



'Advantage' over its rivals

A guaranteed annual meadow grass free turf named Advantage was launched in January at Harrogate by the York turf growers, Rolawn.

Resulting from a long term research programme funded by British Seed House Ltd, Queens University Belfast, have bred two varieties of bent and fescue grasses which after chemical treatment will produce fine turf, free of poa annua and weed.

Under an exclusive contract, BSH Ltd have agreed that only Rolawn will be supplied with the treated seed, Countess Chewings Fescue and Duchess Agrostis Tenuis, but the deal has raised quite a storm of protest among some other turf growers.

A claim that turf can be guaranteed to have no annual meadow grass is like finding gold at the bottom of Finnean's Rainbow, opening Pandora's box or capturing the Abominable Snowman. All knew it was possible but highly improbable.

In the circumstances the name Rolawn have given it - Advantage - could not have been more apt.

In simple terms the seed mixture has been bred to be immune to the affects of amino triazole an agricultural chemical which is used as a complete wipe-out for all weeds and grasses.

It is not available to those maintaining amenity turf, but Rolawn have obtained special authority to treat the grass growing in their nurseries.

According to Robert Laycock, Rolawn's Technical Director, the turf is grown from an 80% fescue 20% bent mix and will be available in the spring at around £2.25 per square yard. When delivered there will be no poa or weeds in the grass.

He agreed that it was possible for incursion to take place from surrounding areas, but said that if the greenkeeper kept a close eye on the

sward, repaired bare patches and immediately removed offending species, then the turf would remain poa free.

What is unlikely under the tightening pesticide regulations is the freedom to use amino triazole when the turf is in situ on the course. To do so illegally could put staff and golfers at risk and is likely to bring prosecution and heavy fines.

Dr. Peter Hayes, Director of the Sports Turf Research Institute at Bingley says there is no reason why the turf should not remain Poa Annua free if maintained correctly.

He also said amino triazole is a chemical used extensively in horticulture.

Duchess Browntop Bent is a cultivar with a high rating in the recommended list published in the STRI 1988 edition of turfgrass seed, though at the time it was said to be still under review.

Countess was not mentioned, but is expected to be included in the 1989 edition.

Inturf Ltd along with other turf growers have also been working on producing poa annua free turf. Inturf in fact do not actually claim to have poa annua free turf but offer a turf treated against annual meadow grass. Inturf at present has 1600 acres under cultivation at four farms around the country. About 85 per cent is selected for use on golf courses and sports grounds.

Turf grower Tim Fell from H.R. Fell & Sons, who sell turf from the South Humberside nurseries under the name of Lindum Seeded Turf is sceptical not so much about the final results, but of the mystic that has been built up in its production.

He said the mixture used to produce the turf free of annual meadow grass has been achieved because of its inherent tolerance to amino triazole, through breeding, rather than prior treatment. Turf treated with the chemical has an initial scorched look but these particular bents and fescues recover fairly quickly.

Lindum Seeded Turf also produce their own poa free, fescue/bent turf, launched at Windsor last year, but Tim Fell was reluctant at present to give details of how this was achieved.

Current stocks have sold out, but he hopes ample supplies will be available from April.

Chris Watmore's Turfland Company in Cheshire have also claimed a poa free sward under the name Crown Green Plus, grown on a free draining sandy loam.

He says that from next April all their varieties will be supplied poa free as well as the Lady Ruby, Sportsman and Bonney Blue varieties.

It is certain that in such a highly competitive industry, other leading suppliers will be fighting for a market share and if producing turf without the dreaded weed grass is the way forward then we can all look forward to better greens and fewer putts in 1989.

A realistic guarantee from Rolawn

The following questions were put to Robert Laycock, technical director of Rolawn on behalf of greenkeepers.

Q. Is the soil type on which turf for greens is grown very important?

A. Yes, particularly for golf greens turf, but all Rolawn turf is grown on soils, which can be classed as sandy loams or loamy sands. They are among the most free-draining natural soils in the country. Only pure sand drains faster and no large scale producer in the UK grows turf on sand. It would be impractical to produce large areas of turf on pure sand for an economic price.

Q. In 1988 you introduced the idea of 'washed Rolawn' for use on all-sand constructions. Is this still available?

A. Yes, any of our grades of turf can be supplied washed, which enables a playing surface to be created in the shortest possible time using soil-free mature turf.

But it is only for very specialist use.

Q. Your new greens turf, Rolawn Advantage, is claimed to be free of annual meadow grass. How does this improve on your past greens turf?

A. Rolawn have always pioneered new techniques. In the early 1980s we grew turf on sterilised soil to produce turf virtually free of annual meadow grass. However, this was a costly, difficult and time consuming exercise and as time went on and the quality of our conventional turf improved, we took the decision to stop sterilising the soil. Rolawn's greens turf has been virtually free of annual meadow grass for some time. In fact, out of the acres of greens turf supplied in 1987 we had only two complaints of excessive annual meadow grass, and two to date in 1988. This compares with our records for 1985 which showed thirteen complaints of annual meadow grass in our greens turf.

The same pattern has been followed with all our turf grades.

Unlike some other growers, Rolawn never make claims that are unrealistic, yet we are prepared to guarantee that Rolawn Advantage will be sold free of annual meadow grass.

Q. How do you eliminate annual meadow grass?

A. The Advantage turf is grown from a mixture of Chewings fescue and Browntop Bent which have been specially bred at Queens University Belfast in a research programme sponsored by British Seed Houses to be herbicide tolerant. This means that we can spray the turf fields during the production cycle to eliminate weed grasses. The seed mixture is exclusive to Rolawn so no other grower can use it for some years to come. In the unlikely event of a weed grass being found in our turf we will happily replace the affected roll at our expense.

Q. Can the greenkeeper continue to