

**Why setting up your own workshop at your club could be the best move you'll make, writes ROLAND TAYLOR.**

**T**he transition of golf from a relatively exclusive sport to one that is now enjoyed by increasing numbers has, for most clubs led to a complete appraisal of course management.

All the media hype the game now receives has meant players are seeking ever higher standards. This places pressure on course managers and greenkeepers to meet these requirements.

The combination of this and the number of golfers using the courses has created a situation where keeping equipment in tip top condition and working is of paramount importance.

As a result, more clubs are now taking the decision to set up their own service department. While each club has its reasons for deciding this action, a number of external influences also play a major part.

Over recent years we have seen the demise of many professional outdoor power equipment specialist service departments.

This in turn has placed greater pressure on those remaining. Also, manufacturers and suppliers have increased their distributors' areas. While one is sure that every effort is made to provide service back-up, often available resources can be severely stretched, especially at the height of the mowing season.

For a greenkeeper with a machine down and a club tournament in the offing, time is of the essence. In this situation those clubs with in-house facilities can deal with the problem quickly and efficiently and have the equipment back in operation with the minimum loss of time.

One major aspect that could have an important bearing on the decision to install workshop facilities is the Health & Safety Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations.

Under section 6 Maintenance it states the following:

1. Every employer shall ensure that work equipment is maintained in an efficient state, working order and good repair
2. Every employer shall ensure that



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where any machinery has a maintenance log it is kept up to date

In addition, the regulations cover routine and planned preventive maintenance

Another factor that could influence the decision to go for a workshop is the size and range of machinery the club operates. With what is available in today's market it is easy to have a fleet valued well into six figures and more. In these cases there is every justification to insure this investment is maintained to the highest of standards.

Setting up a workshop facility is a big step, so where does one start? First the management has to be convinced of the viability of the exercise and the expense is justified.

Presentation is all important and on laying out the reasons there are a number of areas that need to be covered. It should be remembered that this is not a short term investment, so many of the costs can be spread over a period of years and the equipment can be depreciated against profit.

As part of the case, the cost of

maintaining the fleet needs to be analysed.

Invoices for the last five years will supply much of this information. As a very rough guide when predicting future expenditure the hourly rate charged by specialists is between £30 and £40 per hour, depending on the location.

The objectives also need to be set out and these should include:

- Keeping equipment working with minimum of downtime.
- Maintaining machinery in tip top and safe condition. (re Health & Safety)
- Taking care of the investment. Well-maintained machinery should command a higher price when it comes to being sold.
- Better management of maintenance costs.
- Having greater control on day-to-day course management.

These are just some suggestions of areas to cover. In addition each course manager or greenkeeper will have their reasons and requirements for putting forward the proposal.

Getting a workshop operational will also need to be included in the plan. A location will be

required. It is not just a question of setting-up in an old shed or barn. An area within the existing machinery storage facility could be suitable or a purpose built building might be necessary. Where ever it is sited there are some basic requirements if one is to get achieve the maximum benefit. These include concrete floor, plenty of light, heating, good ventilation, weather proof, security; easy access for all machinery and a hard surface area outside for cleaning. It does not have to be a massive structure, just big enough to take the largest machine in the fleet. There should be with enough additional space to work in comfortably plus space for benches, grinders and other workshop equipment.

## Equipment

Initially there are some essential pieces of equipment that will be needed.

Apart from wall benches, the installation of a hydraulic bench is highly recommended. It eliminates lifting and thus reduces the chances of back injury as well as making for easier access which in

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turn increases efficiency. In addition it makes for a better working environment since there is nothing worse than having to crawl round on cold concrete floor under a machine.

A blade grinder is another essential. Cleanliness is all important, especially where engines and hydraulics are concerned so a washing unit for components should be on the shopping list. For cleaning machines before they come into the workshop a pressure washer is ideal and there are plenty of models available. All these can be bought second-hand so it is worth keeping a look-out in trade journals. There are plenty of other items that will eventually be required such as a welder, drills and equipment to test an engine's electronics.

One important area is the need for specific tools for one particular machine. All the suppliers will have a list of these. They make the job easier and therefore faster to complete.

As far as actual spanners and

other tools are concerned, generally a service fitter will have a set. In cases where these have to be supplied it needs to be a comprehensive range should be bought.

It now comes to finding the right person to run your maintenance and service workshops and how much he is likely to want to be paid. This will depend how qualified he is, as a rough guide a top man can at present earn between £7 and £10 per hour.

There are a number of colleges including Evesham and Merrist Wood that run excellent outdoor power equipment service courses. It would be worth contacting one of the when looking for a service fitter. Such courses should also be considered if you are thinking of training a member of staff to look

after the machinery.

On the question of training, assistance can be sought from the manufacturers and suppliers of the equipment, and especially the engines, you operate, regarding service courses, repair and replacement parts manuals. A majority will be able to provide this form of support and back-up.

Setting up a workshop from scratch can be a relatively expensive operation so it is worth con-

sidering any possible way of helping to off set the costs. One of these could be a joint venture with any neighbouring golf courses.

With the ever increasing pressure Course Managers and greenkeepers find themselves under, having an in-house workshop is of major benefit and certainly worth considering if you have the machinery to warrant the investment.



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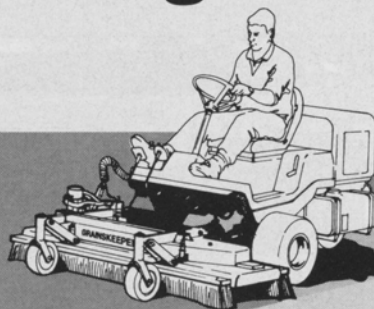
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