

THE COMPUTER AGE



David Jones (on screen above) makes full use of his Epson computer...

WITH the advancement of head greenkeepers to golf course managers, it has become apparent that the latter is not just a fancy job description, says David Jones, who holds that title at the St Pierre Hotel Golf and Country Club, Chepstow, Gwent.

Today's golf course managers are expected, and should expect, to actively manage their golf courses. After all, the term 'manager' means someone who controls a business, or a person who makes decisions.

A golf course manager has to control the golf course and make the necessary decisions, so that the course receives the appropriate treatment at the right time and by properly trained personnel. He also has to keep records of treatments given and be able to prepare and present a budget to the greens chairman or course director.

It is in the keeping of records that course managers can benefit from a personal computer.

Computers are now widely used in many fields and I forecast the dawn of the computer age for golf course managers - a frighten-

ing thought some might say.

Others might ask, "what can a computer do for me?" Well, let's look at one or two of its uses.

One thing you must be sure of from the beginning is that you can only get out of a computer as much as you put in. A computer comes into its own for record-keeping, record-retrieval, working out averages and giving you a paper copy of the information.

A basic system would comprise a keyboard to 'type' in the information, a disk drive to run the programme, which will receive the input, a floppy disk to store the information on for future use, a screen to display the information and, finally, a printer to print out a hard copy of that information.

There is a variety of what are termed 'off the shelf' programmes that could be utilised for

your new 'record keeper.'

A word processor would allow you to keep daily records of work completed on the course; it could be used for writing letters ordering materials; to produce a work schedule for the coming week's jobs or to write an article, as I am doing, correcting my typing errors before they hit the paper.

One of the most useful programmes is termed a 'data base.' As the name implies, it is a base for the storage of data. There are many data-base programmes available - the best are the more flexible type. By flexible, I mean those that you can design to do a specific task of data recording and retrieval to suit your requirements.

The data base is a type of flexible card index system, which can be used for keeping records on staff, holding information such as the date of starting employment, certificates of turf culture, capabilities with types of machinery and overtime details, etc.

Each piece of machinery could have an 'index card' within the data base, giving its age, serial number, purchase price, date of renewal and, finally, renewal cost. You might want to include the machine's service record, when the last service took place, parts fitted, cost of parts, time spent in servicing - all of this would help evaluate when machinery is becoming too expensive to maintain and would be better traded in for replacement.

To take record-keeping further, it might be interesting to categorise the course maintenance. How much does it cost in sand and man hours to look after all the bunkers? Could some savings be made in this area? Answers to this type of question can be made easier with the help of a computer's memory.

A finance programme will be extremely valuable in budget preparation and I find a purchase ledger file useful for maintaining a monthly running cost of expenditure on my course. All materials are set out as nominal accounts within the file - i.e. petrol, sand, seed, etc. The running totals are

up-dated as new purchases are made and, so, they give an up-to-date control figure. Two months before the end of the budget year, it is possible to determine if there is room for manoeuvre for a sought-after item of equipment.

A stock-control file on disk will also keep track of such items as irrigation and machinery spares. If these are categorised by number, the computer finds the numbers quickly and soon tells you whether you have the 2in PVC fitting needed to repair that burst pipe on the 4th fairway. But if you used that same fitting three months ago and forgot to input the information, the computer will be of little help.

As far as specialist programmes for golf courses are concerned I can't recall having seen any on the UK market.* Perhaps the computer programmers are waiting for us to let them know what we want from a computer.

Programmes such as grass and disease identification are possibilities and, some time in the not-too-distant future, we might be able to input specific parameters, such as the date,

type of course, present weather conditions, course agronomist, fixtures, staff levels and find that the computer will give us a list of work we should be doing that day.

Whether a computer is for you or not depends largely on your present paperwork load. Initially, you will spend a lot of time putting in your information but, once you have what you want on record, the extraction of that information should be very simple.

With the Epsom Grand Prix of Europe Matchplay Championship at St Pierre this month, my personal computer has been invaluable in helping to plan the course preparation.

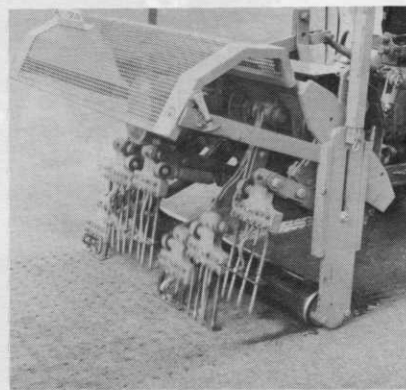
Having decided that you are going to try a computer, the next decision is which one?

**The February 1986 edition of the American magazine Golf Course Management carried a feature on educational software for turf management. As the saying goes, what happens in the States... Ed.*

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