, he likes that it stands up grass rather than pushing it down like reel mowers do with their rollers.

LeFever says there's been a shift from reel mowers to rotary mowers the past few years for productivity reasons. But he quickly notes that some superintendents have switched back to reel mowers for a better quality of cut. Opinions abound about whether rotary mowers leave more thatch and spongy textures in turf, LeFever points out.

"It's a horse race [to determine] whether superintendents are using a rotary or a reel in the rough," LeFever says. "It's up to the superintendent to determine what his goals are."

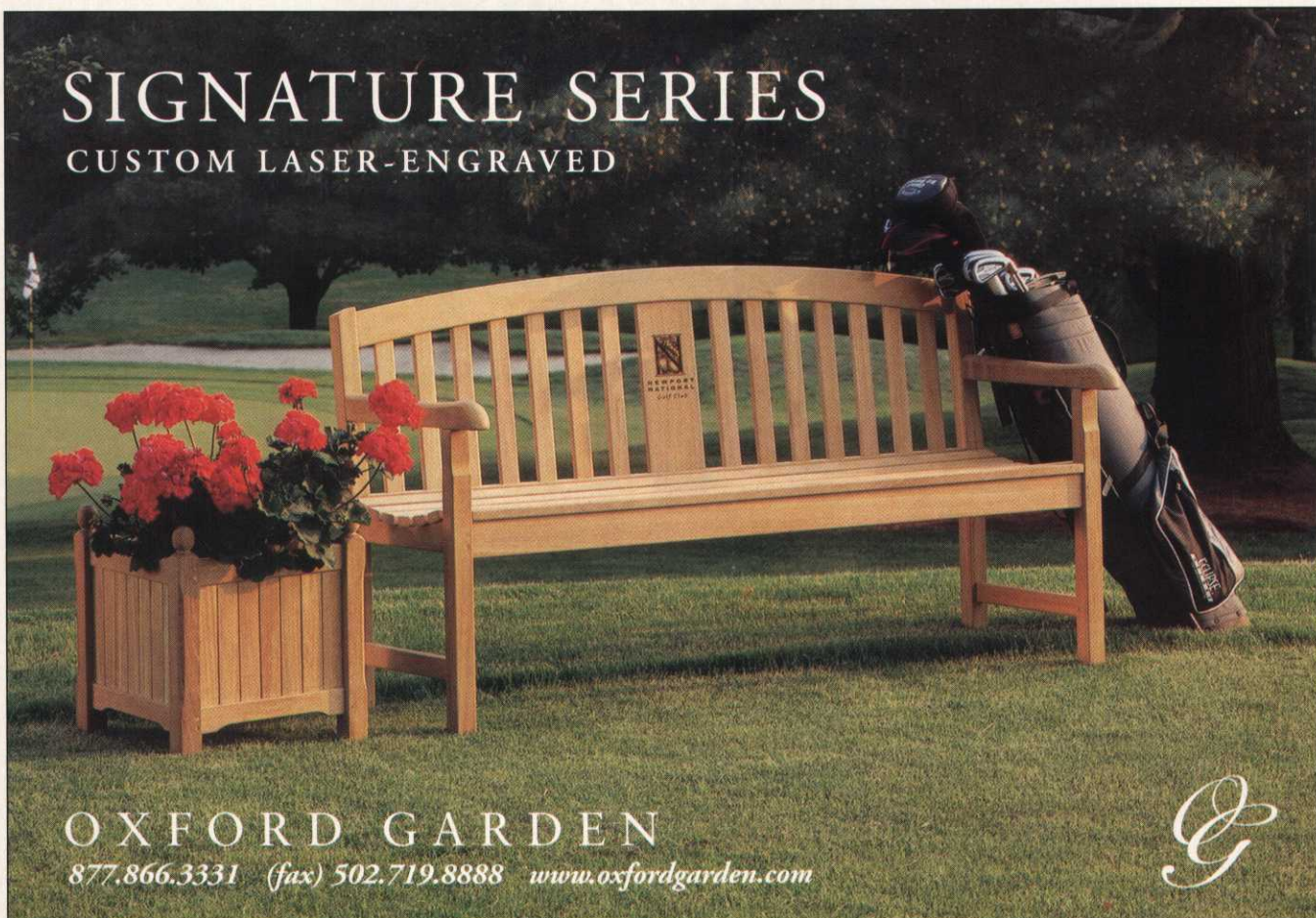
Manufacturers are also improving rough mowers' margins for trimming around trees and other hard-to-reach areas.

"You must have a good machine that operates well on hills," Koppen says. "Maneuverability is important because of trees and obstacles."

Koppen says superintendents also want rough mowers that are simple to maintain. That said, Koppen says more golf course maintenance departments are switching from reels to rotaries because of ease of maintenance. ■

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A photograph of a wooden bench on a golf course. A golf bag is leaning against the right side of the bench. In the foreground, there is a wooden planter box filled with red flowers. The background shows a golf course with trees and a flag on a green.

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