



THE CREEPER. When Cominsky first came across the Soil Reliever in 1988, there was only one tractor he could pair with it. “The Massey Ferguson 1165 I bought had a 16-speed transmission that allowed me to go from 0.3 to 20 mph and everything in between,” says Cominsky. The super-slow “creeper gear” gives the Soil Reliever time to do its precision work. Cominsky’s fleet is now made up mostly of the 1455, though he just bought two 1655 cab models from Smith Equipment in Warrenton, Va. The climate-controlled cabs will be nice in March for spring aerification, says Cominsky, “whether it’s cold, hot or raining.”

Precision Punch

Cominsky leaves the surface of the green smooth, save for a clean, round hole. Beneath the surface, the tines make an 8-degree sweep on either side of the center of penetration. The tractor’s creeper gear gives the tines time to work. At the edge of the green, the machine has to come up quickly to avoid tearing the surface; the tractor’s 3,000-pound lift capacity does the job.

While that would be a big investment for a single course to make, aeration is vital to turfgrass health. “You do it two ways,” says Cominsky. “There’s a solid tine that fractures the soil but doesn’t remove any soil. Then there’s core aeration, using a tine with a hole in the middle that removes plugs.” Those plugs are left on the surface; Cominsky makes another pass with a machine that either pulverizes them or sweeps them away.

Both methods break compaction beneath the surface. “Plant roots grow in air space,” says Cominsky. “If I get a 6-inch hole, the grass gets a 6-inch root system.” That’s good news for the high-traffic turfgrass on a golf green.

Cominsky knew two things at once. First, course supervisors would

understand the benefit of deep-tine aerification. Second, there was a business opportunity here.

“Supervising the grounds at a golf course is a 7-day-a-week job,” says Cominsky, speaking from experience. “The grass doesn’t know whether it’s Monday or Saturday.” He was looking for a way to spend more time with his family; that and his background in golf and the contacts he had in the business helped convince him to make the leap and start an aerification business.

It was a calculated leap. Before making the equipment investment, Cominsky had supervisors lined up that would contract him for aerification jobs. It took a little convincing. “Supers look at the tractor and this 1-ton implement and say,

‘You’re going on my green with *that*?’” he says. “But then you show them the benefit. We can get soil fracture up to 10 inches below the surface.”

Word of mouth spread quickly. After a few years the business took off. Cominsky has a partner—Paul Morton—and a crew of six people. He also has a fleet of 10 Massey Ferguson tractors, and still runs the 1165 he bought when he started.

Cominsky aerates 80 courses in the D.C. area now. It’s a precision business; do it wrong, and you wrinkle the surface of the green. Do it right and you get happy customers—both the course supervisors and the golfers who get a better playing experience. Cominsky built a business doing it right—with the help of the right machines. ■