



Driving Daytona

An effective turf care program and quality equipment keep the Daytona grounds crew ahead of the pack

BY JENNIFER RICHTER

Dick Hahne, vice president of operations for Daytona International Speedway (DIS), Daytona Beach, FL, has always been a fan of racing. But it's not the motorsports that spark his interest; it's the setting for those events. He's responsible for maintaining the complex known as the "World Center of Racing."

Maintaining the Daytona speedway grounds requires the same drive shown by its racing competitors. "One might consider us the Augusta National of racing," says Hahne. "We set the tone for other tracks in terms of aesthetics, fan amenities and competitor approval."

This year, the 18-member grounds crew planted approximately 100 palm and oak trees along Daytona's Superstretch. The crew keeps the tri-oval and grass around the aprons smooth and level (without any holes), which helps reduce the number of dangerous accidents, particularly during vehicle spinouts.

A race of a different sort

With a total of 750 acres of turf to manage, maintaining DIS is a race in itself. "Every day is intense," Hahne says, referring to Daytona's 320 days of activities planned for 2000, including races like the Pepsi 400, tire testing, commercials and more.

The infield alone spans 180

acres, including Lake Lloyd. "Our goal is to mow every section of grass at least once a week," notes Hahne. High-visibility areas are mowed often.

DIS recently entered a three-year agreement with Textron Golf & Turf, Racine, WI, naming Textron as the speedway's official grounds care equipment supplier.

DIS uses a 36-in. Bunton walk-behind mower; Bob-Cat 21-in. push mower and 36-in. mid-size mower; a Cushman Spray-Tek dedicated sprayer; 12 Cushman Hawk utility vehicles; a Jacobsen LF-3800 fairway mower; a Jacobsen Turfcut out-front rotary mower; a Jacobsen HR-5111 hydraulic wide-area rotary; and a Ryan Jr. sod cutter.

Jacobsen reel mowers manicure the tri-oval, while wide-area rotaries trim the turf around the aprons. Utility vehicles transport equipment and collect garbage before and after events.

Turf damage

Vehicle spinouts pose the greatest challenge for Hahne and his crew. Replacing damaged turf isn't always feasible with Daytona's busy schedule. "Sometimes we have to be creative," says Hahne. "If we can't resod, we paint the turf or use green sand."

High-visibility areas have St. Augustinegrass; the infield, 419 Bermuda; and the turf around the aprons, Bahia. All high-visibility areas are overseeded annually with ryegrass to maintain their green hue in winter.

— Jennifer Richter is a Milwaukee-based writer.