

Hugh Tilley takes a look at brush cutters and hedge trimmers.

There are always many areas around a golf course which need trimming but cannot be mown with conventional mowers. The standard machines for tidying up such areas is a strimmer or brushcutter, however these are not ideal for bunker edges and many greenkeepers have tried alternatives to edging shears such as motorised edgers and reciprocating cutters.

The conventional power edger has the disadvantage of not being sufficiently light or manoeuvrable for bunker work, especially as the edge is seldom flat or level. Other major problems are that sand destroys cutting edges rapidly and there is a requirement for a neat tidy finish.

For mowing banks the usual tool is the hover, or air cushion

mower, while for hedge trimming there are a range of machines from tractor mounted units to electric hand power tools, but the more usual option is a two stroke engine hedgetrimmer as this gives versatility and flexibility. As these are used only once or twice a year and usually only for short lengths of hedge around the clubhouse, where wear isn't a problem but neglect may be. For anyone with greater length, especially of boundary hedge, the simple and cost effective answer

seems to be to hire a contractor.

Most clubs carry "spare" small engine machines, this usually reflects past experience of unreliability. Many people look on these machines as they look on a Kleenex - use it and throw it away. One or two seasons is not unusual as the lifespan of either a brushcutter or air cushion mower, but there are differences between models and the engine fitted as well as the use and abuse they get. Greenkeepers generally look after their kit con-

siderably better than local authorities and contractors.

When it comes to air cushion mowers the JLO motor is almost exclusively used as experience suggests that it lasts longer and provides greater power for its weight.

The main differences between strimmer, brushcutter and clearing saw are the head, and of necessity, the size of the motor. There is some interchangeability between heads except on the smallest and cheapest models. Most greenkeepers use the trimmer head mainly with motors of between 30-45cc capacity. Under powering is an expensive economy, but large machines are tiring to use and control.

The strimmer or string trimmer uses monofilament line to cut vegetation, however, there are other types of head which use nylon or similar dense plastic blades, these should have similar attributes of

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not being destroyed when they contact stone, concrete or steel. Neither should trimmers be as devastating should they come in contact with the trunks of trees, or tree guards, however, this "friendliness" is something of a myth and caution is needed when close to obstructions – in other words a loosening of the throttle finger is still required. Most machines have alternative heads and blades available to allow them to cut heavier vegetation. A steel blade is more efficient for cutting grass, making the machine in effect a rotary mower, but to get height accuracy and safety it may need a special guard plus skid or dome fitted under the centre of the blade. Such skids may have height adjustment. For cutting small trees and dense undergrowth or grass the clearing saw comes with greater engine power and an ability to operate slasher and saw type blades.

The dust hazard around bunkers and often elsewhere on a golf course is a very real one, and this probably accounts for the early demise of most of these small power tools – it does not do a lot of good for the operator either! There is often acceptance that these and hover mowers do not last more than a season or two, thus there are many attractions to using a different form of cutter, one which does not rely on a fast impact with the grass to cut it. This applies particularly to bunker edges as, of necessity, these require the trimmer to operate virtually in the vertical position – try this with a brushcutter and you get grass, debris and dust thrown everywhere.

The manoeuvrability of the hover or air cushion mower makes them virtually the only tool for steep banks, however, standing on the bank is often not easy or even possible – although shoes with spikes or studs help.

A common practice is to tie a rope to the handle and dangle the machine down the bank while standing at the top – a somewhat dubious practice in terms of safety.

Hedge trimmers while normally seen as single purpose tools are also available as attachments for the knapsack type of brushcutter,



Dixon & Holliday Hover Hood

and this may be more cost effective when there is relatively little hedge to trim.

Recently, long reach hedge trimmers have become available and these are a real saver when it comes to trimming very high hedges. Hedge trimming does not require a great deal of power, which is just as well as having to a manhandle machine with a heavy power unit would soon tire the operator.

The Dixon & Holliday knapsack brushcutter and hover hood at Cranleigh School in Surrey

Grounds manager Peter Woodhead saw the D & H knapsack brushcutter/hedge trimmer advertised and considered that it looked right. The 700 pupil public school has a 9 hole course as well as considerable lengths of high Leylandii hedge. Safety was the prime consideration in purchase, with the hoverhood attachment enabling gardens supervisor and greenkeeper John Pope to cut his greens and tee banks with greater control and less fatigue. Previously the school had cut these banks using the hover mower on a length of rope method, a practice which Peter commented did not stand up to

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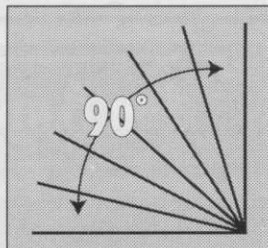
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risk assessment under the health and safety audit now necessary. Cutting tall hedges in the past had required steps and trestles, but the D & H long reach hedgetrimmer had removed the need for these and more than halved the time taken to cut the hedges, and because the operator always keeps his feet firmly on the ground the job has become significantly safer with less risk of accident - to man, machine or hedge.

Commenting on the machine itself John said that he has found it easy on the back, although he as not used for longer than three or four hours at a stretch - others have used it for a full working day and say they are far less tired at the end than when working with conventional power tools. He said that it is easy to use and reliable and changing heads is only a few minutes work.

Ahresty and other machines at Manor House Golf Club at Castle Combe

A recent acquisition to the Manor House machinery fleet is the Ahresty from Bob Andrews, this is described in the brochure as a "new type of brushcutter". It uses

a relatively slowly rotating blade which cuts against a star shaped fixed blade so giving a better cut while reducing the danger of debris, sand and bunker edge being ejected. The design of the blades is such that there is little danger of cutting into the actual edge. Course Manager Paul Bishop first saw the machine at Windsor and then had it demonstrated on several of his bunkers by Handy Garden Machinery of Swindon last autumn. He was satisfied that it would do the job, just cutting grass without damaging the edges and thus the club bought it. He admitted that as yet it has not had a full season's use but to-date it has worked well, cutting only grass, and he sees no reason to regret the purchase. He commented that "it does a very nice job". However the club is retaining its Allen Reciprocator.

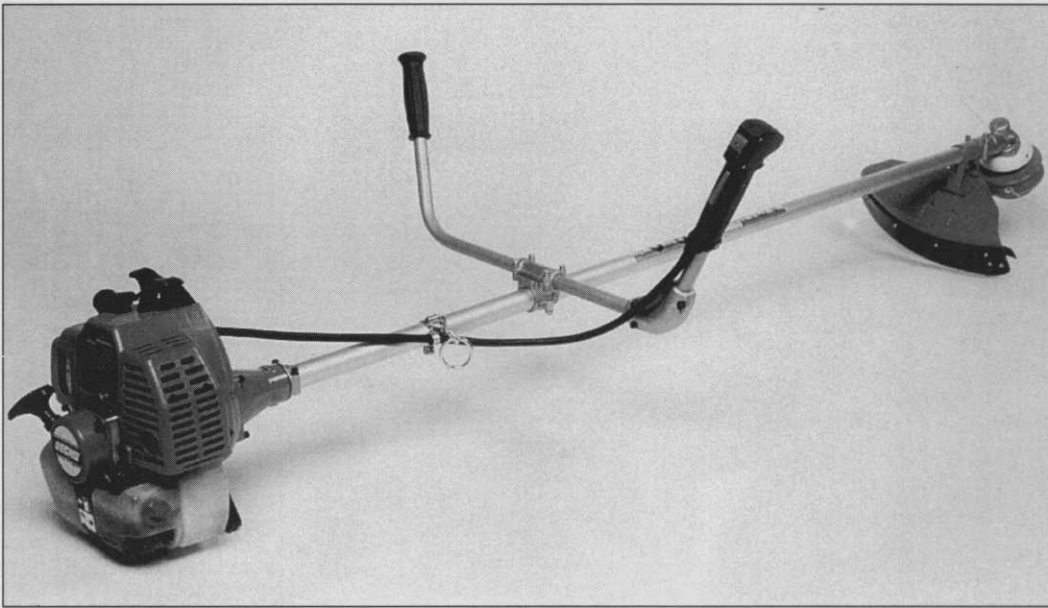
For bank mowing the club uses Flymo air cushion mowers and an Allen, however, Paul specified all as "professional" with JLO engines which he considers the only one suitable for intensive professional use and likely to last two or three seasons. Having some commonality between all



Paul Bishop, Course Manager at Manor House Golf Club, with Bob Andrews' Ahresty

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the machines, air cushion and trimmers is expected to allow him to stock, interchange and/or cannibalise parts so extending life and reducing overall cost.

For trimming around trees and other areas where mowers cannot go the club has two E P Barrus Lawnflite SS2590s with Kawasaki motors and an Allen Pro 43 with a 41.5cc Zenoah motor. However Paul does use the chemical Touchdown to reduce the workload, he commented that it was

also good arboricultural practice to have a vegetation free area around each tree. Various types of trimmer head have been tried, unfortunately not all are interchangeable between differing makes or models, but Paul said that his preference is for manual line adjustment where each line can be adjusted independently rather than the automatic or central release systems as in his experience if you snag the line it breaks off at the drum and then

with no line exposed it cannot pull out by centrifugal force. thus you have to dismantle the unit to get more string out.

Allen Echo trimmers at Marlborough Golf Club

Two machines do all the work of bank and bunker trimming as well as hedge and sundry cutting at Marlborough. Danny Dobie, Head Greenkeeper, manages to make these machines last for about three seasons, but he

admitted that they do look after them and use the heavy duty machine for the heavy work. They have had very little trouble and apart from regular replacement of plugs little had been needed in terms of maintenance. Danny did comment that using good clean two stroke mix at the right strength was vital. He also tends to replace rather than repair as parts and labour can often exceed the cost of new. The club has very limited hedge to trim, and what they have is soft privet, so the smaller machine is used regularly with either line or blade to cut it.

Stihl FS220 Brushcutters at Wanstead Golf Club - N London

Course Manager, Peter Dawson's machinery fleet at Wanstead, includes two Stihl brushcutters and a HS61 hedgecutter as well

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Stihl brushcutter at work

as a chainsaw and two blowers from the same maker and two Flymo GT2 air cushion mowers. Life expectancy for the brushcutters is about four years, however they are not expected to edge bunker banks or cut large amounts of bank for which there are specific tools. In fact, not having found a really satisfactory means of trimming edges, these are still cut, about once a month, using traditional hand edging shears. Peter also sprays around his trees with a long acting herbicide so avoiding the need to trim these areas. Thus most of the trimmer work is tidying up path edges and around posts and fences.

The trimmer heads are of the two string type with a screw release for manually extending the line. The Stihl machinery has all proved extremely reliable only requiring spark plug and filter cleaning or replacement. Peter expressed himself perfectly satisfied with the performance of the Flymos – both are 21 inch professional machines with the JLO engine, but he accepts that theirs is a short life span by virtue of their use.

Husqvarna Brushcutters – Exeter Golf & Country Club

Exeter is exceptionally well organised in using its brushcutters, it has four machines of which the oldest is about five years old, and the policy is to change one every other year – thus giving a life expectancy of up to eight years.

Head Greenkeeper is John Parr and he said that the club is very disciplined in its use of the machines. For a start it has a full time mechanic and a spare machine so that he is able to maintain the machines on a regular basis and keep all in A1 condition. John commented that previously brushcutters at Exeter had short lives and less reliability, however he is happy that this is in the past, and that the current machines will have a long and virtually trouble free life.

Possibly another reason for this change is the disciplined system of use, John sends two people out with two machines when trimming round the course, they work a two hour shift when they are relieved by two other greenkeepers with the extra machine.

All four machines are fitted with monofilament two line heads with manual (screw lock) striking advance. Very little work



is carried out with a blade – perhaps only 1% in total. The machines are used around trees and on tee banks and similar, but not for bunker edges for which hand edging shears are used exclusively – Exeter buy two sets a year and consider this a cheap investment.

Outside bunkers and on other banks air cushion and hover mowers are used, all three machines using the professional rated JLO engine. Cutting these banks is a monthly task for one man and one machine. However, there are also a few other areas within the Golf and Country Club jurisdiction which have to be hand mown. The club has a limited length of hedge to cut.

Allen Power Reciprocators at Chippenham Golf Club.

Chris Sealey at Chippenham uses the Reciprocator for trimming his bunker edges, approximately

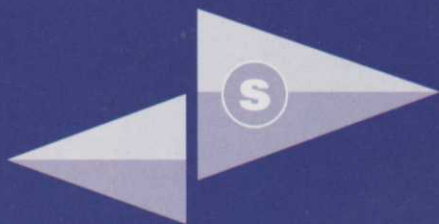
monthly. This machine is a purpose made tool which has two star shaped blades one of which reciprocates to give it a shearing action.

The unit is three or four years old and has further life ahead of it. The motor is a 22.5cc Zenoah which has proved itself reliable and of sufficient power. The blades are normally moved around to present new cutting edges every few holes, there are four positions, and once all four sectors are blunt the blades are removed and sharpened.

Chris reckons to replace these cutters annually – at a cost of about £30.

“What I like about the machine,” Chris said, “is that it gives a definite and very clean cut.”

For general trimming the club has two Allen Zenoah brushcutters and its banks are cut with Allen JLO engined hover mowers.



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