You may think that your local rep has life easy, but a look at the day in the life of a rep might change your opinion...

The grass is always greener...

While the vast majority of greenkeepers are extremely attached to their jobs and content with their way of life; regarding golf courses as infinitely superior places upon which to carve a living, there is nevertheless something in their psyche, deep down, that causes them on occasion to cast an envious glance at the other man's lot.

Mild cases of envy are, of course, altogether acceptable human traits. Certainly they cause no harm, while the odds-on bet when it comes to a declaration of which man's grass is greenest, surprisingly often focuses on the machinery dealer. This is not altogether unexpected, for in the eyes of the greenkeeper, the dealer – or more specifically the dealers' representative – on the face of it does appear to lead a charmed existence.

To look into the dealers role and to present a more rounded picture, Greenkeeper International took the opportunity recently to spend a day in the company of a typical dealership – Ernest Doe & Sons – a firm whose solid, long-established foundation has just been celebrated by 100 years of successful trading.

To be fair, Ernest Doe's are an exception rather than the rule, for they employ the largest number of staff in any dealership by far – over 400 at last count – while invariably they are Ransomes' largest Professional Products dealers. With 14 branches and over 100 service vehicles, theirs is a web that expands visibly through sophisticated main-frame computer networking; for parts, machinery, accounting, indeed every conceivable scrap of minutiae is logged and accounted for, plus a holding of over £300,000 in Ransomes' spare parts alone.

Though as old as the century, Doe's in 1998 are as modern as the latest apparatus shown on Tomorrow's World; clearly successful and set fair upon a spirited programme of continuing expansion.

For the purpose of producing this article, the visit was restricted to a single location, Esher, in Surrey, the youngest in a long line of Ernest Doe/Ransomes dealership bases, all strategically placed around the east, south, and south east of England. In serving parts of SW London, Surrey, West Sussex and Kent, the new Esher dealership is unique for Doe's in attending exclusively to the needs of the fine-turf industry. This is the first dealership within the company's empire not to deal also in the farm implements and agricultural machinery upon which much of Doe's success has been founded.

Guided by a general consensus of opinion and a peek at the EEC barometer, which indicates that farming in Europe is in a condition of 'shudder', added, no doubt, by a strong pound, a decline in world wheat prices and a host of meaningless governmental restrictions, Doe's decision to plump for selling exclusively the latest in Ransomes' professional turf care products in exclusivity at Esher came as no surprise. Proof of their smart thinking can be seen in the healthy volume of business generated in just nine months since opening.

Perhaps the first question to pose might be 'what is a typical dealer?' Simply stated, the definition is one who buys and sells, thereby making a profit. Yet even the most naive will appreciate that to succeed in dealing, a high level of investment by way of after-sales support is necessary. Service, repairs, maintenance, spare parts supply, product training, all serve to create the successful dealership make-up.

This typically is the case at Esher, where Branch Manager, Phil Bush, leads a team of nine skilled personnel, while continuing on occasion also to doff his salesman's hat in servicing and cultivating special accounts. "Busy" is a word that's barely adequate to describe this man's working day, which begins at much the same time as most greenkeepers begin theirs, though for Bush it means a heart-in-mouth scramble round the M23/M25 racetrack, enough to strike terror in all but the very bravest.

Around 7am each morning he begins work on site by supervising the arrival of spares and equipment, delivered daily by Ransomes' fleet, used for fashion alone, never sullying their Firestone's on anything that looks anything but new. Meanwhile salesman, Brian Ryder, initiates the loading of the first of several pieces of machinery contracted for hire – a compact Cushman aerator, geared to cut a charmed existence.

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messages and returning each call promptly and impressively, this between taking live telephone calls and at all times demonstrating the wealth of knowledge essential to the running of an effective dealership.

It becomes patently clear to the onlooker that information is the very life-blood of efficient dealing. In stock- ing a multitude of items — everything from a split pin to a fleet of Ransomes grass cutting machinery — there’s no room for indecision. Thus “I don’t know” translates more readily into “I’ll find out and get back to you.”

One is aware also that with a phone that seems never to stop ringing, infinite patience, unquestioned scholarship, product awareness (both of their own range and those of competitors), keeps every team player very much on their mettle. Each tiny spare part must be understood by number or description, as also must the heart of its working parent. Product training days therefore are an essential part of a dealers efficiency, and regular training periods are set aside. Including tailor-made work shops staged by Ransomes at their Ipswich headquarters.

Forward and following the sales trail now; there are very few people as familiar with the maze of roads excircling London’s airport than Brian Ryder. While negotiating uncharted back-doubles, Ryder speaks of his selling experiences, echoing much of what has been uttered earlier by Phil Bush. It’s clear they’re on the same wavelength, for one remark, “all things being equal, people would care less’ attitudes, and these not good sense, yet we agree there are far more miles now and it’s approaching 4.30pm. The next hurdle is dodging through sprawling suburbia and traffic build-up, for there’s one call remaining, Will the client still be there? It’s best to check, so the essential cellular ‘phone is cranked up and a voice cracks over the ether; “Hey, it’s good of you to touch base, Brian, we guessed you’d been highjacked!” There’s no hint of customer irritation, but for once it seems the clock has won the day, thus an appointment is established — right there and then — for a rendezvous “first thing in the morning.” No, wait a minute, I’m sure it’s best to check, so the appointment is...