

HORSES FOR COURSES

The new golf course at Newbury Race Course is destined to be a success if the effort put in by its Head Greenkeeper and the rest of the staff is anything to go by.

Mark Anderson, Head Greenkeeper of Newbury Race Course Golf Club, has more reason than most to feel he was standing in the wrong queue when it came to handing out the easy lives. He doesn't let it get him down though, despite being one of the busiest greenkeepers in the country on one of the most problematic golf courses.

Busiest? That's quite a claim especially as the industry is not exactly renowned for its shirkers.

But how many greenkeepers can claim the following roles:

(1) Head Greenkeeper (2) He helped design six of the holes; (3) Licensee of the bar with name above the door – he had to go before a magistrate; (4) Barman; (5) Occasional chef doing everything from bacon butties to full roast dinners; (6) A Sparsholt College student on NVQ Level 3; (7) Handicap Secretary (8) Assistant Race Day Manager for the Race Course. Eight jobs!

Fortunately no-one's yet asked him to ride a horse but no doubt if they did he'd be in there mixing it with Willie Carson and Frankie Dettori coming up the final furlong.

"You've got to be adaptable," he says by way of explanation, although he admits he does take it to the extreme a little. "I'll always try something. If I can't do

it I'll find out that I can't and if I can it's another string to my bow."

Most problematic golf course? Another big claim but how many people can say they've got gun emplacements and even American tanks buried under their course as there are rumoured to be at Newbury.

"The 6th hole is on a dumping ground used by the US army. They stripped off layers of granite bedding and sleepers and deposited them all over Berkshire but most of it is still here. I believe there might even be a few tanks buried below the 6th green."

This does not just provide some unusual contouring but causes some major problems for the greenkeeping staff.

"Concrete posts are now beginning to come through. You don't know they're there until you've hit them with a machine because they're just under the grass. I put in a new bunker on the 3rd and we came across five feet long concrete posts just half an inch under the surface. All you can do is dig them out."

If that were not enough there is a gun emplacement under the 6th green.

"It's six to seven inches below the surface of the green but about three feet deep. We found that when we vertidraind for the first time, the back of the tractor started to lift off the ground.

"In the middle of the 5th fairway we have an area of hard core which is about a metre thick and two inches under the surface of

'We



Mark with some of the concrete blocks which have been removed from the course

the fairway which causes us a few drainage problems.

“What we’ve had to do is strip the surface and try to make channels by chiselling it out to give the water somewhere to run,” said Mark, who is a former finalist in the Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

If that weren’t enough there are other problems with trying to put drainage in on the 6th because according to archeologists it is an ancient Saxon burial ground. So they have to get approval before they can do anything.

“In the middle of the course there are another two gun emplacements and areas where they used to empty their cinder bins which are still complete inert and we can’t grow a thing – it’s pure clinker.”

In his disarming way – pardon the pun – Mark describes the

PRESENTING THE POWERFUL NEW REELMASTER SERIES.



also get deer, big time...'

problems thus, "It has certainly created a challenge which is sometimes enjoyable sometime not."

These are just some of the problems the course has but being in the middle of one of the country's better known race-courses brings other problems which would bring a tear to a glass eye.

"On National Hunt days the racegoers are allowed into the middle of the course where 12 of the holes are and they use the mounds around the greens to get a better view. We do fence off the greens but the horse racing world is the same as the golf world and fences are there to be climbed over not gone round.

"We get voluntary aeration when the ladies march over the greens in their high heels. Fortunately we don't have too many problems with horses escaping and running over the course

because they are usually in full flight and take a direct route across the green. They don't stand and do 'Riverdance' on the green.

"The knacker's van goes around the inside of the track with the horses and has a tendency to drive up the bankings on the side of the greens in a five tonne truck to get a better view if a horse goes down.

"The day after a race meeting the first thing we do is walk round and check the damage."

What else does Mark, and his team of four, have to put up with. Well...

"We also get deer, big time, and have had to put an electric fence around the 11th tees. We have a huge rabbit population and people who come three times a week pick up between 20 and 40 rabbits a time. It's not even denting the population."

If Mark has any benefits it is

that he works well with his immediate boss Dave Davey, the Works and Facilities Manager/ Golf Centre Manager, who has been extremely supportive in working a limited budget to the full.

It has meant Mark picking up the sort of wheeler and dealer skills which should earn him the title of Newbury's Arfur Daley.

"Most of our equipment is second hand and I've acquired it all for the grand total of £32,000. It's been fun and I've had a lot of help from Dave, who has had to OK the bills."

"At the moment we have between 10 and 15,000 rounds a year of which pay and play is around 8,000. I'd love to get that up to 25-30,000. My ambition is to suffer from compaction through play - it's also the ambition of my bosses and their accountants!"

"My ambition is to become the

Machinery list

Jacobsen Greensking IV
Jacobsen Turf Cat with Flail Deck
Holder C500
Ransomes Hydraulic 5 Gang Mowers
Ford HST 1520 Compact tractor (Bought new)
Allen National (Bought new)
Cushman with Top dresser
Ransomes Auto Surtees (2)
Sorrell Roller
Four Inch Greens Slitter
Flymos (2)
Wheeled Strimmer
Hand Strimmer
Scott's Fertiliser Distributer

top dog in my trade. Not the all seeing all knowing type but to get to the stage that I know the job and can go anywhere and make an improvement to a course -

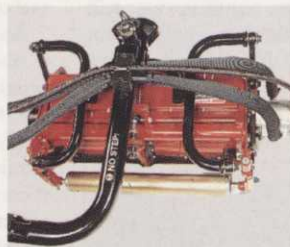
SO DEDICATED, THEY EARN THEIR STRIPES EVERYTIME.



Whatever the season, whatever the weather, this greenkeeper cuts a fine swathe through thick, uneven turf to produce the perfect fairway.

For the new Reelmaster fairway mowers boast many new, innovative features resulting in a cut like never before.

Rugged, powerful and durable, they have the lightest of touches. Their new L-I-N-K-S™ system of floating linkage and individual lift arm dampers hug the turf to get into dips and hollows for a close, all-over cut with no "bobbing", even at speeds in excess of 7mph.



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Quiet in operation thanks to Toro's advanced noise reduction, the powerful 38hp and 42hp diesel engines will help these machines reach inclines other mowers can't.

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Bringing perfection to play.



Mark surrounded by his team

leave my mark.

"I want a Golf Club to be proud to have me rather than just be seen as a necessity – an asset to the club."

Mark's Spring Turf Maintenance Programme

Our spring maintenance is normally a continuation of our build up from winter. We start moving from the more physical maintenance – trying to put in drainage and doing construction – into the

realms of fertilisation to build up the grass for the coming season – girding its loins so to speak.

We give it a little bit of a kick with another application of winter feed 5-5-15 around mid March before getting into the realms of solid tining because the greens as so young – I wouldn't hollow tine yet.

We vertidrain with the Shattermaster last autumn we will hopefully solid tine again about April with an initial heavy dress-

ing of 80/20 top dressing. The fertiliser regime is all the way through the growing period with the teaspoon method keeping the grass fed but always on the want.

Not putting down full applications but putting down part applications but not leaving it too stressed that it is beginning to suffer. It needs to be wanting to put down roots to glean nutrients out of the soil.

Being high content sand greens it obviously leeches away rather quickly so that's another reason we do little and often. If we did apply large amounts of fertiliser it would only be leached away and it can be a very costly exercise.

The grass species which I use on the greens are fescues and bents are grasses which are associated with poor fertility and to encourage those types of grasses I want to keep them wanting rather than fat cat fed.

I change my fertilisers regime yearly as using the same over a period of years leads to problems. I'm not a great believer in straight fertilisers – sulphates of iron, sulphates of ammonias because I believe that restricts bacterial growth through the root zone.

Applications of organics through spraying Turfmaster Agrocrop etc.

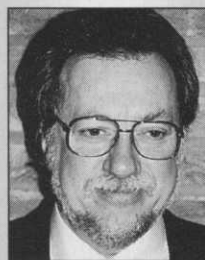
We do have to be careful with fertilisers, specialised chemicals, selected weed killer and fungicide worm control and wetting agents because it can affect the horses.

Our watering is from a bore hole. We handwater but hopefully if we make enough money I'll have a water system within the next couple of years. We've got water beside each of the greens and we lay out hoses and manual sprinklers.



Hard at work removing turf

I THOUGHT BTME 96 WAS THE BEST YET BECAUSE:



"Everybody you could possibly have wanted to see was at Harrogate during the week."
– David Ward, Royal Porthcawl GC