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Mower



Hugh Tilley canvasses opinion on the Fairway Mowers currently on the market.

On most golf courses fairways were once seen as little more than the strip of grass joining tee to green, a strip to be cut regularly to allow the golfer to find

and play his ball fairly easily. However recent years has seen a change in their perception with greater emphasis on the "play" aspect. As a result most fairways

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the merrier

are now better defined and faster, and as well as more frequent and closer mowing, many now have irrigation in part if not in their entirety so that they can be kept green. Visual attractiveness has become important on many courses, either because members are calling for the course to be "pretty", or because there is a need to attract players with more than just the quality of play. This too calls for more regular mowing and a better quality of cut. These changes have required many clubs to rethink their mowing strategy. Plenty of greenkeepers are now prepared to mow fairways two or three times a week, and while few box off clippings yet, except perhaps for a match, this is a possibility with most of the new ride-on fairway mowers. Better definition may also be necessary as semi-roughs are cut shorter to speed play.

The main manufacturers of golf



Ray Day driving a Jacobsen LF128

course machinery have all met the changing scene and now produce ride-on machines. They have also read the requirements for lightweight machines with generously sized tyres which allow cutting to be carried out

with zero turf damage irrespective of ground conditions. Recent mild winters have allowed grass to continue to grow – thus needing to be cut. Nevertheless there are clubs where trailed ground drive gang mowers are used, usu-

ally because they cannot or do not want to justify the cost and complication of hydraulic drive to the cutting units. In any case most courses already have a tractor. Others have gone part way and use a tractor for the prime mover with hydraulic drive to the cutters. A sharp well set trailed cylinder unit, used regularly, should cope with fairway cutting without problem – and many will assert produce as good a result as any hydraulic unit. All the greenkeepers *Greenkeeper International* spoke with aspired to a self propelled dedicated fairway unit.

The Jacobsen LF128 at Saunton Golf Club, North Devon

Saunton has two links courses, and an important part of the club's needs were to buy a machine to relieve the work load on its existing fairway mower. That the new machine was the

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- Ely City Golf Club
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"A quality machine that gives a superb finish to our cylinders, and saves money." Mr. Derek Green, Head Greenkeeper of Royal Liverpool Golf Club.

NEW 1995 JUNO



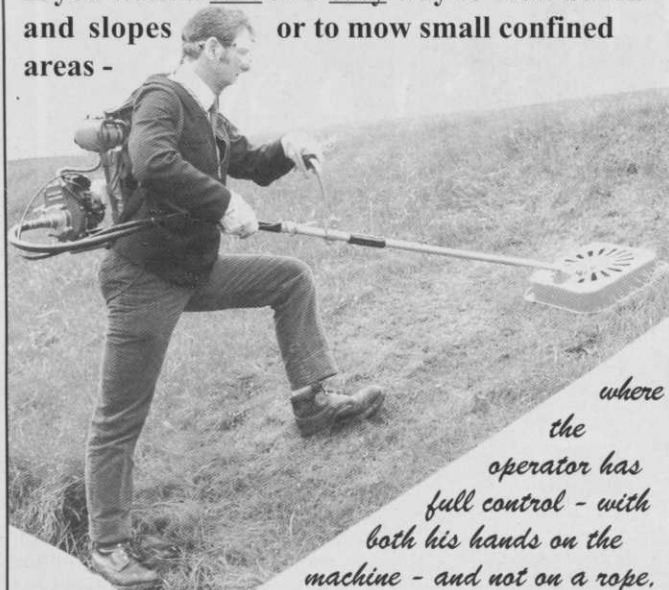
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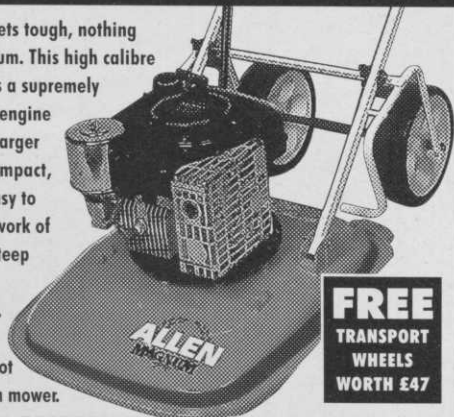
AD REF 214

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AD REF 126

recently introduced Jacobsen LF128 is a comment on the LF100 which has operated on the course for five years with few problems. Prior to buying the first machine the club looked hard at a wide range of machines including trailed and mounted gangs and rotaries. Ray Day, Head Greenkeeper, stated that the important improvements over the older machine were the stronger and more reliable hoses and fittings, and four wheel drive. There were also other important detail improvements which added to the overall superiority. Four wheel drive was specified mainly for the odd occasion and slope when slip and the subsequent turf damage was a real possibility. To date it has been more of an insurance measure than a necessity. The machine has also greater clearance and this was seen as useful as there are a number of humps or mounds to clear to reach some of the fairways.

The '128' designation refers to the 28hp engine output, and this comes from a 3 cylinder Kubota diesel engine. Supplying distributor was MST at Tiverton, who has been very attentive but not yet required to prove an ability to supply urgent parts or service.

Ray commented that he found the machine very comfortable and easy to drive, a view echoed by the other greenkeepers who have used it. The pedal operated lift, hydrostatic transmission and steering made end of run turns quick and easy and this shows particularly on cross cutting.

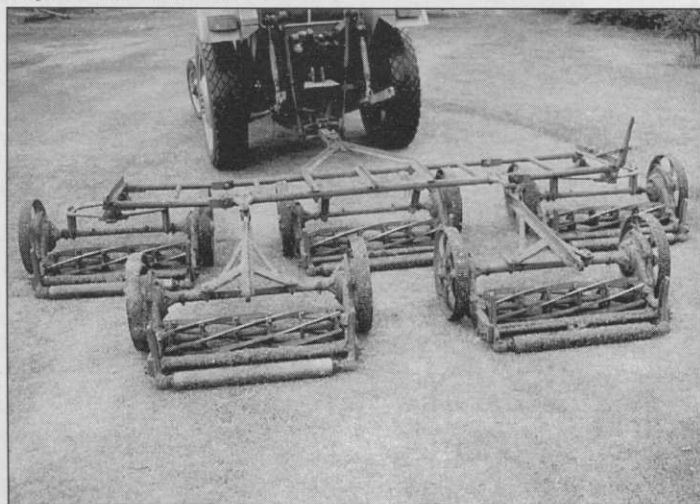
Prior to changing to dedicated fairway mowers the course had a tractor mounted set of gangs. Overall weight (of tractor plus mower) and a tendency to bounce when operating fast were the more important reasons for the change. Ground following is normally very good on the LF128 with a positive down pressure available on rear rollers, however severe undulations do result in some lift off. There are cutting five units, 22 inch wide to give a 100 inch overall cut and the 5 inch cylinders are seven bladed. Grass catchers were supplied as standard but have not been used. Normal summer cut height is 3/8 in. but this increased for winter, (and presumably dry spells). These heights are close to the middle of machine's range.

The club has a full time mechanic who undertakes all servicing, sharpening and most repairs. Routine servicing is simple, cutting units are easy to remove and so are back lapped weekly on the bench. Sharpening - relief grinding - is normally carried out twice a year, unless something untoward happens, like picking up a bolt, as happened when *Greenkeeper International* visited. There were no complaints on bottom blade wear, but the club uses genuine replacements, as they have found cheaper alternatives didn't last very well.

Lloyds Leda gang mower at Burford GC

Burford's set of standard Leda

Lloyds Leda at Burford GC



REAL WORLD TEST

Fairway Mowers

GREENKEEPER INTERNATIONAL

mower units with their "golf course frame" were bought in 1968, since when they have had one major overhaul which cost around £3,000. Ground driven, the units are simple and extremely reliable, and this is a major part of their attraction. Head Greenkeeper, Barry Holt, stated that he is extremely happy with the quality of cut produced, and although he has tried powered gangs he still feels that the old Leda units are more than a match for them. During the growing season the fairways are cut twice a week.

Greens surrounds, approaches and etc. are usually cut with ride-on tees triples which are more manoeuvrable than the trailed gangs. The course staff, limited to just five, means that cutting output is very important, and the Leda gangs give this.

The five gang unit, has cutters which are 30 inch (760mm) wide and have six bladed 7.5inch (190mm) diameter cylinders driven by 17inch cast steel wheels through gear trains. The size of the cylinders, their speed of rotation and the ample clearances means that grass is thrown well clear the rear roller and even in wet conditions there is no grass being picked up and then dropped off in a lump, a point Barry emphasised, so no scrapers are required. Setting the height is a simple spanner task, but is not often required. There is positive location which ensures level setting.

Barry said that having a towed mower was no problem as there would always be a tractor available for trailer, loader and other work. Fitted with the correct tyres marking the turf has not been a problem.

Maintenance on the Leda units is extremely simple, a grease round about once a month with back lapping carried out perhaps twice a season and regrinding during the winter overhaul. This overhaul is carried out in-house and includes a complete strip of all assemblies and a check for wear on ratchets, springs and bearings. Bottom blades last several seasons and Barry believes that the units are still with their original cylinders. Some welding has been carried out on the

frames. The club is split by a road but lifting the units for transport across this is quick and easy.

The John Deere 3235 at Manor House Hotel GC & CC - Castle Combe.

"Greens quality finish" was a major requirement for Course Manager, Paul Bishop, at Manor House Hotel G&CC. Other necessary features included hill safe four wheel transmission, user friendly operation and servicing, and a supportive dealer backed by an efficient parts service.

The club is owned privately by the owner of the Manor House Hotel and as such needs to attract and retain discerning golfers. Location in the Cotswolds area of outstanding natural beauty means that the quality of landscaping and overall visual attraction are a vital ingredient of the course, and one which Paul is working hard at enhancing, hence his preoccupation on quality of finish. Cross cutting is a must.

John Deere offers two engine powers and two cutting unit specifications to suit all golf courses

Paul Bishop aboard a John Deere 3235



world wide, Manor House's selection of the 32hp (Yanmar diesel) engined version with standard 5inch, 7 blade cylinders perfectly reflected the use anticipated - temperate climate and high quality cutting. The 5inch cutting units, with rollers front and rear, have a short 'wheelbase' so follow ground contours better than the larger units.

In keeping with the requirement for quality finish and stripes, the machine has hydraulic down pressure, which is set using a key thus preventing the operator adjusting or mis-adjusting it during work. This pressure will be reduced or removed for winter work.

Transmission is hydrostatic with four wheel drive automatically engaged when required, however an important consideration at Castle Combe was the fact that the drive is positive, so that de-accelerating gives positive braking to all four wheels, something which Paul considers is essential on the course which has some considerable slopes. A "Roll Over Protection System" has also been fitted, with a roof giving the

greenkeeper some protection from sun or rain. Grass catchers are available but not purchased while fairway groomer and verticut attachments are options for the future.

Ease of operation, with one touch single lever lift/pto engagement and two-pedal speed/direction control, was another reason for selecting the JD 3225. All the four greenkeepers who have used it like it, and all rated it as extremely manoeuvrable.

Operators undertake their own daily servicing, checking levels and greasing round etc, while the club's mechanic undertakes other service routines. Back lapping, carried out in-situ using the machine's reverse drive facility, is undertaken approximately every other week, while full sharpening is not expected to be required more often than once a year.

Quality of design and build were other factors on which Paul made comment. In particular he commented on the fact that all hoses were well routed (over the units), clear of the ground and fully protected. His only disparaging remark concerned the parking brake lever which sometimes drops under the pedals.

Huxley HD138 hydraulic reel mower at Andover GC.

Andover is only a 9 hole course, private and with limited means, this meant that whatever it buys on its limited budget has to be cost effective and have a long life expectancy. The club has close and favourable relationships with Huxleys - "they have always treated us well and we have always had favourable deals" said Tony Broad, Chairman of the Greens Committee, "thus it was natural that we should look at their products". Nevertheless a range of machines was considered before the club bought the Huxley HD 138 hydraulic reel mower for the 1995 season. Huxleys also took the previous gang mowers, which "were falling apart", and gave a very generous allowance.

Greens staff is two and a half, thus as well as being reliable any fairway mower had to have a reasonable output. In the event Andover has cut its fairway mowing time down from eight hours

REAL WORLD TEST
Fairway Mowers
GREENKEEPER INTERNATIONAL

Huxleys HD138 Hydraulic Reelmower



to about five since using the new units. Chris Sturgess, Head Greenkeeper, said that as well as saving time this was also saving fuel. No less important was the fact that the new mower gave a far superior quality of cut.

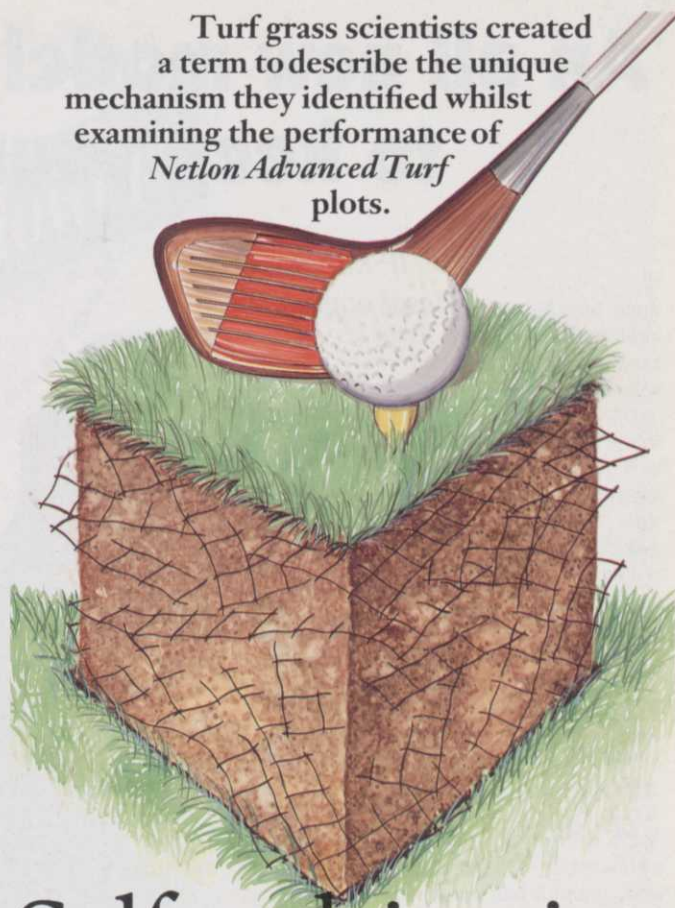
Cutting width is 138inch, with five 30inch wide, 8inch six bladed cylinders, driven hydraulically from a pump mounted direct on the tractor's PTO. The cutting units are mounted on a trailed carrier which also carries the oil reservoir so making the whole outfit quick to attach and detach, and, because there is no PTO shaft, relatively manoeuvrable. Andover GC's HD138 has the twinroll option which allows the cutters to 'float'. Chris said that they have not found any tendency to bounce. Cutting the practice area (the only suitable place with grass) in damp conditions did show some clumping of the clippings, however the wire scrapers were very effective, and Greenkeeper International was assured that no clumping has been seen on the fairways. The club's Ford 1920 compact tractor was more than capable of handling the mower, (35hp + is recommended) and even operating in far from ideal conditions on a site which sloped significantly there was no sign of slip or loss of control, although the driver was given the warning "take care when turning".

Maintenance is limited to a weekly grease of the few nipples plus a visual check of oil level and the condition of the hoses. At the time of writing there had been no problems, Huxleys had made a post installation service check and tightened up one hose. The sharpening regime is to backlap as necessary with relief grinding undertaken by the supplier during the winter service. Tony reckons that the technology of this mower is far enough advanced to allow the club to take the machine into the next century. The assumption is for a ten year life, and written down over this period, unless repair and maintenance costs spiral, Andover GC and both Tony and Chris are satisfied that they have value for money and inexpensive fairway mowing.

Ransomes Hydraulic 5 at Lee-on-Solent Golf Course

Lee-on-Solent GC's fairway mower is now six years old, and likely to be replaced within the next two seasons. Head Greenkeeper, Stephen Pellatt, while not committing the club, said it is likely that the next mower will also be a Ransomes Hydraulic 5 just on the past record of this machine and the supplier, Rows of Chichester. Tees triples are used for approaches and aprons which removes any problem of manoeuvrability around greens

Turf grass scientists created a term to describe the unique mechanism they identified whilst examining the performance of *Netlon Advanced Turf* plots.



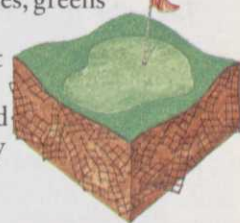
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REAL WORLD TEST
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etc. Lee-on-Solent is a fairly flat course but undulating, it straddles two roads, so the ability to pick up the gang and move quickly and easily is vital.

All fairways can be cut within an eight hour day, but not all are cut each time as variations in soil type and moistures means that only the wettest most fertile need cutting three times a week. Cross cutting is carried out as most fairways are wide enough with sufficient semi-rough surround to allow this.

Stephen reported that the cutting units stay "on cut" well, backlapping is normally carried out about once a month, with a full regrind being reserved for the annual overhaul, which is carried out by a part-time mechanic.

During the time the club has had the machine reliability has been very good, it is a robust outfit, however chafing of hoses and one burst has occurred. Now it is



Stephen Pellatt drives a Ransomes Hydraulic 5 at Lee-on-Solent

a fairly regular routine to check for chafing then move and retie the hose so that another part takes the rub. There are no scrap-

ers on the machine, most broke off at the brackets and, as they were not considered essential, they were not replaced. One

bearing has collapsed and wore the roller so the whole assembly was replaced, but over a six year life this cannot be considered a problem.

Height of cut adjustment is not altered very often, however it is easy to carry out. No problems have been experienced with uneven cut due to rollers slipping in the bracket, nevertheless this is checked regularly. Normal cut height is 5/8inch

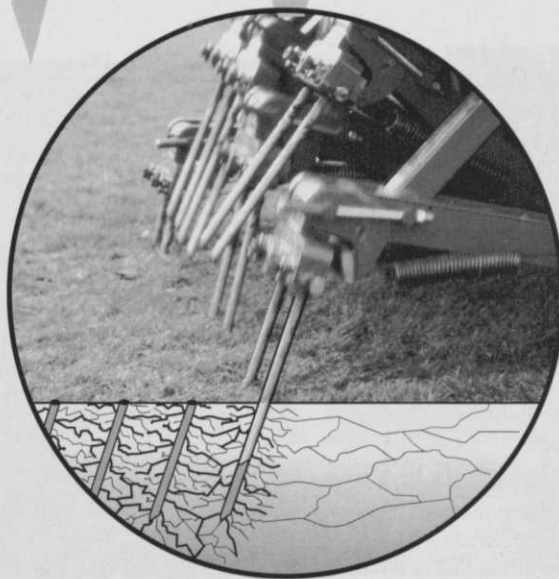
Stephen said that Rows are very good and have already demonstrated alternatives to him including Ransomes new lightweight fairway mower. They have competition in the area, with other makes, and the club is well aware that there are other options, however satisfaction with the capital and running costs as well as with the quality of cut and ability of the Ransomes Hydraulic 5 means that it has an advantage when it comes to replacing the current machine.

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