The power take off, invariably abbreviated to PTO, has become perhaps the most important point from which to extract power from the engine and is usually the most efficient. Rear PTO is standard, but front and mid PTO options may be available and found ideal for mowers and other implements, perhaps with limitations of power output and/or speed. It may be possible to mount an extra hydraulic pump or similar to the front of the engine crankshaft and this can be useful for uprating performance of loaders or for powering a hydrostatic mower. The British Standard PTO speeds are 540rpm, or 1000rpm (for higher power output), but some tractors offer other variations – which may need adaption to the implement. ‘Live’ PTO drive is also an essential modern requirement – with the PTO having an independent clutch.

A three point linkage was the operation system devised by Harry Ferguson for implement carriage and control – this having become standardised in categories (Zero, One and Two) according to power and size – so that in theory any implement should fit any similar category tractor. In practice this does not always work, but the exceptions are reasonably rare. More frequent are variations between link end and PTO measurements. Lift control may be a simple spool valve or a quadrant and lever – normally controlling the position of the links – however higher specification models also have, or can have, draught control to automatically adjust the depth (draught) according to tractile effort.

Of growing importance are external hydraulic services, used to operate front loaders, lift and fold mowers, control slitter depth and tip trailers. These services – and the use and abuse of them – contribute to more problems in compact tractor operation than any other cause. Often this is due to a lack of specification or knowledge by suppliers of tractor and implement. A crucial fact is to realise the difference between single and double acting spool valves and hydraulic rams. Spool valves vary in type and operation so it is essential to ensure the right one is matched to each specific implement.

Cab or no cab is another question of individual preference and use, ROPS being the compact norm. A top specification cab provides a (relatively) quiet, cool, dry and clean environment without too much impediment to getting on and off, but adds over £1,000 to the price.

A loader can be extremely useful on a compact, however if required for intermittent use ensure that it is readily detachable. For satisfactory service it should be fitted to a robust tractor or have adequate chassis reinforcement, for many compact tractors owe much of their light weight and price to the use of pressed and folded steel in place of traditional castings.

Compact tractors offer exceptional value for money and great versatility and can undertake most of the tasks required on a golf course. However, they should not be expected to do the same work that is expected of a 50-70 hp tractor, nor with implements designed for such vehicles.