

With a range of competitively priced, quality products, backed by aggressive marketing in an atmosphere of increasing leisure activity, Nickerson Turfmaster Ltd, one of Britain's leading manufacturers of professional grass cutting machinery, is looking to the future with considerable optimism.

'Design, performance, price competitiveness, nationwide service and absolute reliability, backed by aggressive and confident marketing, are the keys to success,' commented Matt Templeton, the company's managing director. 'All this applies to the company I serve, but it could and should also apply to all sections of the 'turf industry' if I may call it that; be it grass seeds, fertilisers, pesticides or machinery.'

'The UK, with the vast expertise of its groundsmen and greenkeepers, knows how to grow the best grass areas and playing surfaces and we must capitalise on it as individuals and as a country.'

Matt Templeton (who lists his leisure interests as golf and gardening) has

been involved with the Nickerson Group, well known for its wide ranging agricultural interests, for nearly 30 years. He launched Nickerson Turfmaster in 1976 when Charles Nickerson, the chairman, acquired the manufacturing interests of the old Horwool company in Maldon, Essex. Mr Templeton's son, Graham, a former banker and Young Farmers national council member, now works for the company as operations manager.

Last September Nickerson Turfmaster moved to a new, vastly larger factory in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. Although the factory is now fully commissioned the company is proud of the fact that no production was lost during the move—a considerable feat as most of its staff had to be recruited locally.

Today, Nickerson's manufactures a full range of British-engineered machines to meet every professional need. The Turfmaster 70, for example, the longest established machine in the range, has a deserved reputation for sturdy and reliable engineering. It is able to cut up to two acres of grass an hour at speeds

quickly cut large areas at an economic cost. Later this year we expect to be announcing a new and exciting development for the 2001.'

The company's chairman, Charles Nickerson, says: 'I am confident of the future and with our recently strengthened research and development department, look forward to providing the machines that amenity and sport interests need not only now but also in the future.'

Reliability and ease of maintenance on the Turfmaster range—minimising costly downtime—are other features which Mr Templeton confidently points out. Privately, he can quote several instances where Turfmaster machines have undergone servicing at the same time as competitive machines and emerged with considerably lower repair bills. All of the company's machines carry a warranty, but it is rarely invoked.

'We pride ourselves on producing an efficiently engineered, yet simple product,' added Mr Templeton. 'Our machines have an excellent reputation for little or no downtime and, because they are easily accessible for maintenance, any repairs that are necessary can be carried out quickly and efficiently. The cost of Turfmaster spares are also highly competitive, and most can be supplied in 24 hours. In fact, we have held our prices since January last year. All these factors make the range extremely cost effective which is a big attraction for golf courses, local authorities and others. Many of them purchase our machines as a matter of policy.'

All the machines produced at Gainsborough are subject to rigorous checks before they leave the factory, destined for the company's more than 40 UK distributors. The same stringent checks also apply to all export orders.

'We are perhaps unusual in that every stage of manufacture is signed for by the factory employees concerned as a measure of quality control; this enables us to quickly pinpoint problems in the rare event of anything going wrong,' said Mr Templeton.

Apart from individual checks, completed products are given an exhaustive, overall inspection prior to shipping from the factory. The distributors also subject the machines to quality control check and ask customers to make a final inspection prior to accepting delivery.

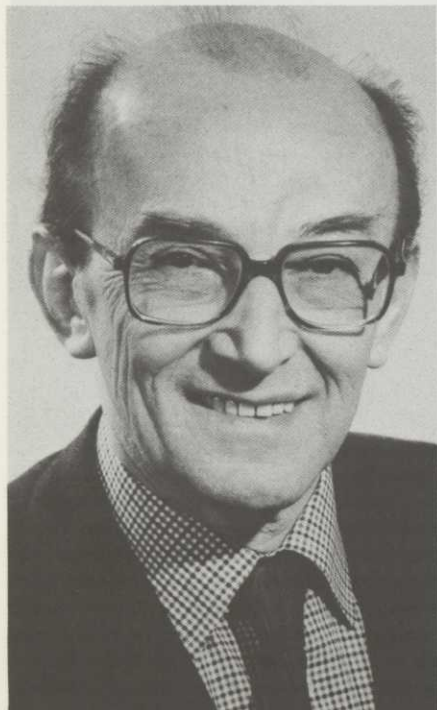
But regardless of all the manufacturing controls, the most critical part of production is the manufacture of the precision built cutting cylinders. 'It's quite obvious,' explained Mr Templeton, 'that a failure here means the whole product is in jeopardy.'

Indeed, unsuspecting visitors to the company's factory often find themselves invited to undertake the sledgehammer test. A swing at the cylinder's cutting blades with as much strength as you can muster, leaves one in no doubt as to the strength of the product!

Matt Templeton himself, a fellow of the Linnean Society, is a total expert. Not only does he control one of Britain's most successful professional grass cutting machinery companies, but he has also

Profile

'Absolute reliability is a key to success'



of up to five mph, in either wet or dry conditions.

The 70 features three independent and floating mowing cylinders that provide a varying cutting width of up to 70 inches. Two cylinder versions are available—five-blades for producing a superior finish where the grass is up to six inches high, or seven-blades for a fine finish on regularly mown areas. Highly manoeuvrable, its low centre of gravity and rear mounted mowing cylinders also make it extremely safe on banks and slopes of up to 30 degrees. The Turfmaster 70 is extensively used by local authorities, golf courses, parks and sportsgrounds, schools, private estates and caravan sites.

The most popular model in the range is the Turfmaster 84. It is the only British machine capable of traverse cutting up to 35 degree slopes making it ideal for the maintenance of steep retaining banks, as well as formal and semi-formal areas.

'Because of its versatility it will prove invaluable for organisations who need to

written a book on grass care called, simply, 'Lawns'. And he is pleased to report that the book is completely sold out.

He has plans for another book, but for the moment, is keeping its contents a close secret.

Apart from grass cutting equipment, Nickerson manufactures a range of sweepers and power-assisted scarifiers and, by use of a special adaptor frame, a large range of Sisis accessories can be fitted to the Turfmaster machines.

Whilst demand for Turfmaster machines is steady across the product range, the company received an unexpected boost from the last Budget.

'As a result of the massive increase in petrol prices, demand for the diesel-engined version of the Turfmaster 84 has shown a considerable increase. Traditionally, because of lack of awareness about the product, few people consider

the diesel engine as a viable commercial alternative to petrol. They are quite mistaken,' commented Matt Templeton.

Looking ahead Mr Templeton believes that the 2001 is the machine of the future and he says 'I think the Turfmaster 2001 goes as far as technology can economically reach at the present time in the grass-cutting field.' Capable of cutting up to 30 acres a day on an eight gallon tank of fuel, it is a genuine all-rounder dealing with short parkland grass to tall dense scrub.

Powered by a Ford 1098 cc low compression petrol engine, the machine's fully floating rotary deck has a cutting width of six feet and a cutting height that can be adjusted from one and a half to six and a half inches. It can safely cut grass on steep banks up to 35 degrees and, with its offset cutting unit, can cut under overhanging branches, bushes and barriers, economising on expensive

hand trimming time.

Apart from its dramatically different aerodynamic shape, the 2001 features a unique and patented hydraulic system in its tubular chassis. The system not only provides smooth transmission control and positive braking, but can also be used to power other hydraulic equipment such as pumps, chain saws and pruners.

Like the rest of the Turfmaster range, the 2001 has been well engineered but simply designed to give years of service with the minimum of maintenance. It has fully hydrostatic transmission which obviates clutches, universal joints and gears. 'In many ways the 2001, which was introduced in 1979, was a machine before its time,' continued Mr Templeton. 'Now, due to spending cutbacks, local authorities and others are buying larger, and therefore more labour saving, machines.

Seaweed for a healthy soil

By W.J. Visser, Alginure Products Ltd

'Not fit to live in' — 'Pollution of environment causes mass exodus of population'.

All too familiar headlines when we talk of our environment, the one that relates to us and our existence. Poor growth and susceptibility to disease, and as a result a possible reduction of lifespan. But does this only relate to us? No, it relates also to any environment which is host to a society of living organisms.

As human beings we are very complex, but there are many far simpler organisms which require an equally suitable environment in which to live and prosper. Such an environment is the soil and in it grows the major stock of the greenkeeping trade — Turf.

Turf is an infinitely variable complex of grass, soil and organisms who must exist in harmony, this degree of harmony will represent the quality of turf and it's wear characteristics. We believe neglect of this balance will, as in all living systems, lead to problems. The soil is not an inert mass of dirt in which grass anchors itself; it is a living and constantly changing mass continually moving and providing water, food and shelter for roots, insects and microscopic life forms as well as food for the plants on the surface. It is perhaps these life forms primarily bacteria and fungi which require much more attention paid to them and their activities in the soil.

When mentioning these soil builders the word fungi causes a lot of greenkeepers' hearts to miss a beat; Fusarium being the most commonly spoken of on golf courses. But it should not be so! The amount of fungal activity in most soils is enormous, this being carried out by harmless and vigorous species which are

continually digesting and humifying dead grass, roots and thatch.

These common soil fungi are perhaps the most powerful digesters of organic matter we have. They can, above ground, digest a fallen tree to pulp within several years, rot oranges or fruit within days and digest even the most distasteful waste quickly, cleanly and effectively, producing their own waste growth promoting and beneficial chemicals we don't even fully understand yet.

Just because we cannot see what goes on under ground, no way should we forget that it is one of Nature's most complex and vigorous areas of activity. In recognition of this activity we must pay more attention to our soil and it's life, using wherever possible products which will provide a balanced and beneficial response from the soil. Firstly, hard wearing turf must not be over fed. One cannot expect grass to put up with continued severe mechanical loading if it is soft and fleshy from overfeeding. Similarly, if it is overwatered one is artificially providing conditions outside it's designed capabilities.

Of course one has to use chemical fertiliser to feed and chemicals to control disease, if the turf cannot recover on it's own; but we must, as with all powerful complex chemicals, restrict use to when it is absolutely necessary, or resistance can be built up usually leading to the proliferation of the more 'toxic or poisonous' organisms. Over the years many advisors to the golf industry have arrived with differing motives. They range from genuine desire to pass on experience to fellow and less informed greenkeepers; to more colourful characters who for their own good

reasons preach their own brand of turf management. Our beliefs are simple and easily understood with a common sense attitude to improving the most vital ingredient necessary to greenkeeping turf health:— The Soil.

The skills and direction of the greenkeeper is of the utmost importance, he can either produce a course which reflects his reasoning and his abilities in respect of his turf care programme, or be the puppet of advisors or salesmen. Available today is a very wide range of machines and materials with the potential to create the very best fine turf. They always say that a bad workman blames his tools, let us return to the skills where tools made for the job enhanced the craft. The 20th Century tools are, irrigation, balanced plant foods, fungicides, sophisticated and complex machinery — they are our servants not our masters. The technology is available for rapid and sometimes instant cures for everyday problems, but must be used carefully as part of a well reasoned programme. One aspect we feel is nearly always omitted and that is a helping hand for the soil, and in this context we mean the general improvement in soil health. We know for instance that the use of Alginure Soil Improver has the ability to promote slowly and progressively an increase in soil micro-organism activity, redress many of the imbalances which can and do have an effect by the lack of trace elements, provide an almost identical natural chemical to humus, thus dramatically improving soil structure. It is not a synthetically manufactured product but the natural way of recycling everything which has been washed from land into the sea, being put back to the land utilising a natural plant — Seaweed. It is cold composted to retain all essential properties of a humified product but does not contain any significant quantities of plant food. It is food for the soil, not the plant. It's prime ability is to promote soil health, and by doing so, lay the essential foundations and building blocks for the establishment of durable healthy golf turf.