Years, rotary sales have grown from wheel marks left in the turf. Consumer Equipment. were introduced on to the golf course 600 to 850 (figures from OPE). with longer grass than the cylinder are certainly delving ever deeper into the rough of the golf industry. Easy to adjust and less expensive to maintain than cylinder mowers, regular sharpening of rotary blades is still critical and should form a vital part of any maintenance programme. First developed in 1934, early rotary mowers had power driven, horizontally spinning blades. They were introduced on to the golf course because of their capability of dealing with longer grass than the cylinder cutter. A rotary is not as competitive as a cylinder mower in terms of cutting cost per hectare - as the grass grows faster when cut with a rotary - but it can be cut more easily at higher cut rates. Neither do they produce as good a cut as a cylinder mower, as the blade hits and destroys the grass leaf tissue which can lead to yellowing at the tips - this is why it is crucial to sharpen the blades at least twice a week for optimum performance. This leads to slower grass growth and less yellowing. Generally a rotary can stand grass up, even when wet, enabling it to cover wheel marks left in the turf. Increasing steadily over the last five years, rotary sales have grown from 600 to 850 (figures from OPE). "This is a very good increase," said Alan Prickett, UK Branch Manager of Textron Golf, Turf and Specialty Products. "We have seen an increase in the sale of our 16 feet bat-winging with nine blades and 90hp," said Alan. "These can cut 16 acres an hour and machines have just been delivered to Worthing Golf Club and Woodbury Park." Increased productivity, with a respectable finish, has secured the rotary's future in the rough. Sharpening up the act Normally sharpened with a hand angle grinder, there are serious problems arising from sharpening.”

Maureen Keepin reports on the dramatic developments in engineering have resulted in the production of highly durable rotary mowers with an improved cutting finish. Taking over rough and semi rough areas how can clubs strive to sharpen up their rotary act?

MAKING THE MOST OF ROTARY

Rotary mowers are proving their worth as part of today's greenkeepers' armoury. You will not find them on the tees or greens - as they cannot cut the sward tightly enough, but rotaries are certainly delving ever deeper into the rough of the golf industry. Easy to adjust and less expensive to maintain than cylinder mowers, regular sharpening of rotary blades is still critical and should form a vital part of any maintenance programme. First developed in 1934, early rotary mowers had power driven, horizontally spinning blades. They were introduced on to the golf course because of their capability of dealing with longer grass than the cylinder cutter.

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Machines have improved significantly and they now give a good quality of cut.

"Often it is not a matter of just fine tuning the blade on a rotary mower, but eliminating damage by taking chips out of it," said Stephen Bernhard, Managing Director of Bernhard and Company.

"Rotary Master has been developed by Bernhard to avoid the need to completely discard a rotary blade. The machine grinds efficiently and with greater precision, reducing the amount of time needed to sharpen blades.

"Greenkeepers used to find it a real chore, either when sharpening blades themselves using angle grinders or bench grinders, or out sourcing their sharpening," he added.

Our purpose-built machine can efficiently and cost-effectively grind them while agronomy factors should not be overlooked. Rotary mowers may have enough engine power to keep cutting when they are blunt, but damage is inflicted on the sward.

Around the courses

At Wildernesse Golf Club, in Kent, Course Manager, Huw Morgan, said: "We are starting to use rotaries on the rough and semi rough, where we previously used cylinder mowers."

Huw has managing Wildernesse for more than eight years and is the 2002 Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award winner.

"When it is dry, cylinder mowers provide a better cut, but taking it over a 12 month period rotaries are best. They are more flexible and can mow when damp, which is pretty essential at the moment."

"Generating a huge amount of vibration if blades are not balanced, this comes back through the machine. One of the biggest problems arises when chunks are missing from the blade."

Low vibration and noise levels are achieved with rotaries by using larger engines at lower revs, together with improved insulation. Reductions in noise and vibrations were driven downwards by CE legislation. These are major health and safety issues - reinforcing the need for golf clubs to make sure rotaries are well balanced.

New power technology is difficult to harness with rotaries, as they are generally power hungry and have to be run on petrol or diesel - electric does not measure up.

As the mower is delving into extremely rough areas of grass, stones and wood can cause considerable damage to the blade.

"Machines have improved significantly and they now give a good quality of cut." said Paul Smith, Head Greenkeeper.

"We found with grass like rye it is extremely difficult to cut when it is coming into flower. Cylinders often just push the stalk over but rotaries can tackle this," he said.

"Cylinder mowers are still used, so we get the best of both worlds." Paul has a special jig to fit to his Hunter grinder for cylinder mowers, which specifically grinds rotary blades.

"The downside is we have to put an edge on the blade quite frequently but this is not a big undertaking," said Paul.