Lots on offer at Landscape Industries

41 - A number of sample signs and fixing arrangements will be on display as well as examples of signs supplied to industry, local authorities and wildlife reserves.

These signs are ideal for tee marker plates, golf club entrance signs, directional and car park signs and club house signs.

• This year ADAS concentrates on safe and effective weed control. With complex legislation, concern over the environment, pressure from the regulators and tight cost limits, those responsible for weed control on hard and soft surfaces, road and grass have difficult decisions to take. ADAS have developed a complete service to review existing practices, assess the risk to industry, local authority, landscape contractor and specifier market, including a comprehensive selection of machines from Ransomes. Two machines which will generate a large amount of interest will be the T-51D and Parkway 225 which were launched onto the UK market last year's IOG show.

• ET Breakwell Ltd, Ransomes dealer for Hereford, Worcester, the West Midlands and Warwickshire, will be exhibiting at this year's Landscape Industries show.

ET Breakwell, who this year will have a stand within the outside demonstration area, will be exhibiting a wide range of machinery for the local authority, landscape contractor and car park signs and club house signs.

For over 21 years Complete Weed Control have been doing all the right things to tackle the problem of weeds and unwanted growth. For example, if I want to play snooker it will cost me £4 an hour even though I am a club member. Let's call it £2 because I will split the cost with my playing partner. If I then play for as long as it takes me to play a fairly quick round of golf it will cost me 3 x 2 = £6. Quite cheap when you think about it.

But if, like a typical club golfer, I play twice a week then my annual budget for snooker is £600, or more than the vast majority of golf clubs annual subs. Six hundred quid just for the hire of a snooker table. But what if, like many a club member, I play four times a week. Twelve hundred pounds! I'd be better off buying my own table, which is a lot easier than buying my own golf course.

Surely the number one rule of business is to ensure the price fits demand. If demand is high then so should be the price.

True, a golf club is not strictly a business, but it does provide a service to paying customers and the quality of that service is dependent on financial input. If people are not prepared to pay the necessary money for that standard of service, then they do not get in the club.

Assuming a golf club is efficiently run then the member pays the money and he or she has no right to complain: "Why is that society booked in today just when I want to play?".

Because we must subsidise your annual dues. "Why then is the rough not cut on the fourth?"

Because you are not prepared to pay for enough greenkeepers or equipment to have this done on a regular basis. "Why does it take me five hours for a round of golf?"

Because the course is saturated with golf in an effort to keep down the subs. It's a bit like someone buying a Metro and then complaining to the manufacturers that it will not do 180 mph. Well, of course it won't, you've bought a Metro and not a Ferrari.

No doubt many club members reading this will at this point be somewhere between slightly irritated and extremely angry. "But I pay a bloody fortune!" they will explode, as if that gives them the right to complain. Well, I will concede that in some circumstances that is so. It is a good point. In those cases standards are very high and there is therefore little to complain about. Generally speaking though, this fortune theory is somewhat debatable.

For example, if I want to play golf it will cost me £4 an hour even though I am a club member. Let's call it £2 because I will split the cost with my playing partner. If I then play for as long as it takes me to play a fairly quick round of golf it will cost me 3 x 2 = £6. Quite cheap when you think about it.

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Strange, the same thing applies directly to golf. If I find the cheapest 'pay and play' in the area, queue up for an hour and then take five hours to hack around a course filled with divots, novices, unraked bunkers and greens that would do Twickenham an injustice, it would still cost me ten pounds. If I then decided to endure that 200 times a year I would be paying £2000, or roughly three times the annual subscription of the Royal what-do-you-call-it just down the road. No wonder it's got a waiting list that goes into the next millenium.

Now having explained my argument that the average member of the average club has got a proverbial 'right result', I will admit that some members
have indeed got cause to complain e.g. the member who plays infrequently and who perhaps joins the club as a status symbol, or a means of entertaining clients. He or she may only play ten or twenty times a year, but still pays the same as our old friend who whinges his way through 200 rounds a year.

Now surely, looking at this system rationally, something has gone drastically wrong. Why on earth don't golf clubs charge green fees to members? Not necessarily the full amount but per-fectly rationally, something has changed in the car park and clubs in Scotland had annual subscriptions that were within range of the working class, but at these clubs overheads were extremely low. One greenkeeper, who may also have been the professional, together with a flock of sheep for mowing duties and fertiliser application, was quite sufficient for the upkeep of the course.

**Golf doesn't have to be prohibitively expensive, in fact for many it should be even cheaper than it is now...**

A steward, his wife and a part-time secretary took care of catering and administration in the clubhouse. The golf courses received considerably less play than they do now and it was common practice to close the course for the winter months. Courses were thus well able to cope with the odd obsessive golfer and so such individuals were not considered a problem. Annual subscriptions were therefore the simplest and most practi-cal means of financing the club. They would have been fixed, as they are now, by the committee and it is there that the problem lies. Although the courses, tradi-tions and the game's popularity have changed immensely the sys-tem of financing the operation has not for two reasons:

1: The committees are loath to change for fear of public opinion, amongst other things.

2: In the main, committee mem-bers are the very people who would lose out if a members' green fee system were brought in.

After all, committees are elected because they are respected members of the club and that respect is gained by reg-u-lar attendance. Their faces are seen all the time. If you don't believe me think of your own club committee, are they not reg-u-lar golfers, Saturday and Sunday and perhaps the odd afternoon and evening during the week? Not only that, but are they not in regular contact with the more frequently visiting mem-ber? The result is that the members who play less frequently are the ones who have less say. The whole system encourages more and more golf from every quarter and the inevitable consequences are more and more problems. Golfing traditions have changed drastically over the years and I believe the subscription system will have to do likewise.

Now before I am tarred, feath-ered and expelled from society as some sort of militant revolution-ary, let me speculate on the con-sequences of this fairer means of paying for one's golf. In my opin-ion, one of two things will hap-pen. Either the regular golfer will not play so frequently or he will accept the additional cost and pay more for his or her golf.

In the first case, the course will make up for this shortfall in golf by introducing more members, thereby eating into the waiting list and increasing revenue.

In the second case, where the member continues to get his daily shot of golf but at a higher price, the club's revenue will be increased - to be spent no doubt with great foresight by the elected committee.

"But what about the potential champion, or the county captain who just happens to be a mem-

ber, they need somewhere to hone their skills?" Well, of course there is the practice ground, that is the place to hone any latent talents they may have. Hopefully they do not practise on the course anyway. At my own club we have an outstanding player but he is a relatively infrequent visitor to the course itself, prefer-ring instead to obliterate the practice ground, which is quite acceptable under the circum-stances.

"Ah! but what about the golfer who merely requires a bit of exer-cise in his retirement?" you may argue. "Surely it would be a sin to expect him to pay the addi-tional fee?" Well, if the commit-tee is worried about being labelled the slayers of the frail and needy, may I suggest a bit of diplomacy. A reduction for the odd minority group would be a tactful decision under certain cir-cumstances. Personally, I am of the opinion that if exercise is all they require then voluntary work at a local SSSI or conserva-tion area would supply their neces-sary work-out whilst at the same time being considerably more constructive.

I am not advocating a huge green fee for all members that would result in mass resigna-tions, simply a change to a fairer sys-tem. I believe that all reason-ably perceptive members will acknowledge that membership of a club that requires a five or ten pound course usage fee is infinitely preferable to the local pay and play, or to putting down a £2000 deposit for membership of a club that hasn't even been built yet.

Golf doesn't have to be pro-hibitively expensive, in fact for many it should be even cheaper than it is now. I do, however, believe that clubs ought to start recognising how popular the game has become and start changing to a fairer system of paying for the game.