

# Rotaries in the Rough

*A growing trend in the management of hybrid bermudagrass roughs.*

by JOHN FOY

USING rotary equipment to cut cool-season turfgrass roughs has been a standard practice for many years. However, in Florida and across the Sunbelt where fine-textured hybrid bermudagrass is the dominant turf cover through rough areas, the use of rotary mowers has not been a common practice because the rotary mowers did not provide an acceptable quality of cut. It has been commonly felt that large five- or seven-gang reel units were needed to keep up with regular mowing of bermudagrass roughs during the summer. At most Florida golf courses, rotary mowers have been used primarily for trimming and cleanup work around trees where the larger gang units could not operate.

In the past few years, however, there has been a growing trend of using rotary mowers for maintaining hybrid bermudagrass roughs. Some of the reasons for this trend are:

- Equipment improvements such as faster blade RPMs, multi-blade setups, and the mulching deck designs that provide an improved quality of cut.

- Reduced mowing time because of faster operating speeds and greater maneuverability of the rotary mowers relative to pull-behind gang units.

- Rotary mowers can continue to operate in wet conditions and with excessive turfgrass growth, which bogs down and even stops both ground and hydraulically driven reels.

- The "vacuuming" effect of the mulching decks helps produce and maintain a more upright shoot growth character and smoother surface condition.

- During the fall, winter, and spring months, this "vacuuming" effect also can help minimize rough deterioration and loss of definition from cart traffic.

- With the increased trend of winter overseeding of bermuda roughs, using rotary mowers on a year-round basis avoids the need for extra equipment.

- Some of the new rotary mowers are less expensive to purchase and operate relative to five- and seven-gang self-contained reel mowers.

At some facilities in Florida, rotary mowers are now used exclusively, while at others a combination of rotary and reel mowing is practiced. When a combination of rotary and reel mowers is used, typically the rotaries are used first and then the reel mowers are used for a cleanup cut.

Regular sharpening and/or replacement of the rotary mower blades is needed to maintain a good clean cut with bermudagrass roughs. During the growing season, blade maintenance needs to be performed at least every two weeks, and preferably on a weekly basis. Yet, compared to maintenance of reel units, blade maintenance can

be accomplished relatively quickly and is less expensive. Furthermore, the mulching decks still need to have some type of clipping discharge, and mowing speeds must be slowed down in order to achieve an acceptable quality of cut when mowing wet and thick bermudagrass roughs.

Wise decisions are always important, and in this new millennium, rotary mowing is a viable and growing trend in the management of bermudagrass roughs.

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*Over the past few years, the use of rotary mowers to maintain hybrid bermudagrass roughs has been a growing trend. To maintain a good quality cut, the blades must be sharpened on a regular basis.*