Onward and upward to the year 2000

John Deere and Co are the latest company to sign up as BIGGA Golden Key Sponsors and as Scott MacCallum discovered the greenkeeping industry can only benefit from the company's increasing involvement.

My wife is becoming worried about me. Ever since joining BIGGA 18 months ago I have become a machinery anorak.

Whenever we travel anywhere I scour the landscape for tractors, triples, even combine harvesters and, ever keen to display my new found knowledge, I inform her of the name of the manufacturer and, if I'm really on form, the model. A name she is becoming more and more conversant with, admittedly with a degree of reluctance, is John Deere.

It is my aim that she will, in

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time, become so familiar with the distinctive green and yellow livery that she can point out distinctive green and yellow livery to anyone. It is the same story. It becomes so familiar with the success are good as the number of machine names? John Deere was born in Vermillion, US in 1837 and became a highly regarded blacksmith thanks to the quality of his workmanship. He developed a plough using steel made in Great Britain and in 1846 the first slab of cast plough steel ever rolled in the United States was made for John Deere and shipped from Pittsburgh to Moline. Ten years later he was producing 1,000 ploughs a year. "I will never put my name on a plough that does not have in it the best that is in me," was his vow and that has been carried forward by his company to this day.

To be exposed to the computerisation of the John Deere company is to be given an insight into just what can be achieved when the implementation of computers is planned at the very beginning and there is no well meaning, but ill conceived decision to change course or computer system.

Run from a mainframe in the United States every John Deere plant in the world is tied into the same system and everyone has access to the same information - even the John Deere dealers.

"All product information is put on our computer - the Service Communications System - to provide an encyclopaedia of information on every product produced by the company over the last 30 years," explained Product Specialist, Ivan Miller. "If a fault is reported or some other dealer and the culprit was caught when he turned up at another dealer to enquire about the value of a Gator. The parts department is equally high tech with the self proclaimed aims of providing market leadership in parts support, minimising customer down time and promoting sales. "Our role is as an emergency parts department with the main European department in Bruchsal in Germany," explained Distribution Manager, Antony Scott. "We hold 34,000 different parts in Langar and around £5 million worth of stock at any one time. In the UK by the year 2000.

It is a statement which should send shivers down the backs of competitors because John Deere and Co is a massive company with a history of patient and successful progression. The statement of intention also came just weeks after the recently launched aeration equipment," explained Alec. The company's Langar base, near Nottingham, Alec put some flesh on the company's aims of providing market leadership in parts support, minimising customer down time and promoting sales.

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Richard Charleton, Scotland and the North Sales Manager, with his trailer

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The company hosts an annual Feed Back Fortnight at its US Headquarters in Moline, Illinois, where recently six greenkeepers from Britain met with colleagues from around the world to pass on their expertise to John Deere designed prototypes so that their views could be gathered and incorporated into the production models. British customers and potential customers also are encouraged to visit Langar to see round the plant and become more acquainted with product.

"The UK operation has a total staff of 96 and the Commercial and Consumer Equipment division has nine - agriculture still takes 88% of the total business," explained Graham Williams, Divisional Manager Commercial and Consumer Equipment. "We have four territory Sales Managers Richard Charleton in Scotland and the North; James Morley, West and Ireland; Richard Johnson, East and Philip Tong, South. "Howard Storey is the new Golf and Turf Product Specialist in Europe having previously been in the West and Ireland. "Ivan Miller is the Product Specialist who works with Nick Ashman, the Area Service Manager while Tony Smith takes the orders," said Graham. It is a tightly knit team, each dedicated to the success of the company and it would be a safe bet that every effort will be made to reaching the Year 2000 goal and John Deere will become even more firmly established as one of our car journey conversation topics.

"We strive constantly to improve service and keep ahead of expectations. There is no mystery to how we achieve our success. It's down to hard work and a desire to meet customer expectations.

With that he answered a ringing telephone on a nearby desk and took a message. It took all of a minute but it demonstrated how the man at the head of the team can, by flexibility and a willingness to deal with any task, lead from the front when it comes to the smooth running of a company.

So who was John Deere, the man who inspired this mammoth multi national company to such great heights and who gave the industry one of its most famous names?

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