

Onward and upward to the year 2000

John Deere and Co are the latest company to sign up as BIGGA Golden Key Sponsors and as Scott MacCallum discovered the greenkeeping industry can only benefit from the company's increasing involvement.



My wife is becoming worried about me. Ever since joining BIGGA 18 months ago I have become a machinery anorak.

Whenever we travel anywhere I scour the landscape for tractors, triples, even combine harvesters and, ever keen to display my new found knowledge, I inform her of

the name of the manufacturer and, if I'm really on form, the model. A name she is becoming more and more conversant with, admittedly with a degree of reluctance, is John Deere.

It is my aim that she will, in



Alec McKee abroad one of his machines with Ivan Miller, Graham Williams and Nick Ashman looking on.

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time, become so familiar with the distinctive green and yellow livery that she can point out machines I miss. My chances of success are good as the number of John Deere machines both in the fields and on the golf courses is going to increase significantly over the next four years.

That's not just my opinion, it's the stated aim of UK Managing Director, Alec McKee, who said at the recent dinner to commemorate 30 years of trading in Britain and ten years in the grounds care business, that the company ambition was to be number one in the UK by the year 2000.

It is a statement which should send shivers down the backs of competitors because John Deere and Co is a massive company with a history of patient and successful progression. The statement of intent also came just weeks after the company had signed up as the latest BIGGA Golden Key sponsor.

Speaking a week later at the company's Langar base, near Nottingham, Alec put some flesh on the bones of the statement and explained how they would go about achieving such a goal.

"When we started in Britain 10 years ago we only had four grounds care products, now we have a portfolio of 61 including the recently launched aeration equipment," explained Alec. The company is also the market leader when it comes to children's model tractors having sold 1700 last year, each boasting the same livery as the grown up versions.

"We strive constantly to improve service and keep ahead of expectations. There is no mystery to how we achieve our success. It's down to hard work and a desire to meet customers' needs."

With that he answered a ringing telephone on a nearby desk and took a message. It took all of a minute but it demonstrated how the man at the head of the team can, by flexibility and a willingness to deal with any task, lead from the front when it comes to the smooth running of a company.

So who was John Deere, the man who inspired this mammoth multi national company to such great heights and who gave the industry one of its most famous names?

John Deere was born in Vermont, US, in 1808 and became a highly regarded blacksmith thanks to the quality of his workmanship. He developed a plough using steel made in Great Britain and in 1846 the first slab of cast plough steel ever rolled in the United States was made for John Deere and shipped from Pittsburgh to Moline. Ten years later he was producing 1,000 ploughs a year. "I will never put my name on a

plough that does not have in it the best that is in me," was his vow and that has been carried forward by his company to this day.

To be exposed to the computerisation of the John Deere company is to be given an insight into just what can be achieved when the implementation of computers is planned at the very beginning and there is no well meaning, but ill conceived decision to change course or computer system.

Run from a mainframe in the United States every John Deere plant in the world is tied into the same system and everyone has access to the same information – even the John Deere dealers.

"All product information is put on our computer – the Service Communications System – to provide an encyclopaedia of information on every product produced by the company over the last 30 years," explained Product Specialist, Ivan Miller.

"If a fault is reported or some-

son's knowledge. It is all shared," said Ivan.

Other benefits from the system are that information can be relayed to dealers instantly by the "News Flash" service.

That came into its own recently when a Gator was stolen from a dealership. Information of the theft was instantly sent to all other dealers and the culprit was caught when he turned up at another dealer to enquire about the value of a Gator.

The parts department is equally high tech with the self proclaimed aims of providing market leadership in parts support, minimising customer down time and promoting sales.

"Our role is as an emergency parts department with the main European department in Bruchsal in Germany," explained Distribution Manager, Antony Scott.

"We hold 34,000 different parts in Langar and around £5 million work of stock at any one time. In

"Parts are held in stock for machines which go out of production for a minimum of 15 years but if there is still a demand we will continue to produce the parts."

With what averages at \$1 million a day invested in research and development John Deere prides itself on the quality of its product and spares no effort in ensuring its excellence.

The company hosts an annual Feed Back Fortnight at its US Headquarters in Moline, Illinois, where recently six greenkeepers from Britain met with colleagues from around the world to pass opinion on John Deere designed prototypes so that their views could be gathered and incorporated into the production models.

British customers and potential customers also are encouraged to visit Langar to see round the plant and become more acquainted with product.



Richard Charleton, Scotland and the North Sales Manager, with his trailer

one discovers something about a machine of particular interest it is logged on the computer using predetermined code words, to enable it to be filed accurately, and an answer is sent out from a service manager which is also logged permanently on the computer. Then, if anyone else discovers the same fault, they can check on the computer and they will find all the information they could possibly want to solve it," said Ivan.

By way of emphasising the point he logs on to a particular machine and one element of it and every fault ever reported, no matter how insignificant, was displayed on the screen together with what should be done to rectify it.

The added benefit of such a system is that trends can quickly be identified and action taken and that no one person has a monopoly of information as it is available to everyone.

"If we're out in the field we can have access to all this information just by a laptop and a modem and diagnose faults immediately and you are not reliant on one per-

total there are 150,000 different parts to fit all products but 90% of sales comes from 5% of the parts – that amounts to about 7,500.

"Approximately 99% of all orders can be dealt with here and in Germany and even if it has to come from the States this takes under 72 hours."

A dedicated delivery service of 12 vehicles – six leaving from Langar feeding into the others in other parts of the country – ensures next day delivery with a cut off point of 6pm the night before.

"In reality because of overnight delivery many orders arrive by late the same evening and all make it by 9am.

"If an order comes in a dealer knows the availability immediately and the delivery time and if there are nine items available from the UK and one from Germany, this will be dispatched separately so there is no time lost."

Even that system is not quick enough for some customers, some of whom have been known to fly in by helicopter, landing at the neighbouring air field.

"The UK operation has a total staff of 96 and the Commercial and Consumer Equipment division has nine – agriculture still takes 88% of the total business," explained Graham Williams, Divisional Manager Commercial and Consumer Equipment.

"We have four territory Sales Managers Richard Charleton in Scotland and the North; James Morley, West and Ireland; Richard Johnson, East and Philip Tong, South.

"Howard Storey is the new Golf and Turf Product Specialist in Europe having previously been in the West and Ireland.

"Ivan Miller is the Product Specialist who works with Nick Ashman, the Area Service Manager while Tony Smith takes the orders," said Graham.

It is a tightly knit team, each dedicated to the success of the company and it would be a safe bet that every effort will be made to reaching the Year 2000 goal and John Deere will become even more firmly established as one of our car journey conversation topics.