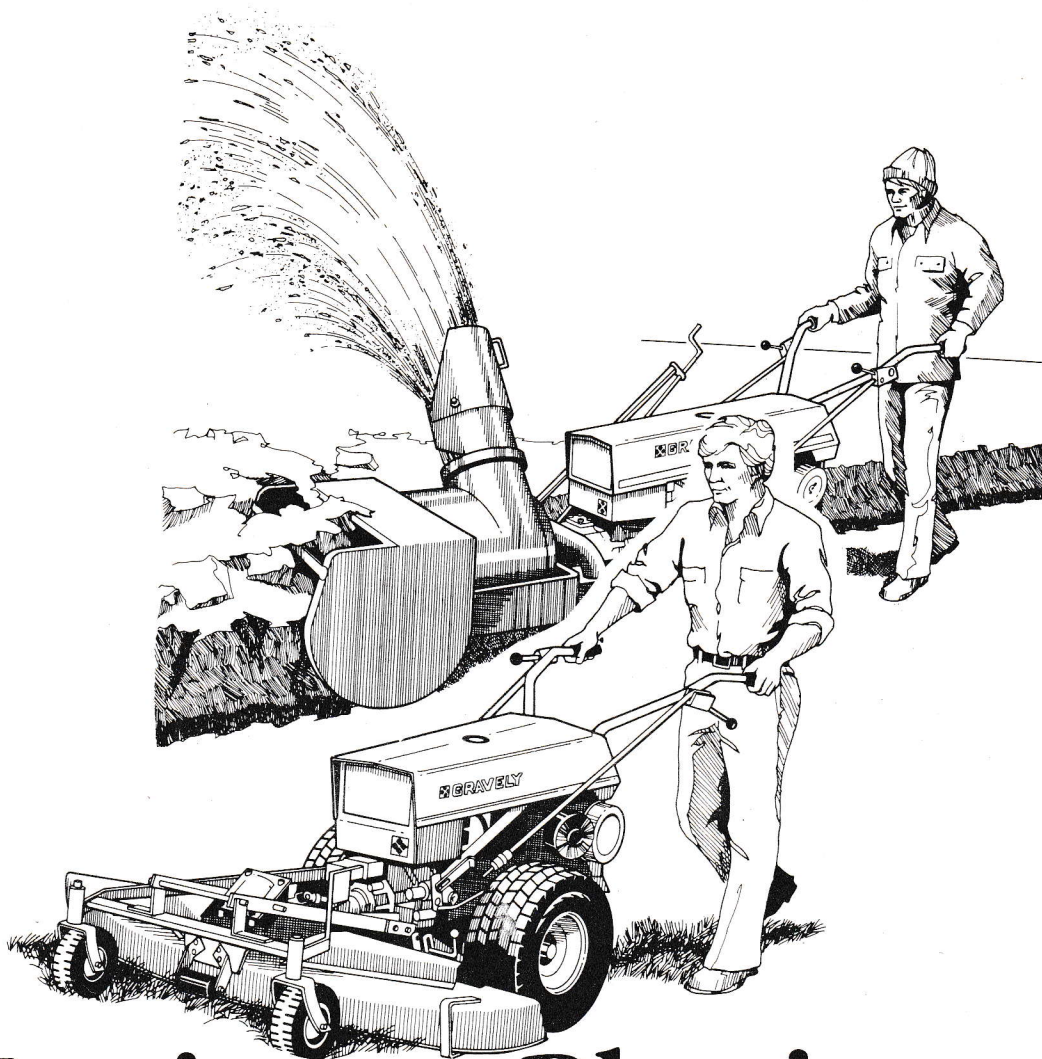




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Mowing or Blowing Know Your Product

by Gerry Hipkins
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Some people reason that the commercial selection and buying process is entirely different from the consumer selection buying process. There are some differences due to the fact that the commercial buyer is buying for his company. He must, therefore, use a selection process that will best serve his company's needs versus the consumer who buys to serve his own personal needs.

The commercial buyer or buyers today are becoming specialists out of necessity. They must be an expert in the buying process, and in many cases they must value analyze the products they purchase. Value analysis is simply, "An analysis of those grounds maintenance items or products that you can expect a fair

return and service for the exchange of your money." This value analysis requires that buyers become involved in areas outside of their particular responsibility.

In light of the specialist requirement mentioned above, there are three factors that should be considered when selecting and buying grounds maintenance equipment. The three factors that should be considered are:

- 1) The dealer
- 2) The product
- 3) The package

These above factors should be given equal weight and importance in the buying process.

The Dealer: Many times, when purchasing grounds maintenance

equipment, one variable only is considered during the buying process—this variable is the product variable. Perhaps this is one of the biggest problems in selecting grounds maintenance field. He is a professional, just as you are a professional.

It is important that you know if his customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with his operation. Customers of specific interest would be those who are very similar to you and work in the grounds maintenance field.

Additionally, the following question should be asked. What types of products does the dealer sell? What is the quality of those products? Are they commercial products or are

they consumer products? Is the dealer service oriented? Is the dealer inventoried for parts servicing? Does he have a repair facility that can accomodate you and all of his other commercial customers?

It is important to know how much influence manufacturers have on dealers. In many cases manufacturers who supply commercial grounds maintenance equipment feel the dealer is the most important element found in a given buying process. For that reason, many manufacturers require that certain standars be met by the dealer. All manufacturers require that the dealer comply with all the laws and regulations that are applicable to his business of selling commercial products. Positive manufacturer influence gives the prospective customer one more dealer factor to evaluate.

These are only a few of the requirements placed upon good quality commercial dealers. A simple check by the buyer or the prospective buyer can virtually eliminate a lot of problems that could arise in the future. This simple check can usually be accomplished by directly questioning the dealer.

The Product: The second important factor to consider in the grounds maintenance equipment purchase process is the product.

Choosing the correct product is complex. First, one should know the classifications of products. The Outdoor Power Equipment Industry will supply information on these classifications. Just about all primary grounds maintenance equipment (excluding specialized turf equipment) can be classified in these categories.

How Do I Consider What to Buy?

Here again, attention goes back to the dealer. With the information supplied to the dealer, the dealer should be able to qualify you, determine your needs, and direct you to a particular category of product that will best satisfy your needs. Remeber, from a manufacturer's standpoint the product is a variable; a variable that can change. Usually, needs do not change that much. Determining the need should determine the product that should be used.

For grounds maintenance equipment used in commercial applications, three major areas of technical

importance should be evaluated. They are: The engine, the transmission, and the driving mechanism to the attachments. These areas receive the most wear, and are the most critical in performing different grounds maintenance tasks.

Engine

Where can you obtain service for the engine? Can your dealer service the engine? Are service parts readily available?

Is the engine a cast iron engine or an aluminum engine? If the engine is an aluminum engine, are the sleeves in the engine cast iron sleeves? How are these sleeves manufactured into the aluminum block? Are the sleeves replaceable bolt-on sleeves or are they permanently splined into the aluminum housing?

Can the engine breathe properly? Is the engine so shrouded and covered that there is a possibility of over-heating due to insufficient ventilation?

Can the engine be serviced easily? Can a mechanic easily and quickly get to the engine to provide the service and preventive maintenance required? In essence, any question regarding the engine should be directed to the dealer and his answers should be understood by you before purchase.

Transmissions

There are basically three types of transmission used in the Outdoor Power Equipment Industry today:

- 1) Hydrostatic
- 2) Gear
- 3) Belt or disc

Each transmission type has both positive and negative aspects. A good commercial dealer should be able to give you the pros and cons of each relative the application in which the transmission will be operated.

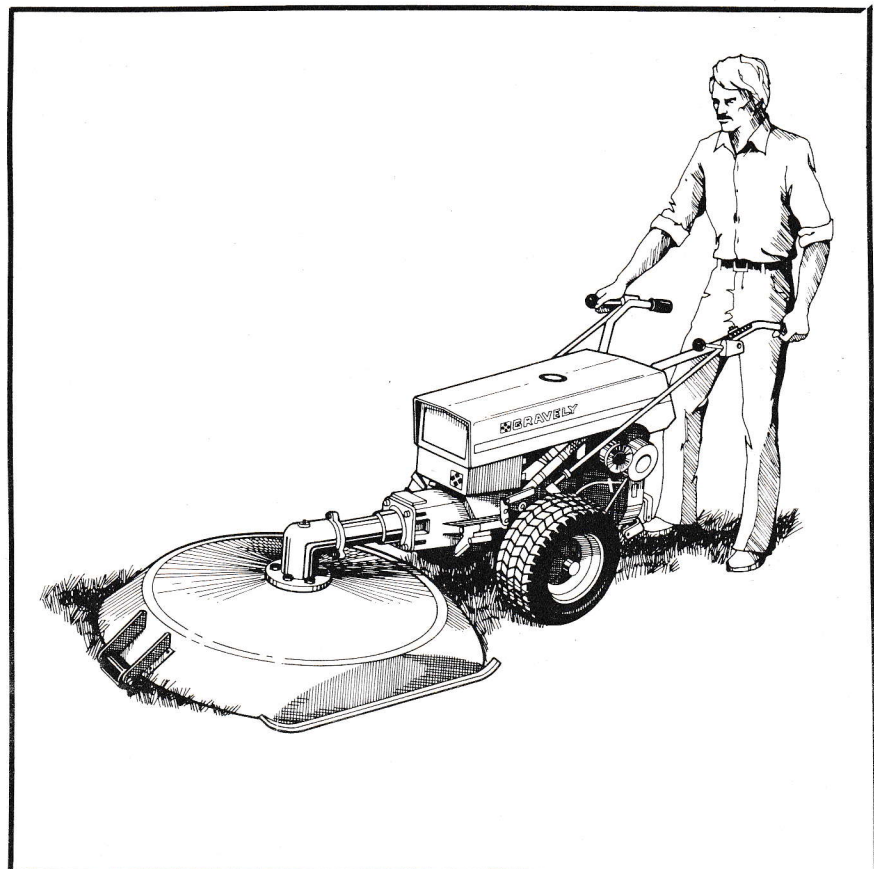
Remember, a very important question to ask is "what happens if there is transmission failure"? Also, who will service the transmission and what is the estimated cost? Additionally, are the transmissions known as commercial quality transmissions?

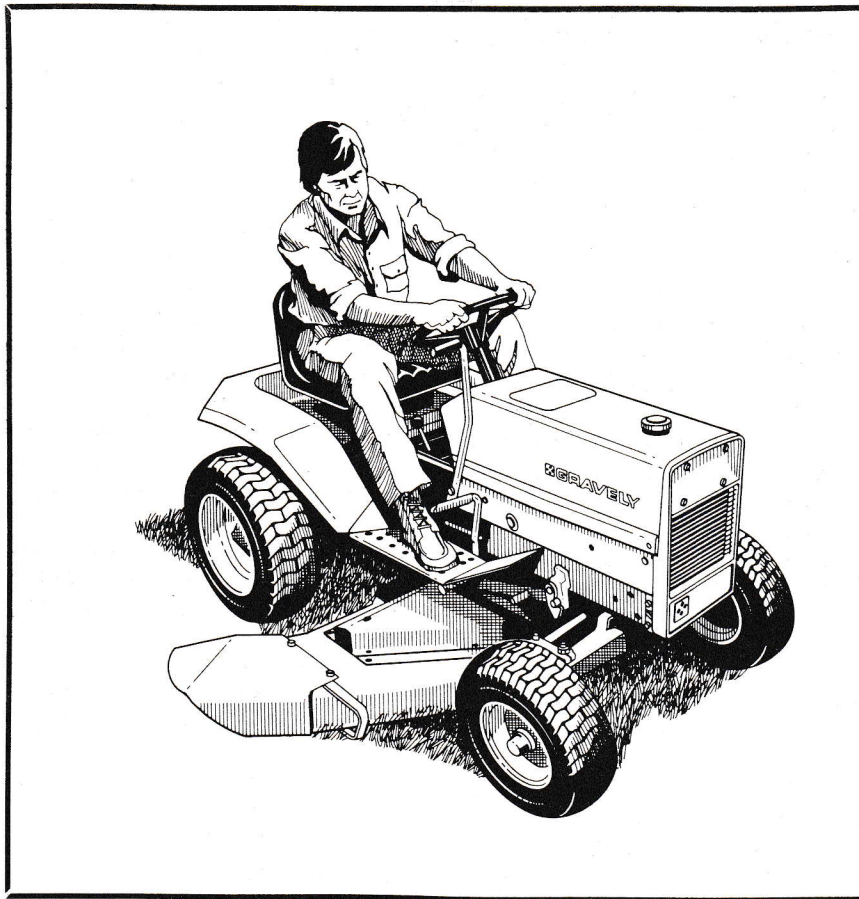
Driving Mechanisms

The third area of major importance, closely related to the transmission, is the driving mechanism or mechanisms to the attachments. There are basically two types of driving mechanisms:

- 1) The belt type
- 2) The gear/gear shaft type

The gear type of driving mechanism is more efficient in transmitting power than the belt driven mechanisms. Gears eliminate slippage and





there are no belts to fray or break. However, there could be applications where a belt driven unit will perform adequately and perhaps might be preferred over the gear unit. As the commercial customer you must be the judge as to which to choose—belts over gears, or vice versa.

There are also other areas that must be considered when you are purchasing grounds maintenance equipment.

Attachments for grounds maintenance equipment usually fall under three major areas of application:

- 1) Grass mowing attachments
- 2) Snow blowing or snow removal attachments
- 3) Gardening or ground engaging attachments

When evaluating mowing attachments, you should look at the construction of the attachment. Is it welded or bolt-on; gear drive or belt driven?

Is there sufficient blade lap, tip speed and blade lift? Are the spindles serviceable and greaseable? How is the mower suspended? These are just a few critical features that you should be asking about

before purchase. A very positive approach prior to selection would be to ask your operators and mechanics what they look for and need.

For snow removal/blower and garden attachments these factors would apply: How is the unit built—welded or bolt-on? Is the unit gear driven or belt driven? For snowblowers, is the unit a two stage snowblower or a single stage snowblower? Is the snowblower speed of the impeller fan in excess of 500 rpms? It is generally understood that snowblower impeller speeds of less than 500 rpms at the shaft will render inferior performance. Are safety clutches found on both the auger and the impeller fans? Is the horse power adequate enough for the attachment?

The purchase of equipment is evaluated by you and your company from both the functional and cost performance viewpoint and it is measured only by the results. Today's buyer must recognize the total environmental organization within which he operates. He must purchase to satisfy the needs of his company and he must do so in the most effective, efficient means at

his disposal. It is very important for a given company to establish a buying program. A good buying program would include:

- 1) Developing a program of initial purchase of equipment
- 2) Developing an equipment replacement program

The Package: The dealer, the product, and now, the package. At this particular juncture in the buying process, the buyer has done his research and selected the dealer and the product. In some cases, unfortunately, the buyer may find one and not the other, good dealers but inferior quality of product or vice versa—then the value of his purchase has diminished. Again, the buyer must consider all things equal to receive good value. When the buyer has found those instances where the dealer is excellent and the product is excellent the ground work a good value package has been laid.

Keep this in mind, the package is all those things that bring more value into a purchase than just the physical buying of the product. For example, you depreciate your equipment for tax purchase and it is very logical that at the time of purchase you could possibly work out an equipment replacement program that is beneficial to you and the dealer. Additionally, by having an equipment replacement program you are never really obsoleting your equipment. Your maintenance costs are much lower and your equipment more reliable.

Part of the package can also be that piece-of-mind and assurance gained from the knowledge that when equipment goes down, and equipment will fail periodically, that the dealer you are doing business with will promptly handle your down-equipment. The correctly chosen dealer knows that to keep you satisfied he must offer you prompt and efficient service during those times of down-equipment.

In closing, it is this writer's belief that if these three factors: the dealer, the product, and the package, are equally considered in the purchase process perhaps many of the problems that arise today will not show their ugly heads tomorrow. The best way to combat cost is through value purchasing. "Cheap things are of no value, valuable things are not cheap."