

THE DUTCH INVENTION THAT HAS TAKEN OVER FROM THE FORK

Jim Arthur extolls its virtues but warns it is not the complete answer to compaction



The Verti-Drain is in regular use at St. Andrews

THE Vertidrain, invented by the de Ridders in the Netherlands specifically to emulate the old raise forking technique – insert and prise back, which was used on golf greens at my instigation on Dutch courses, proved very difficult to introduce into Britain but thanks to the efforts of a few enthusiastic contractors in the early eighties – and it really is a contractors' weapon unless more than 18 holes are involved, it has been regarded as the answer to all compaction problems.

Of course, it is not! Only where there is a permeable situation, within the reach of the tines will it improve drainage and persistent use on wet sticky clays aggravates problems, as has been discovered on some poorly drained football pitches.

Timing is also vital if disturbance is not to be intolerable. This naturally does not just mean avoiding Vertidrain-ing a few days before Captain's day, but primarily choosing a time when surfaces are firm enough to avoid wheel marking and subsurfaces dry enough to be friable and so break up on lifting. The use of flotation tyres initially eliminates wheel tracking even (or especially) with the larger models.

Depth is as vital as lifting. There is no point in Vertidrain-ing 6" deep with no lift – we have cheaper machines with less potential for disturbance. It is vital to go down to the drier less compacted areas and to penetrate any pan formation.

Closer spacing avoids the rippled effect and this means slower operating speeds. Since the whole green (or tee) is lifted, hopefully uniformly, some settlement is inevitable.

Many greenkeepers have found it saves many grumbles to run a hand machine over the greens immediately afterwards, with the reel set up and

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the box weighted with sand bags. It is definitely a very bad idea to sand greens after Vertidrain. If it is desired to keep the holes open to provide a pattern of vertical drains, then use clean uniform 4mm screened 'gravel' screenings from sand quarries. It is available! This either goes down the holes or is swept off. The sand layers, even under dry conditions and we do not want to resurrect the heresy of shallow tining and massive sand dressings, causing severe root breaks and layering and reduced drought resistance and in consequence gross over watering.

Above all, if in doubt leave the holes open. Only if the weather is suitable and there is still growth to absorb it use the normal (mid seasonal) top dressing. Many a greenkeeper has suffered from listening to members moans and going out on a wet winter's day with a Cushman fully laden with sand, putting almost ineradicable deep tracks across all the greens as well as smearing greens.

Timing is therefore vital and in consequence early booking with Contractors, who naturally want to spread their contract season. I would rather see greens Vertidrain in July and August than in November, but the weather is the final arbiter.



Above: Weather is the final arbiter as damage can occur, but this is unlikely with an operator with proven experience.

Left: The forks enter the greens surface and then whilst under ground move laterally.

Vertidrain only where there is a drained or potentially drainable layer below, though this can include uncompacted dry friable clay! Vertidrain only under suitable 'soil' conditions, which includes weather! Vertidrain must be backed up by regular aeration, deeper in winter but frequent in the growing season (to encourage penetration of rain and irrigation).

Do not fall into the trap of thinking that this is the solution to all problems it isn't, but it is a very valuable weapon and greenkeeping owes the de Ridders a vast debt of gratitude.