

INTO THE FUTURE

Nigel Beckford is very much a greenkeeper of today, but with a vision of 'life' in the next century...

I ARRIVED at work around 6.20am, changed into my overalls, loaded up the Hover-Cart (designed to cut down wear on the golf course) with greens maintenance equipment, slotted in the recharged power pack and climbed in to start work on the eighteenth. It was Friday morning. Busy day today. I set the Hover-Cart down at the back of the eighteenth, unloaded the Robo-Keeper and the Hover-Rake, inserted programmes for the eighteenth green, then switched on the golfer sensors. These are able to detect anyone preparing an approach shot and can identify club, stance, etc.

I left the droids whirring and clicking, digesting all the relevant information. I lifted off the Rota-Cut, checked for a fresh set of cups, walked on to the green and selected the new pin position, placed the Rota-Cut on the surface and pushed the necessary button. Another series of whirrs and clicks followed and then a grinding sound was finally punctuated by a blorp! I removed the old cup and renewed the old hole, put the machine in the cart, set the droids into work mode and made off for the seventeenth, leaving the little work droids to carry out their menial duties.

I changed the pin position, repaired pitch marks and went on to the sixteenth to carry out some spraying, as well as regular maintenance. I set up the Hover-Spray droid with the appropriate fungicide, programmed it for the sixteenth green and all its relevant dimensions. That done, I returned to the eighteenth to pick up the Robo-Keeper and the Hover-Rake.

There they were, waiting patiently at the rear of the green, hovering millimetres above the ground. I loaded up, took them to the seventeenth, pushed in the relevant programme and went off to continue work around the golf course.

I finished the fourteenth, returned to pick up the droids

and set them in motion once again on the sixteenth, loading the Hover-Spray back on. I looked at my watch: 7.45am, another three greens and I'll have a break, I thought.

I had finished changing the hole on the eleventh and was on the way back to pick up the droids from the thirteenth when I heard a familiar voice calling me from behind. It was Dave, the head-keeper. I slowed down to let him catch up.

"I've just seen the secretary, Nigel, and he reminded me that there is a tournament on Sunday, so can you do the necessary work on the tees?"

"Yes, OK, Dave, but I'll have to stay late."

"That's all right, just put it into the computer. Any problems, I'll be over at the clubhouse."

I carried on with my work until I had finished the eleventh. It was 9.30, time for breakfast. I walked into the rest area, switched on the video and watched some old golf veterans.

I recognised Severiano Ballesteros, back in the 1980s. It always amazes me how golfers managed to play the courses of that era. They look so worn out.

My thoughts were on the extra work Dave had given me - an idea came into my head. I went round to the programming room. One wall was covered by banks of computers and monitoring screens. I switched on the necessary computer and picked up one of the Robo-Keeper and Hover-Rake programming discs. I tapped in the layout of the golf course and relevant information for each droid and then the relevant commands in the correct order. The computer did its work and out popped the finished programmes.

I climbed back on to the Hover-Cart and took off to the tenth wondering if my deviousness would pay off. I unloaded the little droids and pushed in the programmes.

While they digested the information, I changed the hole and repaired pitch marks.

I loaded the Rota-Cut on to the

cart and walked over to my little work mates filled with anticipation. Pushing their work mode buttons, I sat back to see if my efforts would pay off. The little droids hovered around carrying out their duties, oblivious to all distractions except approaching golfers.

Would it work? They came to the end of their respective toils and stopped as if to think about their tasks and then, to my satisfaction, they took off to the ninth and carried on once again!

I sped off to catch up and change the holes on the greens in front, leaving the droids to carry out their work.

The course was getting busy now, so I switched the play to temporary tees and hastened back to the yard to change my machine. There, I parked the Hover-Cart and unloaded the equipment into the cleansing room, started up the Hover Auto-Turf, went round to the nursery area, cut enough turf for eighteen tees and loaded up enough for six. That's the only drawback with hover-tools - you mustn't overload them.

I started at the eighteenth again, put the tee marker on the temporary tee and rolled back the artificial surface. I pushed in the relevant programme and the machine started to lay the turf, levelling and rolling as it went.

In no time at all, the tee was finished and ready for play. I put the marker back on the tee and sped off to the next one, gliding along almost silently. I carried on until the last tee was finished and then stood back to admire my work. I hopped back on and went down to pick up the awaiting droids. My new programme had worked well. I put the droids in the cleansing room, shut the door and pushed the cleansing button. I cleaned myself up and disposed of my overalls.

I walked outside feeling much fresher. By now, the sun was really beating down.

Just one last job - I must check that irrigation in the nineteenth!