

Massey throws its weight

Latest commitment to greenkeepers - from grass equipment division of multi-national company

It's hard to believe that Massey Ferguson's Grass Equipment Division was formed only two years ago because it has made so much progress in establishing itself as part of the turfcare scene.

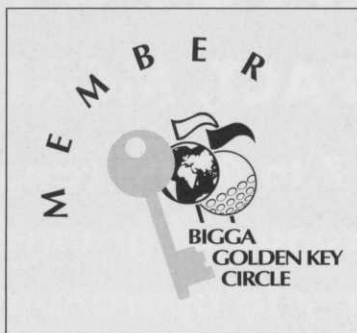
Becoming the latest Golden Key member of BIGGA's Education and Development Fund is a further sign of their long-term commitment to greenkeepers.

"We've long admired BIGGA's education initiatives and the work that greenkeepers are doing," says Nick Kirby, the division's director, "but, of course, we are hoping to get their support in return."

Massey Ferguson is a heavyweight name with bags of heritage and multi-national status behind it, but the Grass Equipment Division is, to all intents and purposes, a company in its own right with its own budget and staff.

The division was set up in 1992 to "grow a separate business within the UK." For a long time, MF had seen the opportunity to develop its marketing operations in the golf and amenity sectors but had not had the product line-up to offer.

Headed by Nick Kirby and with a hand-picked staff of 15 from a variety of back-



grounds, the Grass Equipment Division now has a turnover of £5 million.

Mr Kirby came from Massey Ferguson Ireland to run the new division. His first big task, which took 14 months, was to negotiate with the Japanese tractor manufacturer Iseki to distribute its products in the UK.

Fortunately for Iseki, it already had links with Massey including a marketing agreement in Australia.

Mr Kirby's task was "to find competent, active dealers in all areas." In some cases this involved existing Massey farm machinery

dealers but the main criteria was to select outlets that had proven grass machinery expertise and experience. "This sector demands a high quality of specialist service," Mr Kirby points out, "and this could not come from the grass machinery business being a bolt-on to agriculture."

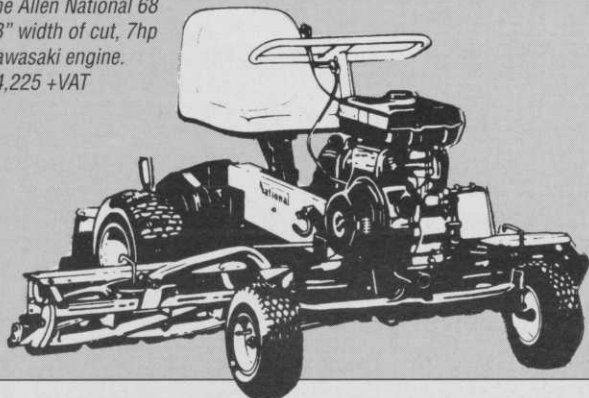
Of the 23 dealers appointed, only six are also Massey Ferguson agricultural dealers. Thirteen of the new network transferred from the old Iseki dealer network. The other 35 Iseki accounts were phased out.

The division set six 'standards for appointment' - and no dealer would be appointed unless they met all six. These standards were:

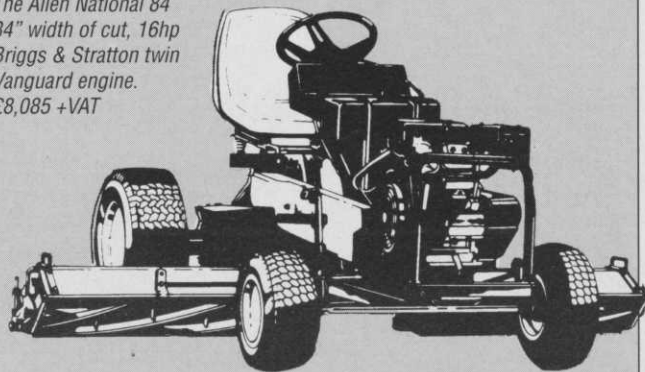
- Specialist sales staff with experience of grass equipment and successful sales track record;
- Competent experienced service support;
- Complementary fine turf franchises such as Ransomes, Toro or Jacobsen;
- Premises with adequate display and storage facilities;
- Adequate financial resources;
- Long-term development plan (the major players in the business started at least five to seven years ago).

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Nick Kirby at Stoneleigh with some of the MF/Iseki machines

"There were no sacred cows – underpinning everything we did was the desire to build the best distribution network for the turf industry, and I believe we are now well on the way to achieving that," says Mr Kirby.

Streamlining and improving the dealer network from the Iseki franchise was just part of the restructuring that went on. Sorting out the stocking and distribution of parts was another priority. "We want to be one of the easiest companies to do business with," remarks Mr Kirby.

The parts distribution centre was moved to Massey Ferguson's headquarters at

Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. 94% of stock orders can now be filled from this warehouse and they are air-freighting less than 50 lines per week, compared with 200 a year ago. The warehouse at the former US military hospital near the Royal Showground holds six months' stock of fast-moving parts.

There have also been product improvements and additions, while rights to distribute the professional grass and grounds maintenance machines made by Swiss manufacturer Bucher were also acquired at an early stage.

"The line-up stands up against any other

range," says Mr Kirby, who points out that customers include top courses such as The Belfry, Woburn and Gleneagles.

In essence, the range includes MF's own line of 1200 Series compact tractors from 17 to 35hp and petrol-driven 30 Series lawn tractors; the Iseki TA tractors from 25 to 45hp; the Iseki TU compacts from 17.5 to 20hp; Iseki TX 16 and 18hp tractors; Iseki SF 300 front cut mower and the Iseki SG diesel riders.

At the recent BTME, a new mid mower deck was announced for the MF 1200 compacts and there are other product improvements planned for later in the year.

Mr Kirby, who started with Massey as a graduate trainee 14 years ago, says he enjoys being in the golf industry and selling these products to greenkeepers "because you're dealing with customers who know what they want".

As well as supporting greenkeepers by contributing to the Education and Development Fund, Massey Ferguson is also firmly behind the BTME. It is committed to exhibiting there in '96. "We're only interested in shows with a creditable customer base and a track record, and we're quite happy to see Harrogate as the only national show."

However, he stressed he will continue to support dealers at Westurf, Scotsturf and other regional shows.

"We see golf as the only stable part of the grass equipment business," concludes Mr Kirby. "We also see it as a sector which can actually develop because the rest is going through so much change."

Left: the MF1230 at work

