

■ On Tuesday 9 March 1993 the Scottish Region will once again be holding their annual one-day conference.

The venue, as part of the Region's plan to move the conference around the country, will be Oatridge College near Broxburn. In complete contrast to Langside in 1992 which lies in the hustle and bustle of Glasgow, Oatridge is located in the midst of lovely rolling farmland in West Lothian.

Gordon Moir and Cecil George have gathered together an excellent array of speakers including the well known and sometimes controversial Eddie Connaughton and John Philp; and new blood in the form of Jim Grainger, who has suffered and sometimes celebrated in the growing-in process at Letham Grange. Alasdair Wellwood and Roy Auld will be looking into the future of aeration and looking backwards at greenkeeping history will be Oatridge College's own Steve Miller.

We'll be kept right up to date with Jon Allbutt and of course David ('Mr Education') Golding.

The entire event is sponsored once again by our Scottish Region patrons and the cost is even less than last year – at £10 for BIGGA members and £12.50 for non-members. Don't miss what should be another interesting and educational day.

■ BOC Ltd has produced a video to promote the safe use of gas cutting and welding equipment throughout industry.

'Safe under pressure' runs for 18 minutes and carries vital information on the correct procedures for using oxygen and acetylene in cutting and welding. It covers cylinder identification and the properties of the gases, cylinder handling and storage, equipment assembly and lighting up and shut down procedures.

Available from BOC's 75 cylinder centres nationwide, it costs £11 plus VAT.

BOC cylinder centres also offer free safety literature and advice. Call free on 0800 515661 for your nearest centre.

BOC is a member of The BOC Group, the worldwide gases, health care, vacuum technology and distribution services company which operates in some 60 countries and in 1991 had sales of £2.8 billion.

■ Grass maintenance equipment specialists, ET Breakwell Ltd of Shirley, Solihull, have become the first in their industry to achieve the coveted BS 5750 Part II award. The quality assurance certificate is the result of eight months hard work for the Stratford Road family business, established more than half a century ago. Breakwell's are one of the UK's leading distributors of professional lawnmowers and grass machinery for the maintenance of public amenities such as parks, golf courses and sports grounds.

■ Europe's largest plant breeder, Force Limagrain, has launched a new range of grass seed mixtures for the amenity sector. Top Green will be marketed under a banner headline promising 'quality, performance and reliability'. The new range comprises 25 mixtures: EuroGolf, EuroSport, EuroSpace for landscaping and utility, EuroClass for domestic lawns, EuroTop for seeded turf production and EuroSpecial, a custom mixture of wild flowers and grasses.

Force Limagrain already markets the range in Europe and Force Limagrain Top Green marketing manager, Stephen Alderton sees great potential for the philosophy in the UK: 'We estimate that the total European turfgrass market is around 55,000t and while the UK uses less than France and Germany at 9,000t, it has the reputation as being the leader as far as quality is concerned. In this respect Top Green is hard to beat'. Top Green will be available next spring. Details: 0954 61456.

■ Allett Mowers launched a new ride on triple mower recently, named the Allett Conqueror and designed for use on golf tees and surrounds. The Conqueror benefits from hydrostatic transmission, making it very manoeuvrable. Unique for machines in this price bracket, the Conqueror has individual clutches for all three cutter units which allow a choice of cutting widths of 78", 57" or 36". All cutting units incorporate 7" diameter cylinders, which make light work of long grass and have high impact resistance. Allett have placed great emphasis on the comfort of the operator and a deluxe spring seat, which is fully adjustable for both position and weight, is fitted as standard. The price is £4995+ VAT. Details: 0536 68950.

'This Dad'

Ian Harrison, the new ICI Premier

Greenkeeper of the Year, almost pulled out of the prestigious competition after his father died. DAVID WHITE reports on how the man of the moment overcame his sorrow to collect the industry's most acclaimed title

It's a little under 60 miles from Darlington to Aldwark Manor, a sling-shot journey down the A1 that can take less than an hour. For Ian Harrison, however, his long and winding route from Darlington to Aldwark Manor – or to be more specific from young apprentice greenkeeper to ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year – took about 14 years!

Utilising the essence of high drama, Roger Mossop, the marketing manager for award sponsors ICI Professional Products, welcomed the five 1992 ICI Premier Greenkeeper finalists to a dinner given in their honour before announcing the results – in reverse order – to the hushed and expectant group. It was, observed someone, not unlike the BBC Sports Personality of the Year awards, only the trumpet fanfare was lacking!

At an event of this magnitude there is a pressure-cooker atmosphere that permeates through the day with the heat as much on the judges as those being judged. For the first time ever, this writer was privileged to observe the whole of the final interview proceedings and to listen whilst the participants unfolded their individual tales. It was a grey December day outside, though the sparkle that emanated from the 'fabulous five' – Dean Cleaver, Kevin Green, Iain MacLeod, Ian Harrison and Ian McMillan – certainly brightened that grey day considerably – I wouldn't have missed it, but as I've written before, I certainly wouldn't have wanted to be in the judges' shoes.

How are the candidates judged? First by nomination from their section, then by a written paper on an essential greenkeeping topic, followed by a searching assessment of their course. The final daunting hurdle is a lengthy interview, chaired by Neil Thomas and headed by BIGGA education chairman, Huw Parry, and ICI's Richard Minton. Down to the wire results are almost the norm in these exciting ICI finals and this year's event was no exception. In the end, Ian Harrison was declared the 1992 ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year, winning by a slim margin from Ian McMillan and Kevin Green, second and third respectively.

What finally swayed the judges? In Ian Harrison's case it was almost certainly his 'fire in the belly' conviction that greenkeeping at Darlington was a challenge to enjoy. His is no easy task, for the Alistair Mackenzie designed course at Darlington is