



Prime cut

Rotary, reel, and the quest for a better natural surface

BY JOHN KMITTA, SENIOR EDITOR

Making a major purchase requires a lot of thought, comparison, and questions asked. Selecting a mower is no different. Comparing brands and features is one issue, but a bigger question for the buyer might be reel vs. rotary.

"It's hard to pick reels and rotaries, because the companies out there are great and the products are improving every year," said George Toma, playing field consultant and one of the STMA's founders. "I'm a reel man all the way. I like the reel even for bluegrass, fescue, and ryegrass. I like to have a rotary as well, because sometimes the reel lays the grass down and you need the rotary to pick the grass up."

According to Toma, however, the buying decision often doesn't come down to the user's preferences. Sometimes you have to take the mower that you are given or what

is in the budget, he said.

Kevin Vos, CSFM, athletic facilities manager, City of Muscatine, IA, echoed Toma's views about the impact of a funding. "Our athletic complexes are operated under the City of Muscatine, Parks and Recreation department," said Vos. "Municipal tax dollars fund our operations, so decisions sometimes come down to dollars, not necessarily what's best for the turf."

Proper use

"The most important thing I try to teach people is that if you don't have time to check the sharpness of the blade, you just don't have time to cut grass," said Toma.

Advantages and disadvantages

Reel mower advantages:

- * Provides the highest quality of cut, wet or dry leaf surface
- * Can adjust the mower height in very small increments
- * Mow at lower heights
- * Striping capabilities to create a variety of mowing patterns
- * Equipment is lighter weight
- * Minimal scalping

Reel mower disadvantages:

- * Higher maintenance machine
- * More man-hours needed to mow fields

Rotary mower advantages:

- * Fewer man-hours needed to mow fields
- * Lower maintenance
- * Larger overall cutting width
- * Chops up clippings better for recycling

Rotary mower disadvantages:

- * Lower quality of cut
- * Usually cannot mow at low heights
- * Heavier equipment weight
- * Not all machines have striping capabilities

- Kevin Vos

"Check the rotary blade and sharpen it all the time. And before you use a reel mower take a piece of newspaper or cashier paper to check the blades to make sure they cut. The most damaging thing to turf is a dull mower, because it will bruise the grass."

According to Toma, when buying a mower for a bermudagrass, don't use a five-bladed, belt-driven reel mower because it chews up the grass. For bermudagrass, use a seven-, nine- or eleven-blade mower. When mowing bluegrass at 1 1/2 inch cut, a seven- or nine-bladed mower is not going to do anything because it's just fanning the grass. Users have to learn which lawnmower to use, said Toma. For Bermuda, get a nine-bladed. For bluegrass, users can go up to a six-blade, but not a nine-blade or eleven-blade.

"Most high schools or colleges, based on budget, have to go with a good rotary mower," said Toma. "But they will do okay if they keep it sharp, and use a bag attachment."

"The majority of the mowing of our athletic fields is done with rotary mowers," said Vos. "A typical, non-tournament week consists of mowing 110 acres of athletic fields and 175 acres overall per week. The reel mower is used for tournaments and during high school/college soccer and softball season. This allows us to mow at a lower height of turf, achieve a higher quality of cut, and create a variety of mowing patterns during the games/tournaments. If I had the hours and equipment available, I would mow all of our athletic fields all season long with reel mowers."

Looking to the future

According to Toma, no matter what type of mower is purchased, groundskeepers need to maintain high standards.

"One of the best groundskeepers in the game is Alan Sigwardt in Miami. He has baseball, soccer, football, and concerts, and he also has to put up with about 90 inches of rain per year," said Toma. "He told me that if we groundskeepers don't straighten up that we're going to be out of a job, because everyone will go back to synthetics."

Toma said that fields are getting so bad that a lot of colleges and universities are changing to synthetics. For example, \$7 million was spent during the past 3 years on the field at The Meadowlands, and yet players again voted it the worst playing surface in the league.

"We have to work on it and do a better job," said Toma. "If you don't have the right equipment it just won't work. Sometimes we expect too much from natural grass and in return give it too little. The cheapest insurance for an athlete is a good playing field."

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Sometimes you have to take the mower that you are given or what is in the budget.



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MULTI-USE MACHINE

Wiedenmann, a German manufacturer of deep tine aerification equipment and other turf maintenance equipment since 1964, began manufacturing deep tine machines in 1990 and introduced their Terra Spike line in the United States in 2000. Wiedenmann will introduce the Terra Combi this year. This modular system will allow you to core aerify, spike, slit, overseed, and de-thatch with one machine.

Wiedenmann/866-799-3004

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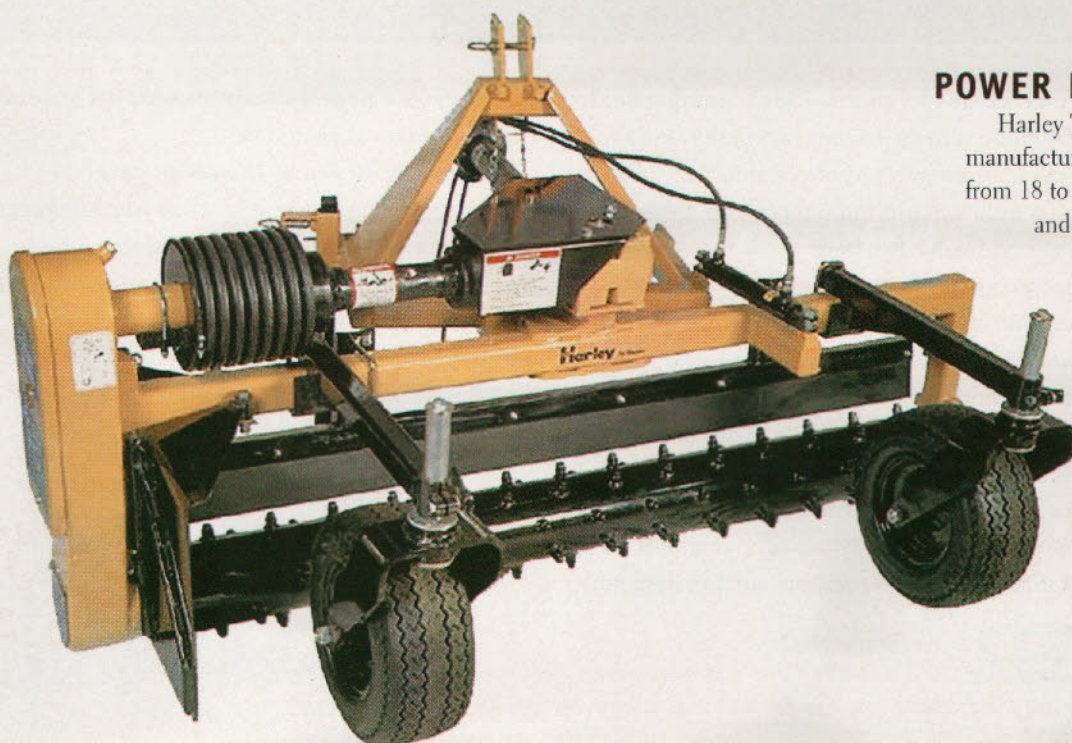
COMPACT CULTIVATOR

RedMax has CV225 model cultivator that can go where you go. At 20 lbs., the unit features a G24LS 2-cycle engine that drives bolo tines through almost any type of soil, says the company.

RedMax/800-291-8251, x213

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POWER BOX RAKE

Harley Tractor power box rakes (60, 72, & 80-in. sizes) manufactured by Glenmac can be mounted on tractors from 18 to 75 hp. The units attach with 3-point hook-up and hydraulic coupler. The unit simulates box scraper action by dropping heavy plates at each end of the roller to trap and gather stones and debris for piling and pick up. The bi-angular design permits windrowing to either the right or left, speeding up the process.

Glenmac/800-437-9779

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FRONT-MOUNT MOWERS

Made specifically for commercial turf maintenance, Kubota's diesel 2- and 4WD F60 series front-mount mowers are now available. The three models sport 22-, 25-, and 30-hp Kubota ISO-mounted engines, which are clean burning and can outperform bigger engines because of their high torque rise, says the company.

Kubota Tractor/888-4KUBOTA
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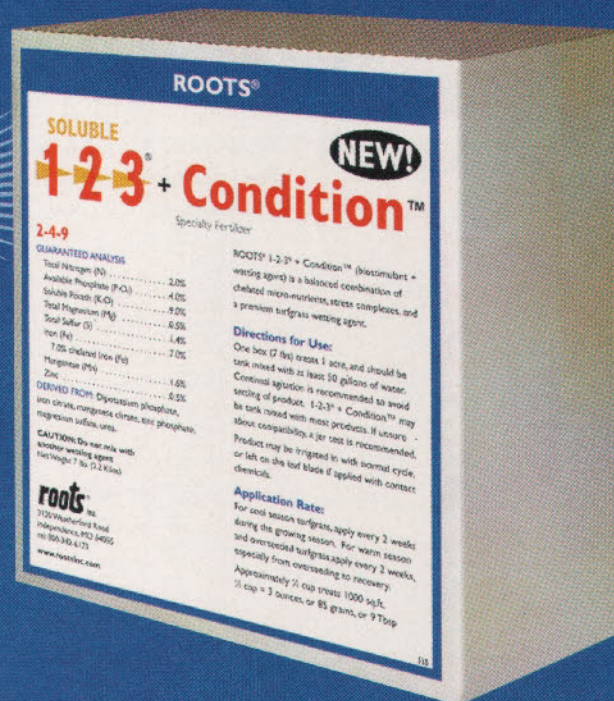
KOHLER-POWERED MOWER

Grasshopper introduces its model 725A mower with new Kohler AEGIS liquid-cooled engine and G2 transmissions to provide power for any application. Operator station offers all-day comfort, with all controls within easy reach. Unit accepts 48-, 52-, 61- and 72-in. DuraMax Decks, which let you mulch, collect, or discharge clippings using the same deck.

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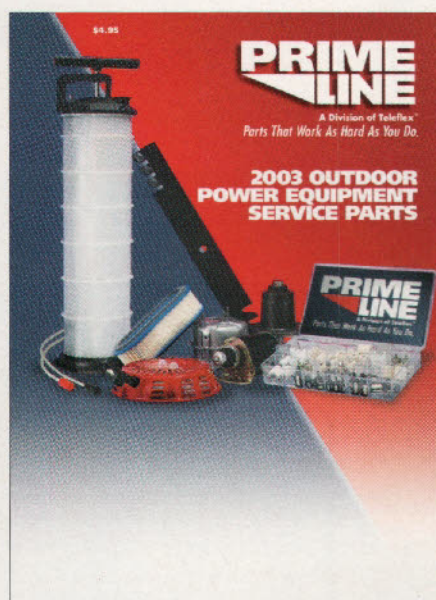
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SERVICE PARTS CATALOG

Prime Line is a one-stop source for all outdoor power equipment service parts with its 2003 catalog, which includes 293 new part numbers.

The catalog includes an even mix of high-popularity products for both commercial and residential applications including thirty-seven new Kawasaki products covering items such as engine gaskets, air filters and pre-filters, and ignition components.

Most of the catalog is arranged by product categories such as air filters, mufflers, engine parts, blades, etc. and with the categories, the products are arranged by O.E.M. brand.

Prime Line/217-324-9400

For information, circle 145 or

see www.oners.ims.ca/2076-145



BLADE CAPABLE TRIMMER

Shindaiwa has manufactured a 4-cycle T2500X trimmer, the company's latest in a range of products featuring C4 technology. At 24.5 cc and 1.1 horsepower, the T2500X is designed especially for demanding markets.

The T2500X is a unique cross between a 2-cycle and 4-cycle engine, combining the best of both worlds: It has the lightweight, great throttle response, and capability for all day, all position use like a 2-cycle engine, coupled with the low noise, better fuel economy, high torque, and dramatically reduced exhaust gas emissions of a 4-cycle.

Shindaiwa, Inc./800-521-7733

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The thing practically crawls up walls.

This may very well be the most versatile tractor line on the globe. To be versatile, you've got to do two things: be agile and be user-friendly. Lots of old guard tractors are so big and clunky that they're hard to maneuver. Yes, they're durable, but difficult. Options can cost you.

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A patented system called "Actio" in all Carraro tractors lets the chassis

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UTILITY VEHICLE

Broyhill's new TerraSport utility vehicle has a 1500-lb. total capacity and robotic-welded tubular steel frame construction for exceptional strength and durability. With a 16-hp Briggs and Stratton engine, continuously variable transmission (CVT), power steering, and multi-leaf spring, dual shock suspension, the TerraSport provides a smooth ride at speeds up to 20-mph.

Optional rear cargo box offers a unique 1/3-2/3 design, making room for a toolbox, sprayer tank, or line marker paint tank, and is located behind the seat. Steel or wood boxes convert to a 48 x 48-in. flatbed. Accessories include Broyhill's dedicated VacMate, Refuse Mate, and Fastliner marking system.

Broyhill/800-228-1003 ext. 34

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