

## 'We both felt that we needed to get more involved in education'

would not go amiss in the corridors of power: the bearing of a politician perhaps, or maybe someone big and mysterious in the City. He's the less talkative of the pair, but you can almost hear his mind whirring, a deep thinker and a most astute observer. I'll admit to being surprised on learning that he had enjoyed four storming years as a private entrant Moto-Cross competitor – and in truth rather saw him as a pukka yachtsman, which indeed he told me he was and still is – funny how first impressions can throw you! I digress.

Graham is from Ipswich, as are so many others who make it in the

world of turf machinery marketing or technology, and began his career at Ransomes. His early interest leaned toward a career in farming but it became evident to him by the late 1960s that unless one was of direct farming stock that wasn't likely – indeed there was no guarantee even for those with the farming silver spoon, as later events have proven. He began as an apprentice, one of twenty or so Ransomes annual intake of raw recruits from which the future of their industry, indeed almost the industry, would find its new production managers, designers, engineers and sales technicians. Exposed in the mainstream

of Ransomes technology, Graham quickly felt that agricultural machinery sales should be his chosen path. He was fortunate in being trained at a time when Ransomes were selling combine harvesters and even more fortunate in manoeuvring himself from the more mundane apprentice tasks of engineering inspection by being assigned to finished goods, an interesting exercise. Equally fortunate, Ransomes encouraged further education and Graham took several courses in mechanical engineering at Ipswich College.

The role of a Ransomes apprentice is very thorough and opportunities presented themselves for Graham's exposure within the agricultural sales division. With his apprentice not yet complete, decisions nevertheless had to be made on his career path and he was guided by Roger Smith, who suggested that the future lay not in agriculture but in grass machinery – and that a vacancy in sales was there for the taking! At the tender age of 20 Graham was a demonstrator, at 21 seconded to Australia on an exchange scheme and working in the distributorship network for three years. It was in Australia that he saw another side – the smaller and altogether more personal side of the distributor.

Although there were to be no instant changes – still too much to do and learn in Ransomes – this 'other side' had sown a seed in Graham's mind – which was to come to the fore later. For the time it was work as a territory rep back in 'Blighty' till 1977, then a brief and satisfying flirtation in being one's own boss – selling kit boats (the sailing connecting) which only ended when recession cut into every yachtsman's pocket and made smaller business enterprises very precarious indeed.

Luck follows the lucky, they say, and a Toro area management job was whispered on the grapevine as being for the taking with the Toro distributor for the South West. Graham had covered this area for Ransomes, knew the people and certainly knew the machinery business – the job was his! Various promotions followed, culminating in a move from the south west to County Durham as sales manager until 1983, when things began to change. Changes take place, business tycoons make decisions and company profiles alter. In this brief article it is not possible to precis all that happened behind boardroom doors at that time – suffice to say that the Toro distributorship changed hands – without bloodshed – and Lely UK, a Dutch owned company in the agricultural machinery business, took over this sole distributorship prize.

Graham was hired as sales manager at Lely for Toro products – not

surprising in view of his skill and expertise – thence promoted to the general manager's role and finally to the lofty role of managing director – lifting a turnover of £2m to one of over £5m and rising. It all seems so simple written here, but this is really a lengthy tale of dedication in a highly competitive market, of grasping every opportunity and winning more than one's share in a tough business. Looking at the Toro machinery marketplace, one thing stands out – the meteoric rise in technological features and innovations: nothing stands still, and in scanning a complete product line of, say, 1983 and comparing it with today, one will see that not a single machine has escaped the high-tech advancements for which Toro are noted. It isn't that obsolescence is planned – it comes by demand from the end user, who literally presurise for more and more innovations. It's called 'the what's new' syndrome. A prediction from Graham for the future? "Watch out for a huge leap forward in the use of micro-chip electronics and controls – see what the motor industry has done in that field, we'll surely follow".

Like any good Captain of Industry, Graham has a release-valve in being an active yachtsman, with what leisure time he has all down to getting thoroughly soaked; heaving-to, luffing to leeward and all that stuff. A sport and language I cannot comprehend, but eminently enjoyable and a wonderful re-charger of human batteries.

In closing, I quizzed these good friends on the BIGGA Student Greenkeeper Award connection. They had both worked through the EIGGA, SIGGA and BGGGA syndrome – both enjoying and revelling in the politics of it all: "We had to know which political cap to wear" they both chuckled in unison. Graham now – "We both felt that we needed to get more involved in education and we listened with glee when Paddy McCarron suggested that greenkeeper education needed something upon which to hang its hat – a publicity vehicle if you like and the scholarship came out of that chance comment.

"Any advice for candidates?", I asked, and their reply, again in unison, centred around a candidates achievements both in college and on the golf course, together with enthusiasm for their chosen career and how they might cope out of a normal environment – in short the candidate who is chosen will be the one who might most benefit career-wise from the experience – that's how it has been, but one never knows: nothing stands still and changes can and do take place, so being on one's mettle is the wisest guide-line.

DAVID WHITE

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