

# HUNGRY FOR HYBRIDS



**I**n a “Saturday Night Live” skit, Christopher Walken, portraying music producer Bruce Dickinson, demands more cowbell from the Blue Oyster Cult on their song “(Don’t Fear) the Reaper.” In fact, Walken has a fever, he says, and “the only cure... is more cowbell.”

The same thing could be said about superintendents and their hunger for information on hybrid mowers. The only cure? More hybrid... information.

Want an example? At the Jacobsen website, the company has created a cost savings calculator (available at <http://www.jacobsen.com/eclipse-calculator>) that demonstrates how much money the company believes a superintendent could save by running Jacobsen’s Eclipse 322 riding greensmower over a regular gas triplex mower. According to Jacobsen, that calculator gets 60,000 views a month.

Even if there’s one really sad and bored superintendent out there clamoring for the Eclipse 322 so badly that he alone is accounting for half those hits... that’s still a lot of interest every month displayed by the industry.

“Years ago superintendents were leery (of hybrid technology) because of reliability. The technology wasn’t available to make a good system yet,” says Helmut Ullrich, Toro’s senior marketing manager for greensmowers.

“Today, the technology is here. Also, people are more concerned about the environment – even more so than they were just three years ago. Now? It’s *‘hybrid-hybrid-hybrid.’*”

## Big three agree

There’s a lot of competition for a superintendent’s dollars across the golf landscape, but especially between the big three – Toro, John Deere and Jacobsen. So it makes sense that at times, these three companies don’t see eye-to-eye.

But when it comes to the importance of hybrid equipment to the industry, the competitors in green and orange agree with their colleague in red.

“It’s a huge deal, a huge investment has gone into this,” says Peter Driver, PR officer for Ransomes Jacobsen. “We know what times are like in the golf course industry. This is the drive to make it less expensive for superintendents to run their equipment.”

“It’s a key innovation in our industry,” says Tracy Lanier, product manager for reels for John Deere Golf. “It’s about solving problems for our customers, things they deal with on a regular basis.”

And they also agree that this technology is just going to keep improving over the years.

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In just the last three years, the demand for **hybrid greens mowing technology** has shot off the charts in the industry.

BY SETH JONES,  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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"We think the technology can only get better," Driver says. "The better technology will come when the car industry develops better batteries – lithium batteries – for their purposes. All of us, the big three, we don't build enough to warrant taking (battery) technology forward, we have to use the technology as it comes down the stream. As batteries get better, we'll see better equipment."

So now that we've covered what these three companies agree on, let's take a look at some of the things they plan on showing off this year in the riding greensmower category. And what the heck, let's stir the pot a little while we're at it, and share something these three don't agree on.

### JOHN DEERE

#### Riding hybrid greensmower: 2500E E-Cut

**They want you to know:** The 2500E E-Cut has a new alternator that powers the electric drive cutting units. In comparison with previous models, the alternator has increased to 100 amps, improving the overall efficiency of the machine. The new alternator increases the amperage available for the reel circuit while maintaining exceptional fuel efficiency. And, with improved radiator fan cooling-to-speed ratios on all 2011 model riding greens mowers, the overall noise levels have decreased even more for both operators and bystanders.

**A word from the expert:** "The technology is still relatively new. We've had (hybrid mowers) out there for five to six years now. Still, a lot of customers are just now starting to look at it as an option for their golf course," Lanier says. "We targeted the reel drive circuit for electrical power. The reason we did this is because the majority of your leak points are in your reel circuit, so by removing that aspect from the machine, you've taken 102 potential leak points off your machine. The payback to the customer is, they're not paying as much up front (for the mower)."

**Friendly fire:** "You're always looking at your competitors to see what they're doing and how you're stacking up against

them," Lanier says, adding that John Deere was the first company to bring a hybrid mower to the industry. "With us being the first ones to the market with this, I feel the other companies are looking at us to set the direction as far as innovation goes. And so far, we have been setting the direction."

**Futurecast:** "Currently, we're the only manufacturer with three different hybrid product line-ups including: walking greens mowers, riding greens mowers and fairway mowers. And John Deere is the only one offering riding fairway mowers," Lanier says. "We're always working on new products, but as we've shown, hybrid technology is a direction we've been pursuing. I would expect to see more from us in the future."

### THE TORO COMPANY

#### Riding hybrid greensmower: Greensmaster TriFlex Hybrid

**They want you to know:** Toro says their Greensmaster TriFlex Hybrids are the first riding greensmowers to truly cut with the precision of a walker. The company took the capabilities of the Flex walk-behind mower and developed a new suspension system for their triplex



The John Deere 2500E E-Cut comes with an improved alternator and reduced sound.

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Helmut Ullrich, Toro, says, "Unless you do it right you give (hybrid tech) a bad name."

models. The TriFlex Hybrid models feature an all-electric reel drive system that virtually eliminates hydraulic leaks and delivers ample horsepower to handle a broad range of cutting applications. Also, the traction unit is equipped with tool-free, quick change cutting units so it can be converted for spiking, thatching or verticutting in just a few minutes.

**A word from the expert:** "Toro did not develop all new greens-mowers and make them electric or hybrid simply to say that we had electric or hybrid models. The goal, as articulated by customers, was to improve cutting performance," says Bob VandenBoom, senior marketing manager for The Toro Co. "The heart and soul of cutting performance on a riding mower starts with the suspension. This cutting system is articulating. It follows the contours of the green. The lift-in-turn feature that is integrated with the suspension system also acts to eliminate step-cutting or triplex ring on clean-up passes."

**Friendly fire:** "Toro is the clear market share leader in both the walking and riding greensmower categories," Ullrich says. "We  
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cannot afford to slip in our market position. We listen to customers and we learn from competitive mistakes. We stay focused on delivering high performance and great value — even though we may be perceived, at first, as being pricey.”

**Futurecast:** Toro is visiting 16 cities on their “Master of the Greens – U.S. Tour” from now until July. “We’re on a mission right now on the Greensmaster tour,” Ullrich says. “To educate our distributors and customers on the outstanding performance of this equipment.” To see a tour visit near you, go to [www.toro.com/masterthegreens](http://www.toro.com/masterthegreens).

### JACOBSEN

Riding hybrid greensmower: **Eclipse 322**

**They want you to know:** The Eclipse 322 is the industry’s only 100-percent hydraulic-free riding greens mower, with full electric traction drive, lift/lower reels and steering. The mower allows superintendents to program and set the frequency of clip to their liking, assuring a consistent cut regardless of dif-



Jacobsen's Peter Driver says the next step for hybrids is improved battery tech.

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ferent operators. Individual reel control allows each reel to be lifted independently. An ergonomically designed cockpit with swing-out armrest controls and LED lights improves operator comfort and visibility.

**A word from the expert:** “We can lift (reels) independently — a machine can go around with all three reels on the ground, or one or two, to do a clean-up pass. That’s a feature no one else has,” Driver says. “Superintendents don’t want hydraulic oil anywhere near their greens. You know exactly what happens when a machine gets a hydraulic leak.”

**Friendly fire:** “I’m going to say we’re ahead of the (hybrid) game. Our two main competitors both have hybrid machines, there’s no doubt about it, but ours just uses an engine, a generator and electricity, while theirs still retain hydraulic oil to raise their reels and to drive the machine,” Driver says. “They’ve retained hydraulics, they’ve gone down that route, we’ve stayed with a completely electrical drive system. That’s the difference.”

**Futurecast:** “We will continue to develop technology for superintendents that solves their everyday problems. Our product managers and design engineers, both in the USA and in Europe, continue to listen to the customer and produce products that meet, and often exceed, the needs of the end user.” ■

PHOTO BY: SETH JONES