



THE JOY OF KICKING TIRES

By Monroe S. Miller

You know that summer is nearly spent when the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association Summer Field Day is over.

The Field Day has held court on the same day in August for so long now that it has become a timepost for most of us working on Wisconsin golf courses.

From very humble beginnings on a very hot and humid August day a decade ago, the Field Day has become an important day on the calendar of a lot of our members. Now that it has found a wonderful home at the NOER facility, the Field Day will grow even larger.

There is something about equipment shows that almost universally appeals to golf course superintendents. And be assured whatever that "something" is, farmers have it too. Honestly, I believe they love equipment shows more than we do.

As I cast about trying to define that appeal, the first thing that comes to mind is the most obvious. Equipment shows are very practical, functional and useful affairs for everybody—exhibitors and superintendents.

An equipment distributor can make one trip and show several, even many, pieces of machinery to hundreds of customers. To expose the same number of buyers to a piece of grass machinery individually could conceivably involve a visit to each and every golf course represented at a field day. If the exhibitor shows five pieces, multiply the number of trips by five.

The economic incentive is powerful for them, indeed.

The same goes for us, too. The arrangements required and the time consumed to see all the equipment at a field day operated on your own golf course, an item at a time, would take all summer. You simply wouldn't get anything else done.

Certainly you cannot diminish the great value of an equipment demonstration at your own course, with its very specific and peculiar conditions. That kind of individual and personal-

ized look is critical to wise buying decisions. I don't even want, nor do I think as an industry we can, give that up.

But a field day helps narrow you to a station where you know what you actually want demonstrated.

Field days provide a singular opportunity to see the various competitors side by side, in operation, mowing grass. Or maybe aerifying. Or spraying. Or any of the myriad of activities equipment does for a course superintendent. Rarely, if ever, can you see such a sight on your own golf course.

More than a few buying decisions have been made as a result of these head-to-head competitions. It's a field day feature I really like.

Frequently, field days also have factory engineers around equipment displays. You can learn a lot about design intent and manufacturing processes from them. They can give explanations about equipment that you'd not likely get otherwise.

I've always been interested in what my colleagues think about a particular piece of equipment I am contemplating the purchase of in the near future. How great it is to hang around a mower at a field day, kicking tires and listening to what a group of other golf course managers are thinking about the same mower. Their collective opinion influences me and my

eventual choice. Studying the pluses and minuses of a machine and researching its value on a golf course is simply a lot of fun with your friends.

Field days, regardless of where they are held, are very colorful affairs. The brightly painted machinery moving across the carpet of grass is a sight to behold.

Here is a fact about every field day I've attended: the food is always good, never fancy and always plentiful. Field days are hard work and a person develops a hearty appetite during the day. One of the key planning elements for the WTA Field Day is securing a caterer which will serve a basic and generous and well cooked meal!

Maybe another reason a field day is such a pleasant experience for so many of us is that the dress of the day is determined by comfort. Seldom do you see a necktie; when you do, you immediately question the wearer's sanity.

There is no sense in denying that field days and equipment shows are social affairs. You are spending the day with people you know and whose company you enjoy. Often, as with the WTA Field Day, you see folks you haven't seen for awhile and it makes you happy to see them again.

I actually see quite a few equipment shows over the course of a year. In a way, the various shows

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mark my calendar, often happening about the same time year in and year out.

It is my good luck to go to many field days and equipment shows with someone who likes them and profits from them as much as I do. In fact, he is one of the best turf equipment people around.

Tom Harrison has a natural talent that enables him to look at a machine and immediately know how it works, understand its shortcomings and fashion just about any repair that it might need. He usually has an opinion on how he'd make it better, too!

Although golf course superintendents who enjoy kicking tires usually prefer golf course equipment shows and the visiting and comparing that goes with them, some of us like other kinds of equipment field days, too. For me, youth on a southwest Wisconsin farm gave me an interest in farm machinery. Fortunately Tom likes farm equipment, too.

We both like going to Wisconsin Farm Progress Days and will try to schedule a trip to this major event when it is held in our part of the state at a time when we can get away for a vacation day. Both of us get a charge out of watching a John Deere 9500 combine with a corn header attachment move across a corn field, consuming acres per hour. It is fun to watch the really big equipment—a 4-wheel drive 200 h.p. Steiger tractor, for example—follow that JD 9500 combine with a huge chisel plow preparing the soil for planting next spring. The scale of everything at Farm Progress Shows absolutely dwarfs turf equipment.

Farm Progress will sometimes precede and other times follow the WTA Field Day. The third event Tom and I enjoy is an equipment display, show and auction that, believe it or not, is dwarfed by turf equipment.

We always take in the National Farm Toy Show. Held either on the last Saturday of October or the first one in November, this equipment show is tremendous. We get lost in the crowd of 15,000 others who are keenly interested in miniature farm equipment. It matters not if you favor 1/12, 1/16, 1/25, 1/43 or 1/64 scale farm equipment toys and toy tractors, it's all in Dyersville, Iowa for the three day show.

Dyersville is the home of the National Farm Toy Museum, the Ertl Company, Scale Models Company and the Spec-Cast Company. They

are the major players in this exciting hobby for equipment lovers. Despite the small size of the equipment, many of the prices are high. And although you cannot kick any tires, one is able to feel all the upbeat emotions and conversations experienced at "real" equipment shows.

It is kind of neat to sit and have lunch (good food here, too!) with several veteran toy collectors and talk about tabletop or desktop farming, custom-built rigs and who has made the best pedal tractor lately.

In our business, the granddaddy of all equipment shows happens when the GCSAA conference and show convenes. The turf equipment show is a dream come true for any golf course superintendent. It is the only place in the world where literally every piece of grass machinery from just about anywhere in the world comes together on acres of indoor floor. This show is the ultimate comparison shopping venue!

I cannot recall ever seeing a superintendent at the GCSAA show in a bad mood. At that time of year, everybody is upbeat and happy, feeling a growing sense of anticipation of the upcoming golf season.

Dreaming is a big part of this show. Everybody can imagine a LF-100 or a 223D on the fairways. Close

your eyes and you can see those new greensmowers cutting your greens for the state amateur.

Some say the only downside to the show is that it is strictly an indoor affair. There's no opportunity to see equipment at work.

To that I say maybe it is best that way for once. A lot can still be accomplished; demo requests are narrowed. The area required for field trials would require the boundaries of Dane County; it would almost be impossible. Not being able to climb aboard a machine and feel it operate necessitates a lot closer inspection than is given when it is outdoors.

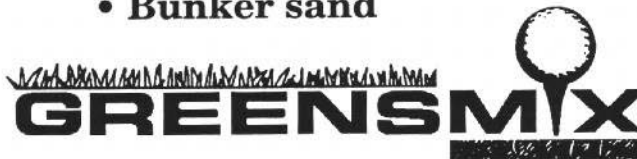
The show season is usually wrapped up when either Reinders or Wisconsin Turf or Horst has alternate years shows in Milwaukee or elsewhere in the state. Most of us never want to miss these traditional gatherings, either. They have an appeal all their own.

Arnold Palmer, sunrise over the 18th, opening day, the Masters, a freshly cut green and kicking tires are among the things that make managing a golf course the enjoyable profession that it is. I can say I hope that field days and equipment shows are around as long as golf remains played on grass.

That should be forever.

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