

# Golf traffic management:



## ON THE RIGHT LINES

by MARGARET STEWART

**W**ith an average of 40,000 rounds per year now not an unusual total, golf clubs are basking in an unprecedented boom. The combination of more and more people taking early retirement, the greatly increased proportion of women players, and golf's appeal as a social focus as well as a game have meant it is riding high on a wave of popularity.

Good news for clubs, developers and suppliers, but – in a way – bad news for greenkeepers who are fighting a rearguard action against far more wear and tear than they had ever anticipated on their courses.

Most courses were originally planned around the knowledge that winter's bad weather would make the surfaces unplayable, and so give the ground a well-earned rest, while giving green-

keepers a chance to repair the season's damage.

Now, however, with year-round playing, the ground has little chance of recover, making soil compaction and pathway maintenance two issues which have taken the science of ground maintenance some time to address.

Another problem – partly due to the increased number of retired players, who wish to conserve their energy, and those who are less fit – is that many golfers are now using power caddies.

"Three out of four players use power caddies on our hilly course," says David Weston, of Enmore Golf Course near Bridgwater in Somerset.

"The combination of the battery's extra weight and the power caddy's third wheel meant that soil compaction was becoming a real problem for us.

"It was particularly noticeable on the approaches to the greens where players had to go between bunkers. We were finding that the soil was compacted to the extent that the ball's behaviour was being affected, as well of course as the ground's slope being altered from its original angle.

"We wanted to find a permanent way of reminding players to keep off these areas. Marking paint was not really the answer for this situation: the grass is cut so often there that it would have been far too time-consuming to re-mark every time we mowed."

David dealt with the situation by using one of the latest – and most ingenious – marking devices to indicate trolleys paths which avoid the edges of the greens as well as keeping players from running their caddies between the bunkers.

Developed in France, Plifix – the Bowcom Carrot – is a durable polypropylene screw set with white fibres. Once fixed into the ground and filled with natural granules, the fibres are cut off in the normal mowing operation: a permanent bright white spot is left, clearly marking areas to be avoided.

"After just a few weeks of using the Carrots, we could see that the soil was loosening up and the turf was reviving to a good springy quality," says David.

"Although they were puzzled at first, our players have responded to the Carrots and many have commented on the improved playing surface on the approach to the greens.

"Another useful benefit is the saving of the greenkeepers' time and effort, since they can simply mow, seed or scarify over the top

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of the Carrots, without having to remove and replace them as they used to do sticks."

So much for dealing with soil compaction: but there are other aspects of traffic management around the golf course which demand consideration with year-round play.

Although the tees themselves can be saved by using winter tees – often artificial turf mats – the paths leading to winter tees come under concentrated use due to the volume of traffic making its way over the same area all day long.

In addition to winter tee paths, the wear caused by trolleys and power caddies has to be distributed as evenly as possible across the fairways, meaning that, particularly on parkland courses, greenkeepers must allow the ground a chance to recover by designating routes which can be moved each week.

Since aerosol paint sprays are

in common use to mark out 'Ground Under Repair' and other messages on the course, many greenkeepers have been using aerosols to indicate pathways to follow.

However, Course Managers on courses such as Abbeydale, Sheffield, have realised that while aerosols are ideal for short lines, or intricate marking such as lettering, there are other products which are specifically designed to mark out longer lines.

"A little lateral thought made us realise that a sports pitch line-marking machine would do the job faster and better," explains John Coleman, Abbeydale's Course Manager. "That being so, we have now bought a three-wheeled line marking machine.

"It's unique, and ideal for our purposes since the paint spray is driven by the front wheel, meaning that we can lift it up and use it like a wheelbarrow when we



need to manoeuvre round tight corners.

"Apart from that, it is light and stable with a sturdy chassis, so as well as marking long straight lines last, its pneumatic tyres are not adding to our problems. Another plus for us is that the paint comes in sealed buckets, so doesn't slop out when we are going up or down slopes.

"The saving in time and effort, the cash savings we are making by using a water-based line-marking paint, plus the fact that it is much less painful on the greenkeepers' backs, has made this a good investment!"

The chief difficulty in managing

traffic on the golf course is a matter of finding an approach which will be clear and easy to follow, then in persuading players to respond to the request. It's not always easy to make people recognise that what they are being asked to do is for their own long-term benefit, by protecting the course.

However, it's a problem which greenkeepers must address if they are to maintain a playing surface which will meet the demands of all-weather golf: new ideas and strategies such as these will soon come to be adopted by more and more courses as golf becomes ever more popular.

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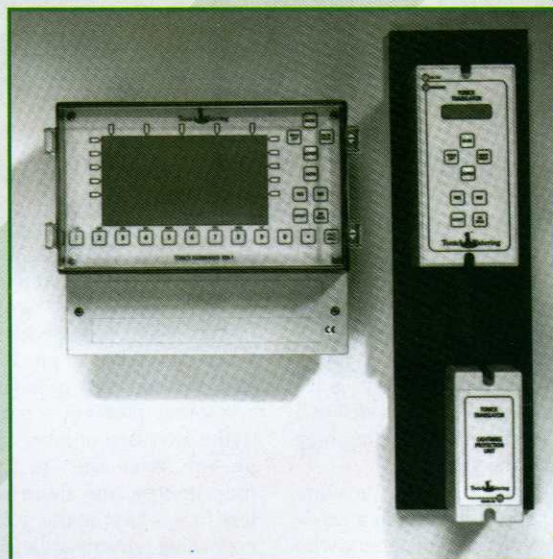
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