

This time last year the rumour mill was churning out all sorts of spicy gossip about who was likely to purchase Ransomes and what might the future hold for a company whose name had been synonymous with grass cutting for over 200 years. Now, 12 months on, these questions have been answered, with Ransomes, now a part of the mighty Textron company, whose portfolio also includes Jacobsen, Iseki and EZ-GO, as well as Cessna aircraft and Bell Helicopters.

The deal eventually went through, just after BTME this year and the man who has been charged with running the new enlarged company is Peter Wilson who had previously been at the helm of Ransomes. As President of Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products Worldwide, Peter will be the man responsible for plotting a successful course for this "super tanker" of a company on a global basis.

Just back from a trip to Tokyo, and between twice monthly trips to the States, Peter took time out to talk with Greenkeeper International Editor, Scott MacCallum, about Textron Turf Care and Speciality Products, what might be in store for the company and the industry in general over the next few years...



The Future is Orange...  
and Green

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**SMac:** Can you give some insight into why Textron decided to purchase Ransomes when they already owned a similar company in Jacobsen?

**PW:** It was clear that Textron had to decide for themselves whether they really wanted to be in this business and I think this was the answer. They felt that there was no point in being small, they would either expand into it and take a commanding position or decide that there was no point in being there.

Together Ransomes and Jacobsen business has a turnover of about \$650 million and when you add EZ-GO golf carts and the industrial business to that grouping we have around \$800 million so you can see the size of the company now.

It was also a very good complimentary fit. Yes, we've got all these products which overlap but, if you look at sales of Jacobsen products, something like 80% comes from greens, fairways and rotary mowers while at Ransomes probably 70% came from utility vehicles, aeration equipment and rotaries. Even in rotaries there is a segmental difference so when you see it in those terms it is a very good fit. The overlap is not nearly as encompassing as it would at first appear.

**SMac:** With regard to research and development will you be continuing down the path of individual product lines for both green and orange, which would suggest some doubling up, or will you be moving green in one direction and orange in another?

**PW:** Certainly in the short term we have made a commitment that we will be retaining our individual brand. We're unlike our competitors who tend to go under one name as we have Jacobsen, Ransomes, Cushman, Ryan and Bobcat to name only a few. Now I can see a time coming when we start to think about developing the next generation of Textron products and that's where we will look at taking the best of the orange and the best of the green and come up with a totally new product. Whether we look at dual branding is something we will have to wait and see. It depends upon how the market reacts because I don't believe we can force our opinions on the market.

There will be people who particularly like the Ransomes name, or

the Jacobsen name. I don't think we can ride roughshod over customer preferences. We are bringing together Jacobsen with a 76 year history and Ransomes with a history of over 200 years. You don't throw that history, that experience and that customer loyalty away. Textron paid a lot of money for some of those things so we've got to hold on to it.

**SMac:** There must have been, and no doubt still are, teething troubles. In effect you've taken two large jigsaws, thrown all the pieces in the air, let them land on the floor and are now trying to make one even bigger jigsaw.

**PW:** When you bring together two well established organisations like Jacobsen and Ransomes there are obviously going to be differences in culture, style and attitude and we are trying to bring all these things together... and do it very quickly. But I think it's gone remarkably well.

The deal was done at the beginning of February this year, and I didn't know I was going to be involved until it was signed and sealed and Textron asked us to stay on.

But you always have thoughts. It took a long time to bring the deal to fruition and I couldn't had gone through that time without actively thinking what I would do if I were pulling it all together. So I can hardly say I started on day one with a clean piece of paper.

**SMac:** With Textron's European base now at the old Ransomes base in Ipswich how have the Kettering-based Jacobsen staff dealt with the situation?

**PW:** I always think that if you have to take tough decisions you must do so quickly and with some degree of compassion for those people whose lives are going to be affected. There were some very clear cut decisions to make. For example we have a major manufacturing facility here at Ipswich which was going to be one of the key advantages for Textron in the acquisition. It did not make sense to have a separate distribution centre at Kettering, particular when we are six or seven miles from the port of Felixstowe where all the product comes into. So it was a very easy decision that Ipswich would be the main manufacturing and distribution point for the whole of Europe.

Similarly in Germany we had two facilities for our sales organisations and we've pulled that back to one while in France we still haven't made up our minds although we will have a central location so again there will be rationalisation.

Again in the United States there were similar decisions being made. We did not need two sales organisations or two offices so we decided to go to Rasine near Chicago, very largely because communications are easier.

Some of these decisions were fairly straightforward.

Then we had to make more fundamental decisions. How do we take the business forward? On that we decided we would create a concept of Centres of Excellence. For example in the US the Centre of Excellence for cylinder products will be Charlotte, for rotary products it is Johnson Creek, while for vehicles and aeration it is Lincoln. The Rasine facility will produce cutting units and be the major machine shop.

Here at Ipswich we will concentrate on both cylinder and rotary products while we will continue to import aeration and vehicle products from the US as the volume doesn't justify setting up new production lines.

**SMac:** Both Jacobsen and Ransomes had large dealer networks, what decisions are being taken with regard to them?

**PW:** We are going to be quite demanding. Our distributor has a right to expect a level of service from us and for us to value him as an independent business man but he must become totally self sufficient to be able to serve the market in which they are in. That means that they must be financially strong and have succession plans in place.

We are going to grow so our dealers will not only have sufficient resources but also the ambition to grow to the same extent and speed as us.

In some areas it will move quicker than others because those decisions will be easier to make than others.

In some cases we will continue with dealers who handle specific products and others who will carry the whole line of products.

There is no time table or set agenda but we do want to get to the strongest distribution set up as quickly as we can.

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**Peter Wilson**

President, Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products

**SMac:** Have you been surprised, as much of the industry has been, that Ransomes has not been swallowed up in the deal and, with you at the head, Ransomes and not Jacobsen is seen as the dominant partner?

**PW:** I don't see it as a case of Ransomes domination or Jacobsen domination. The Textron management looked at it and asked "How are we going to manage this company?" It just so happens that they decided to have myself as President and Paul Hollingworth as Vice President. I think they looked at the results we'd achieved at Ransomes over the past three years and decided that we could make money out of this business and would be a good team to head up the business. It would have been silly to get rid of that experience.

What we've done is try to produce a good team and we've looked at people in both organisations and tried to mould them together.

If you look at the geographical spread of the business there are parts where Ransomes were stronger and others where Jacobsen were stronger. In the UK Ransomes had a very strong position not only in the golf market but also in the commercial grass cutting side so it tends to give the impression that Ransomes are dominant but in other parts of the world it is slightly different.

**SMac:** How would you persuade the average BIGGA member that having two of the biggest names in the industry under one roof is a good thing?

**PW:** Well, I think that he is going to have more choice. With these two companies coming together it means that we are not knocking each other but pulling our resources and combining them to be able to give BIGGA members a better product and a better service.

Around 1200 greenkeepers a year visit us at Ipswich and I think now we will be in a better position to listen and have greater resources to respond. It's unrealistic to ask a greenkeeper what he wants, we're supposed to be the experts in terms of machinery, but we have to listen to the trends and translate these into the sort of equipment that is going to play a part for the greenkeeper.

**SMac:** What do you think the industry is going to be like in five or ten years time?

**PW:** Ever since I joined Ransomes there was talk in the machinery side that there were too many players and everyone wondered where the rationalisation would take place. The coming together of Ransomes and Jacobsen is really an indication that there has been some consolidation and I believe we will see more.

The reason for this is that there has been a slow down in the growth of golf worldwide, although it is still forecast to grow, albeit at a slower pace.

In terms of trends, environmental issues are going to continue to gain in importance while people are going to continue to demand a higher level of presentation.

**SMac:** On a personal note how does your new job differ from your old one?

**PW:** In 1993 when I joined Ransomes it was very much a rescue situation for the first 12 to 18 months. Having then gained a degree of stability it was a question of how to grow the company and although we dramatically improved the financial base we were always a small company playing against the big boys.

The change is to move from that to being part of Textron which is a huge multi industry company which is where I really started when I worked for BTR.

At Ransomes we weren't short on ideas or ambitions and we knew where we wanted to take the company but the difference then was that we didn't have the immediate resources.

That doesn't apply now. If we can put forward a good solid case we do now have the financial backing to do something sooner rather than later.

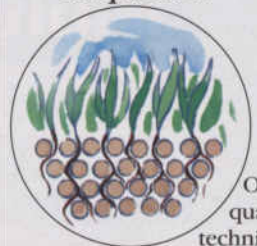
I'd given some thought to whether I wanted to stay in this industry or move on but a lot of people had shown a lot of loyalty through some difficult times and worked extremely hard to bring success back to Ransomes so I felt that if the right opportunity came I'd stay. I felt I owed it to these people to try to give them some continuity and at the end of the day it's a nice industry to work in and is a lot of fun.



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