

Head to head

JACOBSEN VS TORO

In the first of a regular series, we test two top-of-the-range walk-behind mowers – the **Jacobsen Eclipse 122** and the **Toro Flex 21** – both precision-engineered machines. We asked Irene’s course superintendent and two of his top operators to try out these greens mowers and give their opinions.

GCM has found an interesting phenomenon when asking clubs why they choose a particular brand when shopping for turf equipment – most can’t give us a straight answer. Only in rare cases is the choice left to the greenkeeper, which seems rather strange as it is this person who ultimately bears the responsibility for keeping the course in the sort of condition demanded by members and committees. Of course, the cost factor is important, as is brand loyalty – many greenkeepers inherit equipment, and many committees insist on ‘staying with what they know’. Suppliers often complain that it is the individual who signs the club’s cheque who makes the decision, sometimes a person who fails to grasp the value in spending a bit more to save money in the longer term. Some frustrated greenkeepers might bemoan the fact the club manager/treasurer does not always appreciate the added-value features found in premium equipment.

We have decided to test equipment of the ‘big three’ suppliers (Jacobsen, John Deere and Toro) and, in order to keep our judges as neutral as possible, we will be limiting our tests to two of the brands and conduct our test at a club that is loyal to the third brand. Irene, a club that keeps a fleet of John Deere equipment, allowed us to conduct our first test.

It is fair to say that we picked the most critical machines to begin our test series – greens mowers. One would assume that the most precious areas on any course are the putting surfaces, and no self-respecting club would skimp on the machinery that is entrusted with the job of mowing these areas.

Representatives of the Jacobsen and



Smith Turf’s Lionel Coetzee with the Toro machine (left) and CSE’s Alex Ackrom with the Jacobsen.

Toro machines were on hand to point out the features of their products and, after a crash course given to superintendent Joseph Leseha and his operators Johannes Saul and Phaniel Kkuna, both mowers were put through their paces.

First to be tested was the Jacobsen Eclipse 122, a machine that can claim to be a true ‘hybrid’. Powered by a quiet, reliable Honda engine, this powers a brushless 1.5kW generator that effectively drives the machine, resulting in there being less moving parts on the machine. An important feature of this model is that the engine can

RETAIL PRICE COMPARISON

Jacobsen Eclipse 122

- Including wheel and light kits **R76 871**
- Power module (including battery, charger etc) **R6 329**

Toro Greensmaster Flex 21

- Including wheel and light kits **R 83 400**



ABOVE LEFT: Smith Turf's Bruce Chalmers pointing out the features of the Toro Greensmaster Flex 21 to course superintendent Joseph Leseha.
ABOVE RIGHT: CSE's Barry Reinders giving Joseph the lowdown on the Jacobsen Eclipse.

be easily removed and replaced with a battery pack. Particularly at estate courses, this would no doubt please residents that have homes close to greens, and there is a lot to be said for silent operation. (The battery pack will supply power long enough to cut three average-sized greens.) The floating head guarantees perfect cuts on the most undulating surfaces, even at the lowest height of cut. Particularly impressive is this machine's control system which ensures ease of use with operator comfort.

The manufacturer of the Toro Flex 21 claims that its machine can deliver faster, truer greens than any other comparable machine. The flexible cutting unit is mounted on a dual-axis suspension and flexible drive shaft couplers guarantee a constant bedknife attitude. The dual-function lever controls both the traction and reel, with a simple twist of the wrist engaging the reel. Overlap markings are eliminated by its tapered drum, and while it may lack the battery-pack option, the 2.8kW Kawasaki engine is well muffled. Important is the front weight bias on the cutting unit, which eliminates unwanted operator influence. This allows for deeper penetration and straighter lines when mowing. Importantly, the sealed bearings on this machine never need to be greased and eliminate potential damage to greens.

It must be said that both of these machines proved to be extremely user-friendly, and, comparing the time that it took for all three of the testers to become familiar with their operation, there was little between them.

After several runs with both machines,



ABOVE LEFT: Joseph gave the Jacobsen the thumbs up. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Both operators agreed that if given choice, they would go for the Toro.

first Joseph made his choice – he immediately chose the Jacobsen. Admitting that there was little difference between the ease of operation of the two machines, the fact that the Jacobsen Eclipse has the on-board back-lapping ability impressed him. He did add that both were excellent machines.

As for the operators, Johannes and

Phanuel, both were unequivocal in choosing the Toro. They believed the red machine to be easier to operate, yet seemed to manage both machines comfortably. Joseph was then put on the spot: if he were to choose between the two mowers tested and his John Deere? Again the Jacobsen got the 'thumbs up'.