

# Fixing it

How preventative care now will pay dividends later. By **Hugh Tilley**

**T**he best reason for winter servicing is that you won't have time in the spring! But of course there are other serious reasons for looking closely at all of your machinery before you get into winter proper. One of the most important is that it gives you time to present a case (to green chairman or secretary) and obtain quotes where replacement or major overhaul is needed – and (hopefully) time to select and order. For machinery which is required throughout the winter a thorough service should maximise reliability. For machinery which will not be needed until the next growing season, maintenance should be aimed at conditioning the equipment so that it can be put back to work in spring with minimum delay or stoppages.

This autumn and winter work usually includes a number of different elements and priorities, such as cleaning and inspection, routine servicing, preventative maintenance, repair and overhaul, and storage.

## **Cleaning and inspection**

A thorough clean must be first priority and ideally this should be carried out with eyes open and a notepad in hand (or chalk on wall etc.) so that 'work to do' can be written down – lest you forget. Start cleaning by removing the bulk of caked-on grass, mud and the like with a knife, scraper or

stiff brush – a putty knife or masonry paintbrush are ideal. Remove guards and clean behind them, cut away any long grass or string left around shafts, empty bins, lockers and any recesses in the cab. Having done the 'rough' it is usually easier to complete the clean with a hose or pressure washer. Oily deposits are best removed with hot detergent or a special cleaner such as Gunk – obtainable from motor accessory shops. Note any oil leaks before washing for later repair.

## **Routine servicing**

If you need to change oils, drain while still hot as this gives fastest draining with minimum sediment left behind. Fresh oil will provide the best protection when full strength inhibitors are included and the engine should be run briefly to circulate these mineral properties. Check all oils not just for level but also for contamination, particularly with water, for water in fuel or hydraulic oil can have expensive consequences. Fill diesel tanks to the brim, for this really does minimise condensation in the tank. Make sure that you have winter grade diesel fuel – it has an anti-waxing additive to prevent freezing.

Petrol engines will probably need new plugs – but make sure that you fit the right length and gap. Check or replace leads; for cracked insulation – often unseen – causes

## 'Mowers will need resharpening and a timetable should be set for this so that it is done well before they are required'

19 → many irritating non-starting problems. Clean or replace all filters – they are a cheap protection.

As most engines are liquid cooled, this means checking the coolant (which is usually a 25%-30% anti-freeze solution) and as this includes corrosive inhibitors, it is better than leaving the machinery empty.

Checking the level is easy, though checking the efficiency of the mix is more difficult and needs either a hydrometer (preferred) or testing by syphoning some off into a plastic bottle, inserting a steel nail and leaving in the freezer. If the nail goes rusty, and/or the liquid freezes, then you had better be quick and renew your anti-freeze!

Grease or oil all lubrication points, which should remove any water impelled into bearings etc while washing. Beware, however, of sealed bearings, for over enthusiastic application may push the seal out.

This treatment will protect them during the damp days of winter. Sliding and shiny parts such as coring tines, cutting cylinders and bottom blades will benefit from a smear of grease, or better still a coating of a de-watering or rust protection oil.

Check that all adjustments are working freely.

Mowers will need resharpening and a timetable should be set for this so that it is done well before they are required – we don't yet know if we shall have an early spring. If these are sent away, ensure that the cutting edges are protected from rust when they return. Flails and rotary blades may not be as critical where rust is concerned, but will still benefit from being sharp.

Such sharpening is a simple DIY task which requires patience if the blade is not to be 'blued' and ruined – the old fashioned whetstone is safer.

### Preventative maintenance

This is 'model advice' seldom acted upon, but if carried out diligently can really save time and breakdowns when you are most busy. The secret is to look for wear – wear on belts, in bearings, on chain and sprockets, on hoses and anywhere else that takes the rub. Loosen each belt and → 23

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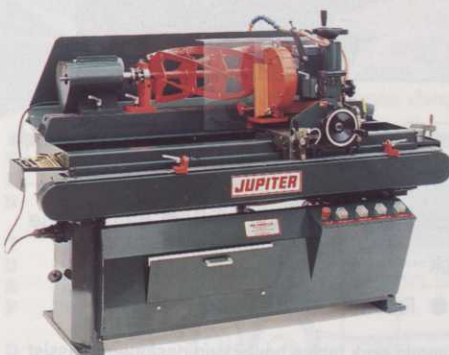
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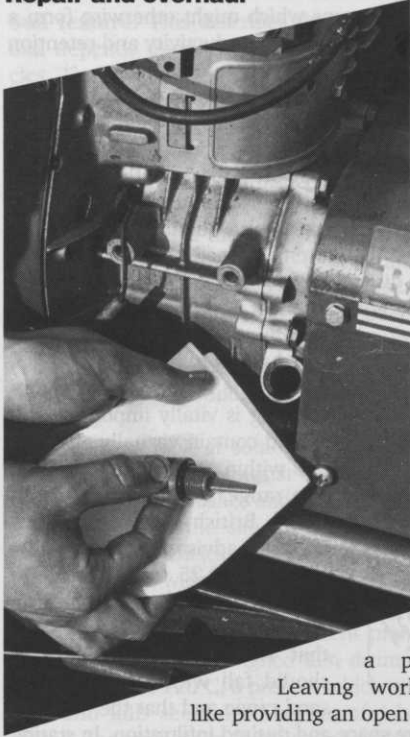
# 'Getting an estimate in writing can save later dispute. Leaving work open-ended is like writing an open cheque'

21 ➔ chain and check the bearings. Rollers chains should have every link free, every roller present and minimum lateral 'bend'. If replacement is fairly quick and easy – as with chains and belts – it may be sufficient to put the new part into stock ready for the fateful day. Bearings should always be replaced if they are the least bit suspect as they deteriorate rapidly and can be difficult to change in a hurry without special pullers.

Hoses are liable to 'go' with little warning and inspection for chafing, severe kinks, missing fastenings or damaged unions will help pre-empt future problems and perhaps an embarrassing leak on a green. Guards are another 'problem area' which are ideal candidates for a little preventative maintenance – get replacements for those little rubber toggles. The Health and Safety Executive are getting less tolerant about guards not in place.

Most of these tasks can be carried out at convenient times, though it is all too easy to leave them until you 'get around to it' and when it is cold and miserable you don't often get 'a round tuit' before the grass starts growing under your feet. The simplest reminder is chalking a list of jobs to do upon the wall.

## Repair and overhaul



Leaving work open-ended is like providing an open cheque: of course

Major jobs, or those which you won't get around to, may have to be sent to the supplier. Getting an estimate of the work and its cost – in writing – can save later dispute. As argument can get quite acrimonious it helps to record (in a duplicate book) what has to be done before a machine goes off, attaching the top copy to the machine in a plastic envelope.

your dealer is honest, but were your orders unambiguous or did you just say 'service'? When it comes to radical overhauls it may be better to buy new and it is possible, given time, to strike some good deals – especially if the dealer has time to take your old machine in, prepare it for resale and find a market.

Nevertheless there are many Clubs that have the manpower skills and facilities to undertake major work. For them the first problem may be to obtain all the parts, and in this era of de-stocking and minimum stock levels this may take time. Even quite long-established dealers are finding parts supply more difficult. Getting parcels by TNT or Overnite adds to the cost – so allow time.

Where parts are removed pending repair ensure they are stored safely in a box, or perhaps still in place with nuts finger tight – this way you won't forget where they belong or how they fit.

## Storage

For longer term storage it will pay to undertake a little extra work such as removing belts and chains, inhibiting all shiny parts – including the engine – removing battery and blocking-up off the wheels. Belts are best stored in a Hessian sack hung up in a dry, airy place, chains are ideally stored in a tin of oil or oiled in a plastic bag, though second best is to spray them with chain lubricant and keep in place. Aerosols of de-watering/rust inhibitor are available, but a jar and old paint brush is much cheaper and often more effective – just try and spray the edges of a mowing cylinder! With small engines pay attention to the valves, for stuck valves and rust on the seatings will prevent the machine from starting. It may be possible to spray or trickle inhibitor or oil through the plug hole. Being self-charging, batteries prefer regular use, but if they cannot be used elsewhere, just re-charge and smear the terminals with Vaseline, which unlike oil or grease conducts electricity.

Some still prefer to keep a machine mobile and run it at regular intervals – say monthly. If so, keep tyres slightly above pressure rather than blocking up. Petrol loses its aromatics with storage, so it is best to empty the carburettor. If the empty tank is steel, a swill round with oil should inhibit rust.



● Photographs courtesy of Ransomes

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