



The rise of the CLUB MECHANIC

The Club Mechanic is becoming an increasingly important member of a staff at golf clubs

How many clubs rely on a mechanically minded greenkeeper to get a machine back on the fairway when it falters? As often happens, the result of his efforts is your man covered from head to foot in axle grease and the machine still immobile. The dealer would then be called and "a man who can" despatched to administer whatever assistance was required.

All this time the stricken machine would lie idle, an unsightly reminder of an important job not completed.

Nowadays many clubs are "insuring" themselves against such a scenario by employing their own mechanics and it is a policy which looks to pay dividends.

One such course is Greetham Valley, near Oakham in Rutland, where Steve Randall has recently taken up the post of Club Mechanic in charge of the club's £200,000 worth of equipment.

"It is brilliant. Having a mechanic gives you so much peace of mind. You can relax knowing that when you turn the key it will start. It's



STEVE RANDALL:
'I'm a big believer in preventative maintenance'

great having Steve about," said Adrian Porter, Head Greenkeeper.

"We have such a lot of machinery it is easier to have an on site mechanic to keep it maintained so that it all runs smoothly. It keeps cost to a minimum because you don't have the yearly expenditure of expensive mechanics.

"Normally if something broke down on the course you just had to leave it, ring up and get mechanics out. It wasn't always the case that the mechanic could come out that day.

"There have been cases that they could come out in an hour or bring you another machine but it could be a day or even two days to come out."

Steve (46) worked for a main Toro dealer in

Leicester before taking the job at Greetham Valley.

"I had been with them for nine years as a mechanic working on all Toro greens machines. I gave it a lot of thought before joining a golf club but decided I would like to get out there in the field," explained Steve.

"I was the other side of the story, going out to golf clubs to repair machinery. I found the clubs were getting young chaps to learn mechanics on these golf courses which is a slow process so we were losing work with clubs doing their own."

It could be an expensive business for a golf club which tries to take short cuts instead of using qualified people.

"On numerous occasions we would find that people had tried to do the jobs themselves. I remember one particular time where it cost the club nearly £2,000 to put it right because someone had put something together incorrectly. If that happened on two or three different jobs over the year it would be very costly."

Like all good mechanics Steve doesn't just sit in his workshop waiting for a machine to start playing up.

"I'm a big believer in preventative maintenance. If a bearing is even thinking about

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wearing out I'll order a new one, run the original until it is nearly ready to give in then replace it right away," explained Steve who is also not averse to helping out the greenkeeping staff if they are pushed and he has some free time.

"I work with the operators so they will let me know if there are any problems. Machines are serviced for oil and filter change after 100 hours usage. But if we have had a really dusty season, like the last one, I'd try to do it every 50 hours. I don't mind putting oil in them.

He is quick to stress the importance of good operators and how that can prolong the life of machines.

"Steve has come in and told operators certain way to leave the machines when they are not being used and that is helping prevent any damage in future. When starting up don't have it on high revs for too long drop lit straight back down to tick over. Basic things that generally you'd probably forget," said Adrian (26).

"He can do the servicing on a day when the machine is not being used and you don't really notice it," he added.

There are other benefits to a golf club and its members to having a club mechanic.

"Hopefully in the future we shall be able to take business from another golf course if they want machines regrinding and we have the facilities to do it or even assist members who want mowers repairing – it can be done for a set fee. We've got 800 members and they've all got lawns to cut. It will help to finance the building up of the workshop. That is what is in the pipeline," said Adrian.

The cost of fitting out that workshop is not quite as expensive as you might imagine.

"I did a rough price check for kitting out the workshop by ringing round different places for machines. We have kept it down as much as we could on prices etc and I don't think we've done too badly. We shall obviously add to it as we go on.

"It has cost around £7,000 to equip the workshop to a state of usability which when you compare it to a triplex or fairway mower, which can cost around £30,000, you can see how reasonable it is," said Steve, who has also brought much of his own equipment with him.

"I have a lot of my own hydraulic testing equipment and electric testing equipment. If a situation arose where we didn't have the piece of kit required to do the job I think we would



The Greatham Valley team with Robert Hinch (third left) who, together with his father Frank, own the club. Steve Randall is pictured extreme left and Adrian Porter, Head Greenkeeper, is extreme right

probably buy the kit because we wouldn't want to be in the position of sending the machinery out and if we were to need it once chances are we would need it again some time."

The growth of the Club Mechanic will perhaps need a change of thinking by some manufacturers as Steve has discovered.

"If you are a main dealer you can tap on to available information but the manufacturers are a bit loath to give information to a golf club mechanic.

If you go on a training course as a main dealer you get the full training course right through but if you go as a golf course mechanic you just get the basics on how to change the oil and grease it. That is basically it at the end of the day. With the advent of the golf course mechanic this is bound to change though. It has got to," commented Steve.

Another situation which will require clarification is that of manufacture warranties on equipment and whether main dealers would be required to service them to maintain the warranty's validity.

"It's a situation we've not come across but we would have to make sure that the warranty wasn't affected," said Adrian.

Overall, however, the benefits of the Club Mechanic are there to be seen and ensure that

machinery is kept performing at its optimum level.

"Anything that is due to break down tend to get seen to before it does break down so you get rid of all these problems. Greenkeepers with mechanical skills I would imagine would just be trained to fix it when it does break-down. You're not a trouble shooter whereas Steve can find out all problems," explained Adrian.

■ So what do the major companies do by way of training for use in their equipment? Greenkeeper International surveyed what's available...

Lely (UK) Ltd – Distributor of Toro Equipment.

Manuals: A service and operator training manual with every machine purchased.

Videos: A free operator video with each purchase while there is a Health and Safety video, a Raising the Standards (of mowing) video and a Setting the Course (of mowing management) video free on request.

Training Courses: There are various training courses for end users, dealers and salesmen.

Helpline Number: 01480 476971.

Jacobsen Textron

Manuals: An operator manual with every machine purchased with a very comprehensive service log.

Videos: There is an operator training video on all products.

Training Courses: There are full training courses for operators and end user mechanics.

Helpline Number 01536 417777 (ask for service department).



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John Deere Ltd

Manuals: Operator and technical manuals.
Videos: F1145 Operator Safety Video.
Training Courses: Available at the golf course or at their training facility at Langar. They include installation and safe operation, cutting units and adjustments and a two day course for golf course mechanics/greenkeepers.
Helpline Number: 01949 863204 or 863244.
Richard Charleton or Ivan Miller.

Hardi Ltd

Manuals: Sent out with each machine.
Videos: Available on machine operation.
Training Courses: In association with the dealer network or special training with BIGGA sections on request.
Helpline Number: 01455 233811 or 0831 430025 R.W. Oliver (Amenity Manager).

Kubota UK Ltd

Manuals: WSM available by ordering from dealer.
Videos: Can be loaned on request.
Training Courses: Can be arranged on request to regional sales manager or dealer staff.
Helpline Number: 0184421 4500 Ext 229.

Hayter Ltd

Manuals: Operator and workshop manuals, coloured maintenance charts, maintenance check list and maintenance schedules.
Videos: Just started producing safety and operator videos.
Training Courses: Four day Dealer mechanic courses, End user mechanic courses, basic maintenance courses, operator courses, safety courses.
Helpline Number: 01279 723444.

Charterhouse Turf Machinery

Manuals: Complete manuals available for all products.
Training Courses: Can be arranged for suitable parties.
Helpline Number: 01428 661222.

Ransomes Sims and Jefferies Ltd

Manuals: Operator, Parts and Service manuals.
Videos: Product Presentation Videos.
Training Courses: Service training courses held annually at the Ipswich factory for all professional equipment users.
Helpline Number: 01473 276443 Mike Prentice for service training or 01473 276286 Nigel Church for sales information.

New Holland UK Ltd

Manuals: Operator, Service/Repair and Parts manuals for all models available through New Holland dealers.
Training Courses: Operation and daily maintenance procedures.
Helpline Number: 01268 292573 - Peter Bray.

Huxley's Grass Machinery Ltd

Manuals: Operator and Parts manuals supplied with all new machines.
Training Courses: An in-house Training Centre for regular customer and dealer training.
Helpline Number: 01962 733222 - Ray Chant, Service Manager.

SISIS Equipment

Manual: In duplicate with all new machines and available free of charge on request even for obsolete machines back to the 1950s.
Training Courses: On application.
Helpline Number: 01625 503030.

Multi Core Aerators Ltd

Manuals: Full and comprehensive manuals detailing all aspects of routine maintenance.
Training Courses: Upon delivery full operator instruction is given and all routine maintenance jobs are covered with the mechanic/greenkeeper.
Helpline Number: 01257 231861 - Ian Waddington Mobile 0374 488508.

Massey Ferguson

Manuals: Operator instruction books.
Training Courses: BIGGA training courses covering safety and critical tractor maintenance at key greenkeeper training colleges. Customer training on site and at in house company training centre.
Helpline Number: 01203 851243.

The job I'm always glad to see the back of is...



"Clearing leaves from ditches"

- Kevin Peace, Inverurie GC