

New Product Review

eCutter 24-volt cup cutter

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Earlier this year, someone posted a photograph of the new eCutter electric cup cutter in the TurfNet.com Forum under the heading of "Now I've seen everything" or something like that. If you're like me, burdened with the task of cutting cups on heavy push up soils, you have at one time or another wondered why someone hasn't invented a motorized cup cutter! Twenty years ago I tried to come up with a way to attach a weed-eater engine to a cup cutter in the hope of making that job a little easier.

The post about the eCutter piqued my curiosity, so I contacted the manufacturer (FSH Machines of Viborg, Denmark) and inquired about it. After I expressed my interest, he agreed to send me one for my evaluation. It arrived last week, so I thought I would write a review as I believe this is the only eCutter on this continent. I have no affiliation with the manufacturer, and no, I'm not going to get a free eCutter for writing this review.

The Kit

- eCutter cutting unit with leveling bubble.
- Rechargeable 24 volt NiMh battery
- Battery Charger (110 volt)
- Depth Spacer (for cutting shallow cups in putting green)
- Extra scalloped shell w/ inside bevel. Unit came with scalloped shell with outside bevel.
- Skewer for creating air hole to facilitate the removal of the plug.
- Hanging rack for cup cutter
- Cup Puller / Setter

Construction

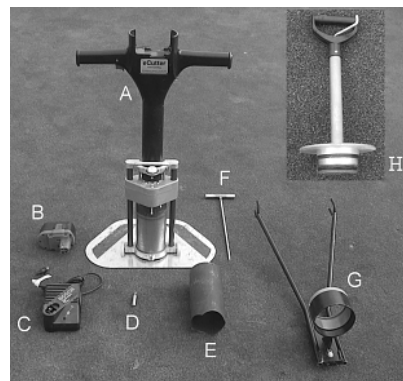
The eCutter's design is very simple and well thought out. It is constructed of high quality aluminum along with a well supported plastic handle that houses the battery compartment and the DC motor. The tolerances are pretty close on the slide mechanism so sand or grit is not likely to cause premature wear. The gear box is cast aluminum and looks to be water tight. The shells appear to be similar to the standard shells available here in the USA.

Upon first picking it up, I was surprised at the eCutter's light weight. Without weighing it, I'd guess that is several pounds lighter than the HIO pound-in cup cutter we currently use.

Overall, the workmanship and design of the eCutter is pretty solid. I'm not sure there's a lot I would change, but I might add a handle to enable you to carry it in a horizontal position.

Performance and operation

Operating the eCutter is pretty straightforward. Just pull the trigger to start the blade action (a back and forth motion) and push the handle downward. It's that simple. To get a better idea of how the eCutter works, take a look at



The eCutter Kit.

the manufacturer's video at www.fshmachines.com.

The greens at our club are push-up heavy clay with intermingled rocks and pieces of shale, with no drainage. It is IMPOSSIBLE to use the traditional twist-method to cut a cup here. Not only do we usually have to replace our HIO cutter every other year because of the abuse it takes, but from an operator's standpoint, the pound-in cutters take their toll on the human body as well, particularly when the soil is dry. I was very doubtful that the eCutter would be able to cut a cup in these greens in a reasonable manner.



I was wrong! Surprisingly, the eCutter works pretty darn well, requiring much less effort to operate. You do have to exert some downward force, but your body is positioned over the handle and you can use your body weight as an advantage. The same is true with removing the plug. Using your knees while pulling the trigger, the plug can be ejected from the shell with little effort — much less effort than pulling on the lever of a pound-in type cutter. The foot plate also eliminates the crowning effect you sometimes get when removing the plug with the traditional style hole cutters.

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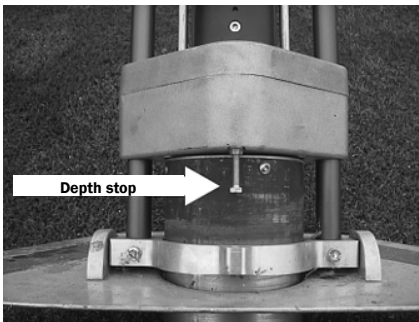


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The eCutter has plenty of torque. If you hit a rock and you don't have a firm grip you could go for a little spin. We did encounter an occasional piece of shale that caused some resistance but with a firm grip and a little more pressure the cup cutter broke through.

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One really nice attribute of the eCutter is its ability to cut cups to the exact depth. An adjustable depth stop makes it virtually impossible to over-cut a cup. Since every plug is a perfect match, replacing plugs a breeze. From my experience, it seems that no matter how hard we try, we always have those days when the person cutting cups is not on his game and the result is low or scalped plugs. With very little effort, the eCutter makes it extremely easy to produce a perfect plug every time.



The eCutter comes with a storage rack that mounts on a utility vehicle or mower, which sure is a lot better than just tossing it in the bed of a utility vehicle and having it bounce around during your trek around the golf course.

To get a good idea of how the eCutter performs on different soils, I tried it out on several other golf courses in our area. For the most part, the soils on the greens at these courses were not nearly as heavy as mine and the eCutter went through them like butter. I didn't have an opportunity to test it out on any sand greens but I have no doubt that cutting a cup in a sand green would be effortless.

On our greens we were able to just barely squeak out 18 cup holes plus five on the putting green with one battery. On the other courses we tested it on, we easily cut 18+ holes with plenty of battery life to spare. If I purchase one, I will definitely opt for an extra battery but I suspect that one battery will be sufficient for most golf courses.

As far as hole quality, neither I nor any other of the local superintendents noticed any difference in hole quality in comparison to the cutters we were using with the exception of crowning. The integrated plate on the eCutter eliminates the crowning often associated with the traditional style hole cutters.

On the downside, when the conditions are wet (on our greens) the eCutter didn't hold a wet plug as well as our HIO does. To compensate for slippage when withdrawing the plug we had to use the skewer that was provided. This allowed air to enter the void and greatly reduced the occurrence of losing the plug.

The other issue was a lack of a well positioned carrying handle. It was a little awkward to carry the eCutter in the upright position while full of soil. A handle positioned at the point of balance with a plug loaded would allow you to carry it in a more comfortable manner.

Also, the foot plate seemed a little odd at first as it blocks the view of the cutting blade, but once you got used to it, it really wasn't an issue.

Conclusion

Certainly, using the eCutter on heavy soil greens requires much less effort than the pound-in type cutters. By comparison with the eCutter, the pound-in type is like a caveman using a club.

At a price of \$1995, the eCutter is about 4X the cost of traditional cup cutters, but the eCutter requires much less effort and doesn't subject the operator to the shock of continual pounding. If ergonomics is an issue, the eCutter may be the way to go.

The manufacturer claims that using the eCutter helps prevent back strain, and there may be some validity to that. The superintendent at one of the courses where we tested it has back problems that have prevented him from cutting cups in recent years. He was able to use the eCutter to change all 18 holes.

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Since I have only changed about 54 cups with the eCutter so far, I really can't comment on durability but there seems to be no indication of any potential for problems down the road.

Frankly, I was very skeptical at first but after I had a chance to use it, I must say, I think they got this one right.

Is the eCutter for everyone? Because of the wide variety of soil conditions and different methods of cutting cups at each club, I'll leave that decision up to you.

