

EXPLORING EQUIPMENT

Exploring Equipment: Reel Mower Excels On High-Use Turf

Ross Kurcab, turf manager for the Denver Broncos, is almost always pressed for time. It's not his schedule that creates the "time crunch" — it's working around the schedule of a professional football team.

Kurcab has been with the organization for nearly eight years. He helped plan its 13-1/2-acre training facility in southeast Denver, which was constructed in 1989. Maintaining the fields there is his top priority, which isn't easy in light of the heavy use they receive.

"The team conducts five-days-a-week training for three-and-a-half months in the spring," Kurcab says. "There are conditioning camps, mini-camps, quarterback camps — the fields are constantly in use.

"We get about a month's break in late summer when the team goes to Greeley for pre-season training," he continues. "We use that time to get the

fields repaired and ready for fall. Then, from August through December, we have at least 65 intense practices."

The training facility includes 2-1/2 practice fields covering about four acres. The sand-based fields were built using USGA specifications for golf greens. One of the practice fields has an electrical soil heating system with 21 miles of buried wire to keep the ground from freezing.

The turf cover is a mix of 70 percent bluegrass and 30 percent ryegrass. There are four varieties of bluegrass and two varieties of ryegrass in the blend.

Cutting Practices

At the Broncos old training facility in north Denver, Kurcab cut the grass with rotary mowers. The team wanted a finer cut on its new practice fields, so Kurcab turned to reel mowers.

"I checked out every mower I could find," he explains. "There are a lot of good

mowers out there. Finally, we settled on Ransomes 350D reel mower. It had the features we wanted including the quality of cut. Plus, the local Ransomes dealer, Colorado Outdoor Power, is giving us excellent service and support."

According to Kurcab, the mower's five-gage 11-1/2-foot cutting width reduces cutting time. "We have a relatively short 'window' for mowing," he says. "If there is dew on the grass in the morning, we have to wait to start. Then have to get on and get it cut before the players show up for their first practice."

Kurcab handles most of the mowing himself with just one part-time assistant during the summer. Reduced cutting time translates to an additional advantage: reduced running time, which saves wear and tear on mower and its engine.

Maneuverability was a serious consideration for Kurcab in his search for

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the right reel mower. The 350D, he says, was the most maneuverable of the five-gang reel mowers he tested.

The reels are backlapped every 30 hours to keep them sharp for the fine cutting the fields demand. "The reverse reel drive feature is really a time-saver," says Kurcab. "I can sharpen blades in about 15 minutes with it. That's a lot better than having to take off reels and hook them up to a backlapping unit, then put them back on the mower. That can take a half-day or more."

To further enhance fine cutting, the unit features floating cutter heads. Also, the hydraulic reel cutting drive is independent of ground speed. The ability to adjust reel speed independent of ground speed, says Kurcab, enables him to get a precision cut despite fluctuating mowing conditions. Being able to make an adjustment to apply more "down" pressure to the cutting reels is also helpful, he notes, because it minimizes reel "bouncing" and maintains a more even cut.

"The maneuverability and quality of cut were the main reasons we went with the 350D," Kurcab concludes. "The practice fields are definitely 'high wear, high maintenance' turf. But with a good mower, you can make even an average field look good." □

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