



When Ransomes introduced its E-Plex all-electric greens mower in 1994, greenkeepers had to adapt to a new way of thinking and a new way of working. Instead of relying on the internal combustion engine and hydraulic pumps to provide motive and cutting power, they had to get used to batteries, electric motors and the strange sensation of using a virtually silent machine to cut their greens. It was a learning experience in more ways than one, as two of the first users in Britain discovered...

Graham Wissett admits to being somewhat apprehensive when his new E-Plex greens mower was delivered to Lydney Golf Club in June 1995.

Although he had arranged a long demonstration of the machine and had ensured that Ransomes' dealer, R S Bird Ltd, was able to provide the necessary back-up service, Graham still felt that he was stepping into the unknown.

"That feeling did not last long," he now says. "Once you get used to the lack of engine noise, vibration and exhaust fumes, the E-Plex is just like any other greens mower, only it's better and less costly to own."

Founded in 1927, Lydney Golf Club is a nine hole parkland course located on the western bank of the river Severn midway between Gloucester and Chepstow. Following his appointment as head greenkeeper in 1994, Graham had set about compiling a list of new machines to replace the ageing equipment on the course.

A new greens mower was a high priority, yet Graham had a specific requirement. "I work pretty much on my own, so I needed something that was quick and simple to maintain," he explained. "Even with nine holes, there's a lot of work to get through each day and I want to be out on the course not back in the shed. I took one look at the E-Plex and could see that it would take very little looking after."

Although it took time to per-



Thinking ELECTRIC

suade the club's committee to order the E-Plex, Graham's initial reasoning has been totally vindicated. The machine has cut weekly servicing and maintenance time by half compared with the club's previous diesel-engined mower.

Yet precious time is not the only saving being achieved by Graham Wissett with his E-Plex. "Running costs are minimal," he pointed out. "I need no diesel fuel, no engine or hydraulic oil and no filters. All the E-Plex consumes is off-peak electricity and distilled water. I estimate that the club is saving around £600 a year on consumables alone. Even if the batteries need replacing after three years, we'll still be more than £1,000 in pocket."

In its first season at the club, the E-Plex managed to cut 27 greens before the batteries needed to be recharged. The average size of the greens is 450 sq yards (375 sq metres).

In 1996, groomers were fitted to the cutting units which placed extra demand on the batteries. "Yet, I'm still able to cut 19 greens with power to spare," commented Graham. "The machine has proved extremely reliable, it produces a very good finish and there are no worries about oil or diesel spills. Both the club and I are totally convinced we made the right decision and we would not go back to an ordinary greens mower now."

Brandhall Golf Club was the first local authority course in Eng-

land to buy a Ransomes E-Plex greens mower.

Owned, managed and maintained by Sandwell MBC, the attractive 18-hole course is laid out on hilly, undulating parkland close to the M5 motorway, approximately 5 miles west of Birmingham city centre. The urban location makes Brandhall a very popular course, attracting close to 50,000 rounds of golf a year.

Apart from being an E-Plex pioneer, Brandhall golf club has the rare distinction of being looked after consecutively by three head greenkeepers from the same family for the past 50 years.

In 1947, Doug Underhill was appointed to the position, remaining for 34 years. He was



followed by son Ian, who held the post for six years before becoming contracts manager with Sandwell MBC's DSO division. Ian was succeeded by his brother, Paul, who has been Brandhall's head greenkeeper for the past 10 years.

The decision to purchase the E-Plex was made jointly by all involved with the council's grounds care contracts, as Ian Underhill explained: "We looked firstly for simplicity of use and maintenance. Here, the E-Plex scored top marks. We then considered the environmental aspects which are of major importance to the borough. With no engine, no oil and no exhaust, it was obvious that the machine would be kinder to the environment than other mowers."

Before placing the order, an E-Plex was loaned to Brandhall golf club for two weeks' assessment. "We don't buy any new machine



The E-Plex's batteries are checked daily by Paul Underhill, Head Greenkeeper at Brandhall Golf Club

without a thorough test," pointed out Ian. "It did not take the greenkeepers long to get used to the E-Plex and they were keen to have the mower. Our mind was made up by the confidence of

local Ransomes' dealer, E T Breakwell, who said they would swap the E-Plex for a diesel greens mower if we did not like it after 12 months use."

A year on, Sandwell MBC has

no intention of taking up the offer and head greenkeeper, Paul Underhill, says the mower has been troublefree since it was delivered in April 1996. "It was a bit of a culture shock at first, but

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304

'It is put on charge overnight and the mower is ready to go without delay the next morning'

we quickly appreciated the absence of noise and the low maintenance requirements. One small drawback is the lack of power steering, but this is only really noticeable at very slow forward speeds."

A critical factor in extracting maximum life from the batteries is setting the cylinders correctly to the bottom blades, says Paul. "Too tight and the drag creates excessive battery drain. We check them daily so they barely touch, enabling all 18 holes to be cut on one charge. This is a good result on our sloping ground."

Realising that the groomers take additional power to drive, Paul uses them on a maximum of nine holes in a day, grooming the other nine holes the following day.

"We chose the E-Plex principally for its simplicity and reliability," commented Paul. "A year on, the facts speak for themselves. Daily maintenance involves simply greasing the cutting units and checking the batteries. It is then put on charge overnight and the mower is ready to go without delay the next morning."



Graham Wissett of Lydney Golf Club: "We would not go back to an ordinary mower now"

During 1996, the machine clocked up 225 hours without a single visit to the DSO workshop, much to the delight of manager, Les Parkes.

"Apart from the obvious environmental benefits, the machine has proved it can make significant savings in maintenance time and running costs," concluded Ian Underhill. "I believe other clubs need to take a serious look at the mower. If it can do it for us, it can do it for them."



Ian Underhill (left), Contracts Manager with Sandwell MBC, discusses course maintenance with his brother, Paul, Head Greenkeeper at Brandhall Golf Club

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102