

Selecting the Right Surface Spinner

Guidance from Steel Eagle
GM Carl Harry

by Allison Hester, Editor



Surface spinners (a.k.a. “surface cleaners”) have been proven to work as much as 66 percent more efficiently when cleaning flatwork than using a wand alone. Not only do spinners provide faster, more even cleaning, they greatly reduce operator fatigue. For anyone doing parking lots, decks, dumpster pads, driveways, sidewalks, and so on, surface spinners are no longer an option, they’re a necessity.

But with the many different brands and types of spinners on the market, how can

contractors choose the best one to meet their specific needs?

To help answer this question, I recently had the privilege of sitting down with Steel Eagle’s General Manager Carl Harry, whose 30 years experience provided valuable insight into selecting the right equipment.

Answering the Most Important Questions

When helping contractors select the right size/style surface spinner, Harry always begins with a few basic, yet imperative questions.

1. What is your current pressure washer’s capabilities?

No matter what type or diameter surface spinner a contractor desires, the spinner is going to be limited by the connecting pressure washer’s flow and pressure ratings. Also, some low-end units may not allow the use of hot water or chemicals with the cleaner.

For example, surface spinners generally need to run off a machine that is at least four gpm and 2000 psi – at the very minimum. This rating, however, won’t allow for much bigger than a 24-inch spinner. A five gpm machine would allow for a 30” spinner, and the size goes up as the flow increases.

As with most cleaning applications, higher flow and pressure allows for better and faster cleaning. It also affects not only the surface spinner’s diameter, but how many spray bars the spinner can support. The more spray bars

What Causes Zebra Striping?

A common problem contract cleaners face when using a surface spinner is zebra striping on the surface being cleaned.

While this could be the result of a spray bar being out of adjustment or a clogged nozzle, the most common cause for striping, according to Harry, is that the operator is simply walking too fast.

Slow down,” said Harry. “Give the spinner more time to clean it evenly.”

This is particularly true in areas that are very dirty and in need of a good cleaning. Once the surface has been cleaned at a slower pace, the follow-up cleaning – if put on a maintenance schedule – should allow the technician to work at a faster pace.

on a spinner, the more times the surface is hit per rotation. So, for example, using a three bar over a two bar provides the contractor “50 percent more coverage and the ability to walk faster,” Harry explained.

However, you have to have enough flow – at least two gpm per bar – or you will lose efficiency. So for a three bar, contractors need at least six gpm. Four bars require eight gpm.

With Steel Eagle surface spinners, contractors can upgrade their current configuration to add – or remove – one bar at a time.

One important sidenote: bigger is not always better. It may seem obvious but it’s worth saying. If you are cleaning in tight areas, you need a smaller diameter spinner.

2: How much will the unit be used?

Like most things in the cleaning industry, there are different levels of quality available when it comes to surface spinners. Some companies sell low-end units with plastic decks and low-end components at a much lower cost. Of course, these don’t tend to last with contractors who rely on their surface spinners

regularly and who can’t afford to have a machine break down.

Medium and high-end grade surface spinners are usually made of either aluminum (such as Steel Eagle’s machines) or stainless steel. They have a number of options and upgrades available, which we’ll get into a little later. However, the most important – and expensive – aspect of the surface spinner is the swivel – i.e., the center piece that actually does the spinning.

Again, the amount of use is one thing to consider when selecting the correct swivel for a surface spinner. A contract cleaner, for example, who is using his surface cleaner six to eight hours a day and can’t afford to break down is going to want a higher-quality swivel. Those who only use their machines every other weekend can probably get by with a mid-grade swivel.

The price difference among swivels is significant. For example, Steel Eagle’s list price for a 24-inch spinner with a medium-duty swivel is \$920. The same machine with a heavy-duty swivel runs \$1620. (These prices may vary.) In general, the higher quality the



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swivel, the longer it will last.

However, there are exceptions – and that is why contractors need to look at warranties before choosing a swivel. Some swivels, such as the Steel Eagle Talon 4, come with a limited-time unconditional warranty. Other high-end swivels come with a longer warranty, but they are not unlimited. The swivel manufacturer – not the surface spinner manufacturer – is the one who determines if the swivel is covered or not.

The most common maintenance problem surface spinners face is due to a bent spray bar, typically caused by a technician jumping a curb or hitting a bolt with their employer's expensive, high-end swiveled spinner. "Once the spray bar is bent, it's done," said Harry. "It's going to start to vibrate bad. The next thing they'll see is the vibration transferring to the bearings of the swivel. Then the bearings go out, the seals come out, the grease comes out. Shortly thereafter, you're going to be repairing the swivel."

Most swivel manufacturers do offer swivel repair kits, which can help offset the cost. Of course, unless the spray bar is also replaced, the new or rebuilt swivel will eventually face the same demise.

3. What other options do you need?

The pressure washer's capabilities and the choice of swivel are the two biggest factors when it comes to ensuring a surface spinner is going to be efficient for specific cleaning jobs. However, there are a variety of other options available to help make the cleaning job faster and more efficient.

- **Types of wheels** – No one needs to be slowed down by a flat tire, and so Steel Eagle offers a few tire choices, including "flat free" tires. Ten-inch pneumatic wheels are another popular choice because "they roll easily and help minimize operator fatigue." Some contractors prefer to use castors instead of wheels so they can steer from side to side as well as forward and back. Some prefer castors on the front for easy turning, and wheels on the back. Basically, these come down to operator preference and trial and error.

Swivels: To Grease or Not to Grease?

Some swivels are greasable – which can be a good thing or a bad thing, according to Harry.

The purpose of the grease in a swivel is to protect the bearings so that water and condensation can't get in and rust the bearings. Some swivels are pregreased by the manufacturer, and as long as the seals remain intact, the grease will remain inside for months on end. It's when a leak occurs that there is a problem.

On the other hand, just because a swivel is greasable doesn't mean it should be overloaded with grease. Some contractors will add grease every week, which can actually hurt the swivel if too much is inserted and the swivel cannot rotate. "That puts a lot of pressure on the seals."

Generally, a greasable swivel only needs to be greased about once every three months.

- **Brush Skirt Kit** – different manufacturers design their decks differently. With Steel Eagle, for instance, the area beneath the deck is open – except for the back portion where the contractor is walking – so water and debris sprays out the front and sides as the unit cleans, but keeps the operator dry. An optional brush skirt kit can be added to the bottom so that the debris does not fly out from underneath, an important option particularly when working around storefronts or vehicles that could be damaged by flying objects.

- **Handle Configuration** – Harry compares the style of handles to the "Ford/Chevy theory" – it just depends on the operator. Lawnmower-style bent handles versus a straight handles are the two most popular choices, and Harry said it seems to be about 50/50 with the units they sell. (They offer some more unique/customized configurations as well.)

- **Handle Extensions** – the typical spinner is designed for average-height users, not for taller

contractors who will have to slump over to push the spinner – which can become tiresome quickly. Spinners can be designed with handle extensions to raise the handle height and reduce fatigue. Steel Eagle’s units, for example, come with joints that can be easily added or removed depending on the operator.

• **Vacuum Recovery** – according to Harry, this option is generally only needed if the contractor’s customer requests it, or if there are no drains available on the property. However, it is an option for those who need to collect their wastewater.

• **Adjustable Spray Bars/Nozzles** – As mentioned earlier, the number of spray bars on a spinner will speed up cleaning, as long as the bars and flow rate align. However, some machines also come with adjustable height options, allowing the operator to raise or lower the distance between the spray bar and the surface. This is important when working on more delicate surfaces that could be damaged if hit with too much pressure. Similarly, some machines allow operators to change the nozzles – whether it’s a 15-, 25- or 40-degree tip – to again control how much pressure is actually hitting the surface.

It’s a Matter of Preference

These are just a few of the more popular options available for surface spinners, but there are others. In fact, because there are so many different surface spinner configurations available, Steel Eagle keeps very few “stock” machines on hand. Instead, they work with each individual contractor to determine which spinner will best meet his or her needs, then custom build the machines onsite. Because the parts are readily available, however, most spinners can be built and shipped within a day or two.

No matter which company’s product you choose to use, your best bet is to find a company and representative who understands your unique needs as a contract cleaner and will work to ensure you have the right spinner to keep you operational and profitable.

To learn more about Steel Eagle’s surface spinners, please visit their website at www.SteelEagle.com

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