

# Clean sweep

**Hugh Tilley bids summer goodbye and canvasses opinion on some of the sweepers and collectors around.**

Autumn or "Fall", as our friends across the Atlantic more descriptively call it, means leaves on the course, on paths, around the clubhouse and in the car park. Removing these is a priority task, especially when they fall on greens or tees so most clubs have equipped themselves with powered tools and machinery. However some machines have other uses such as scarifying, grooming, litter collection, drain cleaning, core collection and even dew dispersal. Blowers are frequently seen as an adjunct to a sweeper collector, although in some cases they can be used on their own to blow debris into the trees or shrubbery. Most hand

operated blowers also have a vacuum mode and a collector attachment which is useful in restricted areas.

There is a wide range of machines available, early sweeper designs mostly used ground

wheel drive to rotate brushes and lift debris into the collector, but this had several important limitations. An independent drive improves performance and allows heavy concentrations to be lifted, but unless there is extra draft or a

mulching fan these collectors tended not to fill very efficiently.

The Amazone Groundkeeper was perhaps the first of a new design and could be said to have revolutionised the task adding a scarifying ability. Since its introduction other machines of similar design and ability have come onto the market. The Billy Goat range from Bob Andrews Ltd is also well known and respected, having become almost generic. The name encompasses a wide variety of types and accessories, from pedestrian operated push and self propelled vacuum sweepers and blowers to truck tailboard mounted machines.

The following should not be considered as anything other than a representation of the machines available and the ways in which certain machines are being used by their respective clubs. Selection was mostly on the basis of asking manufacturers



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for a greenkeeper contact, and they had no other control over the questions asked or the answers given. Several makers failed to respond. Two of the machines considered were early production models and as such did experience teething problems, however buying an "early" machine is a double edged sword because usually the manufacturer looks after it well and expects to learn from problems. One greenkeeper admitted that he would have preferred another make but there was no effective dealer back-up in the area. Interviews took place in

mid September before the main leaf fall.

**Echo Shred 'n' Vac at Saltford GC.**

Saltford is a private 18 hole course between Bath and Bristol and has had its Shred 'n' Vac for about 18 months. A well established course with plenty of (mostly) deciduous trees, these do not appear to overcrowd the greens thus there is not a overwhelming need for intensive leaf clearance.

The Echo ES1000 is hand held with a 21.2cc motor having a cen-



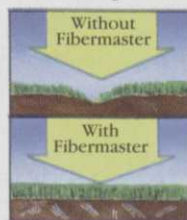
Ian McFarlane with the Echo Shred 'n' Vac



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trifugal fan direct mounted to it. It is very light, under 5kg, and easy to operate. Both suck and blow modes are available, with pick-up tube fitted to the fan housing in place of the grill and a 64 litre bag replacing the blower pipe without tools for the vacuum mode, a shoulder strap carries the bag. The unit is remarkably quiet.

Head Greenkeeper Ian McFar-

lane, prefaced his remarks by stating that it is used in conjunction with an Amazone Ground-

keeper (pictured below) and that obviously it would be inappropriate to consider it alone except for limited areas. Having said that, he said it does do a good job clearing leaves and debris from bunkers, off banks and from around the base of trees and shrubs. Its lightness and portability means that it is easy to carry around in the tractor cab so that the operator can move leaves into the open from inaccessible areas before he uses the Groundkeeper. Although Saltford mostly used the machine as a blower it does have the vacuum nozzle and collecting bag and occasionally uses

this for borders around the club house and for the putting green and for other inaccessible areas.

Operating on two stroke mix has not been a problem and the tool has proved reliable and easy to start. Ian said that should it be stolen, or otherwise become unavailable, he would replace it. The machine was supplied by John Miller (Corsham) Ltd.

**Amazone Groundkeeper - also at Saltford GC**

Saltford's Amazone Groundkeeper, now about three years old, suffered some teething problems with the PTO, however dealer TH White Ltd was extremely efficient and helpful in sorting these out without cost to the club and ultimately fitted a heavy duty shaft. Since then it has performed without trouble or cost and is even still using the original tines.

Ian uses the machine for leaf



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collecting (of course) as well as for scarifying the fairways and roughs. The machine is also used occasionally for cutting some roughs. The scarifying operation is normally carried out once in spring, however Ian used the machine again this autumn to open up matted dead turf to enable him to apply seed in areas that have been badly affected by the drought. The machine is not operated to maximum depth even for scarifying, it has rollers front and rear for depth control, which perhaps accounts for the lack of tine wear. Saltford has found that its normal tine configuration gives ample air flow to fill the hopper even with wet leaves.

Maintenance is quick and simple and no problems were reported over this. The drive line includes a gearbox and twin vee belts, these are original and trouble free with a sprung loaded

jockey ensuring a constant belt tension. Ian did say that he would buy another but next time would go for the high lift model.

**Sisis Fibagroom at Wilmslow GC**

Now in its third season, the Sisis Fibagroom at Wilmslow is an early production model and Course Manager, Stephen Oultram, admitted that it has had its share of teething problems. However Sisis has been extremely ready to accept responsibility for these and sort them out. These problems have included some

cracking of welds, two bearing failures and chain failure, none of which made Wilmslow wish they had another make of machine. Stephen (and Sisis) believe these problems are in the past.

The main reason for buying the Fibagroom instead of more established competitors was its twin independent headed approach. Each unit is carried on two rollers giving it better contour following and less possibility of scalping than competitive machines. During the interview Stephen commented several times on how well the machine followed the contours.

The machine is 6ft wide, has an unladen weight of 652kg and a 2m<sup>3</sup> capacity so it is no lightweight when tipping the full hopper which hinges at the top back edge. Stephen said it loads well and holds a considerable quantity of material when full, this is helped if the material is slightly damp, however it is also due to the reel configuration which has scarifying blades interspaced with brushes which provide some mulching and ample air to carry the material.

The machine is used twice a year as a scarifier on fairways and surrounds and occasionally on some of the large tees. Stephen said that it was also used at about six weekly intervals over the fairways as a groomer and verti-cutter removing a large quantity of thatch as well as loose divots and sundry rubbish.

**Trilo SG450 Mini Sweep at Stanmore GC**

The Trilo Mini Sweep is a vacuum sweeper of no mean performance, but Stanmore in Greater London has more than its share mature trees around its 18 holes, thus a machine of more than usual capacity is essential. Head Greenkeeper, Donal Penn-Howard, said that before the club got the Trilo they looked at a number of similar machines,

however discounted them all for a number of reasons. In particular Donal said the very large diameter to the suction hose on the Trilo (350mm) was an important factor in selection because it reduced the possibility of blockages caused by sticks or twigs. None of the other machines had remote control of the hose either. During the autumn one greenkeeper is kept fully occupied clearing leaves with the Mini Sweep, and he is augmented if necessary by colleagues with a back pack machine, pedestrian Billy Goat and/or a Litamisa.

As well as removing leaves the Mini Sweep is used for clearing ditches, collecting the thatch after scarifying fairways and approaches, and occasionally to remove cores – which are moved to the edge of the green first, but Donal said they do need to be dry. The machine is seldom used for scarifying because the head will scalp, but the machine is used regularly for “grooming” particularly of roughs before competitions, when it is set “high” so that it pulls out all the rubbish and “sets the grass up”. This operation is usually followed by a cut with a rotary mower.

After the first year of use the club invested in the remote control kit which allows the hose to be operated by one man from the tractor seat. These controls operate lift and lower, slew and reach so that the driver is able to place the end of the vacuum hose with some precision. The Mini Sweep has several modes and options, and another of these is a 6m long wander hose, this is designed for pedestrian control and gives the machine further versatility to reach more inaccessible spots. Donal said the machine is very effective for emptying rubbish bins, although this ability is not needed at Stanmore, and as an aside he added that it didn't pick up golf balls which made it even better.

The capacity of the hopper at 4.5m<sup>3</sup> is large, and because the fan mulches the input it does hold a considerable amount of material. This has to be considered when tipping as the hopper hinges at the rear back, this makes it essential to only empty when the machine is stood on



The Sisis Fibagroom



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level ground. However the high tip does make filling trailers, trucks or skips easy and effective, although for Stanmore the most significant advantage is that it allows the debris to be piled very high so minimising the ground area needed.

On servicing the club is meticulous over greasing and washing daily, as the fan is so powerful and runs so fast. The machine also needs to be kept clean, the fan because if this is clogged it makes it hard to start, the hopper mesh because any back pressure reduces the efficiency of operation and filling – a fact common to virtually all machines not just the Mini Sweep. There have been few breakdowns, two bearings and a shaft, but the response from MJT Contracts, the UK distributor, was extremely fast and efficient and maximum delay in getting the machine “back on the road” has been 48 hours when a

part had to be obtained from the Dutch manufacturer. Donal said the liaison between MJT and Van Loen Techniek is exceptional, but MJT keep a good level of spares and always respond fast with a personal service. Overall Donal said the machine has been extremely effective and worth every penny – and the members seem to think so too.

**Turfmech Tornado at East Berkshire GC**

The Turfmech Tornado TM360 is a powerful fan which East Berkshire operates on the linkage of

a MF362. It is driven from the PTO and when at full speed it has the power to remove almost anything that is not fixed to the ground, including golfers, a comment made with feeling following the dispersal of several shell paths by a student. It was suggested that the blast could carry leaves as much as 70 or 80 yards, especially if working with the wind. Nevertheless throttle control allows it to be used selectively by intelligent operators to move debris with considerable sensitivity.

East Berkshire is in many respects a heathland course with

considerable stands of heather. A number of years ago the area of heather was declining and it was realised that this was due to the dead material building up at the roots, thus the club bought the Tornado to strip this out and blow it back into the woods and scrub. In addition the machine is used to remove leaves, acorns, pine needles and etc., from the course, car parks, paths and anywhere else. It has also been used to dry out specific areas where there is casual or standing water. Another use is to strip loose divots out of the ground prior to divotting. With the power of the machine it is also normally possible to clear greens and tees without having to take the tractor onto them.

Marc stated that main drawback to the machine is the need to time operations so that no one is around and playing. Mostly the debris is blown into the surrounding woodland, however it is possible to use the throttle and produce a swath or even a rough pile which can be collected with the Litamisa in two passes.

Maintenance is minimal, part of the reason for selecting the Tornado was its simplicity with no engine and minimum moving parts. Fan and PTO, are the only parts which are greased regularly, grease is avoided for the two height control castor wheels as it only picks up dust and drops on the grass.

During the 18 months that East Berkshire has had the Tornado Marc said he has been very impressed with it and what it can do, he said that it has paid back the £2,000 cost within a year, has incurred no on-costs and has saved considerable time and effort.



The Trilo Mini Sweep

What's the *Best* thing about being a Greenkeeper?

Ronan McKeown... "Working outdoors is great and I get a certain amount of satisfaction putting the pin behind a bunker on ladies' day!"

