

Compact and bijou

Hugh Tilley looks at the range of compact tractor which now faces the prospective customer and speaks with the people who use them.

With an excellent power to weight ratio and both hydraulics and power take-off, compact tractors are ideal for many essential operations. Equipped with turf or low pressure tyres, most have four wheel drive making them very sure footed and able to be used for both tractive and hydraulic lift and pto work.

Recent changes have altered the marketing of several makes of compact tractor, notably Shibaura and Iseki.

Marketing agreements have been made for Iseki with Jacobsen – in place of Massey Ferguson and for Shibaura with Ransomes. The recent Ransomes announcement simply states that that company will be bringing in a range of seven tractors – from 18 to 45hp in corporate style and colours.

For trailer work compact tractors offer greater capacity and load hauling ability than turf maintenance vehicles (TMV) such as the Cushman, while the virtual standardisation of their hydraulic lift (category I) and pto means that they offer exceptional flexibility to use with other makes or models. Actually several speeds may be offered for the pto – so it will pay to check what speed your machinery

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requires, remembering that forward speed and engine speed will co-relate.

Furthermore front end loaders are available so that most can be used for lifting and loading in a way that no TMV can. Some models are better for loader work than others, in particular for the output of the hydraulic pump

and the strengths of their construction.

Experience suggests that on many courses the compact tractor is also used as a run-around. Cabs, once scoffed as "soft", are becoming more popular and widespread although there are still those who say that their tractors are mainly used in fine weather

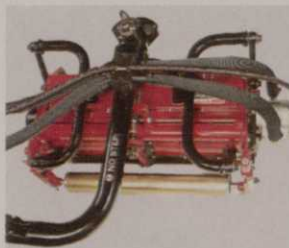
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(ie for mowing rough or fairway) so a cab is superfluous. ROPS, or Roll Over Protection, or frames are a minimum legal requirement.

Few smaller tractors have air conditioning, but most with cabs do have heating.

Most manufacturers offer a range of transmissions, and usually these include a hydrostatic drive which may be more ideal for loader work. There are many variations in transmission ratios and many models will offer a 'shuttle' gear which gives fast and easy direction changes. Deep aeration – such as with a Verti-drain is a frequent requirement, and places several specific requirements on the tractor, typically, sufficient low ratio or creeper gears, and enough front weight, but the latest developments in deep aerators with higher gearing mean that specific "creep" ratios may not be needed. Where there is limited turning space such as at the edges of greens or tees a good turning circle or easy to operate gear shift may be another essential requirement – however beware of the dangers of scuffing.

Because hydrostatics is such an integral part of most compact tractors the majority also use it for power steering – from the manufacturing point of view hydrostatic steering is more flexible as there is no need for mechanical connection from steering wheel to drag link. From the operators point of view there is less effort needed and little kick back – but some maintenance may be needed. Hydrostatic steering can be abused.

John Deere Tractors at Puckrup Hall Golf Club, at Tewkesbury

This 18 hole course is about five years old, mainly flat but with considerable tree planting and the Head Greenkeeper is Trevor Williams. He used past experience to suggest the club buy John Deere tractors from Frank Sutton at Raglan, and now with five years use he is totally satisfied with the choice. Trevor's past experience has included Ford, Kubota and others.

The club has three John Deere tractors, a 38hp JD 1070 now with 1727 hours on its clock and two 33hp JD 955s – clocking 905 and 1986 hours respectively. JD 1070s are no longer available. The higher hour 955 is equipped with a front end loader and a mid-mounted mower thus it has a considerable work load. The 1070 is mostly used for verti-draining and for operating a five gang mechanical mower set on fairways, as well as for trailer work.

One of the first comments that First Assistant Peter Rack, made was that all three tractors always start – first time, every time, without heaters. Another of his likes was the roominess of the operator platform (particularly on the 1070) with all the controls to hand. Access was particularly good he commented. None of the tractors have a specific driver – any of the five greenkeeping staff are expected to be able to operate any machine. Oil changes and similar routine servicing is carried out by in-house, as is some larger scale work, however none of the JDs have needed anything other than routine work – the only non-usual item on the service sheet has been with one of the 955s which needed a new hydraulic pipe as the old chafed through – this was covered by warranty. The club is meticulous over its servicing and oil changes, preferring to undertake them early rather than leaving them past their due date.

Trevor said his policy was to get the right sized tractor for its use, he commented that expecting a smaller tractor, for instance, to operate the verti-drain was asking for problems, with steering and control as well as by



Keith Weston, Course Manager, Kenilworth GC and their Iseki 537

demanding too much from the hydraulics and power output. All three tractors have 4WD but this is seldom needed on the Puckrup Hall course. Hydraulic lift has proved to be more than adequate in terms of lift capacity.

The lower hour JD 955 has a three gang wrap-around fairway mower fitted and this has made it effectively a one use machine – Trevor said that he would expect this to last for at least ten years, whereas he is looking to replace the other two machines within the next two years. The criteria for replacement is "before the value drops" – or more exactly while the tractor is in good order, clean and with a good resale potential.

Mounting and demounting the loader is exceptionally easy and quick and it was demonstrated to Greenkeeper International, and although this demo was on concrete it demonstrated the 70A loader to be one of the best systems ever, and one which looked particularly stable without needing extra stands or the removal of pins or stands. Peter commented that not only was the loader quick to fit but it was also a very fast loader to use, with quick acting hydraulics and the hydrostatic transmission which made for rapid forward/reverse operation. Fitting the 60 in. mid-mounted deck was little more difficult, Trevor estimated it as a four minute job. In this form the tractor is used to cut between the 15,000 trees planted on the course – a considerable task, and one which demands some dexterity.

Certainly Trevor was confident that the John Deeres had been his best choice and he foresaw replacement as being from the same supplier.

Iseki Tractors at Kenilworth Golf Club

Kenilworth Golf Club is an old established club which has used a wide variety of makes of tractor in the past, nor has it tied itself to any particular dealer. The two Iseki tractors currently on the course – an 18 hole private park-



Puckrup Hall Head Greenkeeper Trevor Williams, left and First Assistant Peter Rack with their John Deere 1070

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land course – were supplied by Western Farm Machinery at Stratford-on-Avon, who happen to be Massey Ferguson dealers.

Course Manager Keith Weston said that in the past little dealer support had been needed. Later he explained that the club sent all its main machinery out for a winter service to ensure maximum reliability during the season. There were absolutely no complaints over the service provided by Western Farm.

As of writing the expectation is that local Jacobsen dealer, Abbey Mower Supplies Ltd, will become an approved Iseki dealer, and The Kenilworth Club is a committed Jacobsen user and Keith commented that if Mick's service on the Iseki is as good as has proved with other Jacobsen equipment he will be happy to go to them.

The main tractor at Kenilworth is a 37hp Iseki 537 with 4WD, cab, and mechanical transmission. It has proved to be totally reliable no breakdowns were admitted, except when it was run without coolant and this caused two oil seals to warp. The fact that this appears to be the total extent of the damage has been taken as proof of the quality of the engineering. An ex-assistant greenkeeper also managed to do some damage to the tinwork but this has not prevented the machine from functioning – again a tribute to the machine.

Bought in 1991 the 537 now shows 2565 hours on its clock as a measure of the considerable amount of work it has undertaken mostly with verti-drain, fairway gang mower and trailer. The hydraulic gang frame also takes a set of verti-cutters thus significantly adding to the tractor's duties. The creep ratios on the tractor are an essential for deep tine aeration as is the cab. Keith commented, "It gets very cold when operating for considerable lengths of time at low speeds and the operator is justified in expecting some comfort." The tractor is used with a 1.46m Verti-drain and covers all the greens and most of the fairways on the course each year.

The operator platform is particularly user friendly and devoid of clutter with all controls ready to hand. Four wheel drive is used most of the time – in particular it is seen as giving a better and surer travel with the Verti-drain.

The club also has an Iseki 4270 from the same source – and with equally as good a service record.

Lamborghini 660S at Chiselhurst Golf Club

Prime reason for selecting the Lamborghini 660S was for its excellent power to weight ratio. In fact it is not a compact tractor within the strictest terms as it is actually from the Same/Lamborghini "fruit and narrow" tractor range. This gives it an overall width which is less than many compacts while having little greater weight but considerably more power (60hp). The "fruit" specification also provides a high level of specification including a full 'Q' cab without any need to fit options. To Gary Tait, Course Manager at Chiselhurst, the narrow width was a welcome bonus.

The most applicable extra on the tractor is the loader which Gary rated as excellent, especially when it came to putting it on and off. One of the most important tasks undertaken with the tractor has been to reform several banks on the course, using bucket and grader blade, for this the tractor has been brilliant, in particular because it has a 12/12 shuttle gear box – ie 12 ratios with a single lever forward/reverse shift. Also notable is the visibility from the cab, while external operation of the hydraulic lift make fitting implements to the linkage considerably easier.

Deep aeration is a future requirement thus



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sufficient low gear ratios were considered essential, and these are part of the standard specification of the tractor.

Service support is provided by Ian Kerry Machinery – who supplied the tractor for the 1996 season. They also supply an enhanced level of service which includes a monthly visit with major services at six monthly intervals. Gary also commented that the tractor has the benefit of a three year warranty. To date no problems have been experienced.

The main occupation for the tractor, other than bucket and loader work is with a trailer and with a rotary mower on roughs in summer. Because the course is exceptionally compact and also has some quite steep banks the manoeuvrability and surefootedness of the Lamborghini 660 are ideal. Turning circle can be enhanced by steering brakes, and the tractor has both four wheel drive and four wheel braking. Turf tyres are fitted.

Gary said that when Ian Kerry Machinery knew he was in the market for a new tractor they asked to bring the 660S out on demonstration and he liked it immediately, considering it ideal for the course.

He also added that the club had been able to get an excellent deal. There was no hesitation in recommending the tractor to any greenkeeper, and Gary expects it to be good for at least a ten year life on the course.

Kubota L4200 at North Wiltshire Golf Club

The Kubota at North Wilts is one of the new 'Grandel' models and was bought from Handy's at Swindon in a deal which traded in two tractors including an aged MF 135 with loader. Course Manager, John Boorman, said that the old tractors had become unreliable and that the new tractor would be expected to undertake more work.

John said that he had been given a set sum with which to purchase the tractor and the deal had to be made within this constricton. He added that the dealer would have liked to sell him a smaller model, however the club has an Amazone high lift Groundkeeper and expects to buy a deep tine aerator and thus needed the extra weight, power, and a low gear. Also on the wish list was a back hoe, and for this the L4200 would also be ideal, however, John is not holding his breath until he gets one.

Although the tractor was taxed for the road, it will not be used on the road, partly because insurance (for roadwork) would not be cost effective. Fortunately off-road tracks allow the tractor with trailer to be used to collect compost from a local farm.

The machine will also be used for cutting the rough. With the course built on the edge of a hill effective four wheel drive is essential.

Another important consideration with the Kubota was the fact that it is small and light enough to use on greens when necessary.

It is now one year old and it has worked for 250 hours. Of course these are engine

hours – derived, like all tractor hours, from engine revolutions rather than from time. There were some criticisms of the tractor, one of the assistant greenkeepers is a large lad, he finds the cab a little small and has some problems finding some of the controls which are below seat level. There have also been some cab door catch problems and a hydraulic pipe which was perished had to be

replaced – under warranty, but overall John said he is more than happy with the tractor and he rated Handy Garden Machinery "as one of the better dealers". The club also has another Kubota. John said that the club now has a five year plan in place and this should allow for a better and more regular turnover of machinery.

He expected the Kubota to stay on the course for ten years.

Below: Gary Tait, Course Manager at Chiselhurst with their Lamborghini.

Bottom: North Wiltshire's Kubota L4200

