

BY TRACY LANIER

REEL SHARPNESS: THE RELATIONSHIP & THE GRIND

It can be a dreaded word: relationship. "Yes, dear." "Sure, dear." "Of course I'd rather go shopping with you instead of watching the game." Yeah, right. But you know that without such minor concessions, your relationship might dissolve into little pieces and *then* you'd be sorry. The key is to keep the two elements of any relationship in harmony; if neglected, the consequences are undue stress and sometimes, even ruin. Not a pretty picture. Relationships are easily maintained with some regular attention and occasional adjustments, and your reel mower deserves the same attention to help maintain the relationship between the reel and the bedknife.

Unlike you and your significant other, a reel and bedknife should NEVER touch. Contact causes friction and heat buildup, resulting in rollover, dulled square edges, and distortion. The reel and bedknife should maintain a clearance of .001-2 inches. A mower with less clearance may result in an unacceptable cut quality, undue strain on drive mechanisms, and premature wear of the cutting unit. After all, a little space is always good.



As in any relationship, appearances aren't everything, but if there's trouble on the surface, it's often a sign of problems underneath. Of course, the best way to prevent such ripples is by taking preventive measures. You don't want your mate to be mad, so make sure you say a few nice words daily. You don't want your field to be uneven, so every day, spend a few minutes maintaining your reel blades.

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Backlapping is a simple process that should be performed regularly. It should take no more than 15 minutes to backlap a reel. And, depending on your hour usage and conditions, it can be performed a daily or weekly.

Backlapping helps maintain sharp edges by the application of special abrasive compounds while spinning the reel backwards, ultimately giving you a cleaner cut. This process should remove no more than .005-inches of metal—you don't need extreme changes, just subtle tweaks. Course compounds should be used first, followed by a finer abrasive to hone the edges. Sharpening compounds should not be toxic, oily or greasy. Recommended grits for larger cutting units are 60, 80 and 120; with smaller reels such as walking reel mowers, use a 120, 180 or 220 grit.

While daily maintenance helps keep a relationship strong, sometimes it still can get a little off track. So pause for a moment, take stock of the current situation and make some adjustments to get realigned. While regular backlapping is important, eventually a reel and its bedknife will require grinding.

Over time and use, a blade can get dull. This results in squeezing and tearing of grass instead of cutting. Tearing is a shock and can retard growth. Grinding will restore the cylindrical shape of a reel that has become cone-shaped and restore the edge if the grass is not being cut across the entire length of the bedknife.

After spin grinding, John Deere recommends relief grinding the reels because it:

- Removes metal from the trailing edge of the blade forming an angle (relief angle) to reduce the contact area of the cutting edges. This reduces blade contact area resulting in less friction.
- Ensures longer wear life.
- Makes backlapping faster and more efficient.
- Reduces squeezing and tearing of the grass as the unit dulls.
- Requires less horsepower to drive the reel.

John Deere also recommends backlapping after spin grinding to remove burrs and rough edges left from the spin grinding procedure. Backlapping produces a honed edge that will cut the grass evenly and leave the tops of the grass with clean, straight edges.

Working to restructure and correct the relationship (at home or on

the job) results in fewer daily problems and requires less energy to maintain it. Remember, a little regular maintenance now can help prevent major overhauls in the near future.

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