

**Roland Taylor looks back (but does not remember!) to the days when greenkeepers used scythes to get a quality finish on their greens.**

# Would you scythe your green?



It's dawn and the sun is just breaking through the mist that shrouds the courses. A heavy dew sparkles on the greens, it is an ideal time for mowing and the greenkeeper and his staff prepare for another day. There is no roar of an engine firing-up, just the sound of stone against metal.

The year is 1890 and any form of mechanisation for many golf courses is still a long way off. Scythes keep the grass short and early morning is the best time to use them. The wet grass stands well to the blade. Mowing with a scythe required a great deal of skill, but in the right hands a reasonable surface could be achieved, although it was far from the immaculate playing surfaces of today.

Budding's patent gives us an idea of what it looked like - "circular sears, bare places and equalities con-

tinued for several days". The operation was slow - it took three men a day to cut an acre and then the clipping had to be brushed up and the green rolled. There were also long delays as golfers played the green.

For some, a salvation was available - but it was expensive. Although it was mainly the rich who played golf, money for maintaining the course was in many cases not readily available. Numerous companies had adopted Budding's cylinder mower design both here in the UK and in the USA, so there were plenty of mowers to choose from. The one favoured by most of the greenkeeping fraternity was the 'Greens Silens Messor Deluxe'. Built in Leeds, this mower had what was then a unique feature - it was self-sharpening. When the blades became dulled you simply reversed the cylinder drive

and they were sharpened - backlapping had arrived!

Although we do not know how many cuts per yard this machine produced, the finish was far superior to scything, and raking-up was eliminated. An 18" model cost £7.10s (£285 at today's prices) so it was relatively expensive.

Progress in the development of professional mowers was slow. This is probably due to the limited number of machines a manufacturer was likely to sell. An essay written by a greenkeeper in a 1929 competition illustrates the conservatism that was prevalent at the time. He states that he prefers the Greens Silens Messor and would not use a motor mower on his greens. Another entrant lists among his equipment the Ransomes Certes. This had been introduced in 1924, specifically for mowing fine

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turf, and was to continue in production for 34 years.

Ways to increase productivity were being sought and a Mr Worthington of Shawnee, USA patented a power unit for taking three hand greens mowers (the forerunner to the triple mower). Known as the "Overgreen" it enabled one man to mow 18 greens in a day, but the machine was cumbersome and far from easy to operate. There was no way of lifting the mowers, so each half of the green had to be mown one way. The big benefit was that it released labour for other jobs.

Although the first commercial petrol powered mower had been introduced in the early 1900's, another three decades passed before the first fine turf machine for greens was introduced. Even then, greenkeepers were reluctant to change. Many were worried about the weight, and the possibility of oil or petrol being spilt. The Lloyds Pegasus was a lightweight

machine with a one horsepower engine that provided power only to the cutting cylinder. At normal walking pace it was said to produce a 105 cuts per yard.

Ransomes quickly followed with their Certes and, in 1952, introduced the Auto Certes, which was self-propelled.

Over in the United States, things were also happening and in 1970, Ransomes imported the Hann Tournament Triplex which they later manufactured. At the time, it must have seemed a world apart from what had gone before. The operator rode instead of walking. Cutting greens would never be the same again.

Over the last two decades, golf has become the most important sector for the major manufacturers of professional grass cutting equipment. As a result, competition has led to a considerable amount of money being spent on research and development. The combination of this, modern engineering technology and materi-



als has taken the cylinder and bed-knife cutting principle virtually to its zenith. Two other introductions, hydraulic drive and small diesel engines have been major contributors to the development of today's machines.

While it is good to have a choice when considering new equipment, the plethora of greensmowers now available can make selecting a machine more difficult and time consuming. A look around the marketplace and reading available literature is the first step towards the final decision.



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### Pedestrian operated greensmowers

It is generally considered that this machine is still the best for getting as near to a perfect finish as possible, providing one has the labour and time available. What appears to be the modern approach is for a triple to be used to regularly mow greens, but for special events the pedestrian comes out.

A close look at the specification of most pedestrian greensmowers on the market reveals a lot of similarities. Sizes range from 18" up to 24" and engines vary only in the name on the label. In addition to quality of cut, features to look out for at a demonstration include handlebar design, control layout,

balance, straight-line tracking and noise levels. Grooming reels for removing surface stems and rotary brushes are available as an optional extra.

There is one model with a floating cutting unit that is said to be an advantage on heavy, undulating or stepped greens.

### Ride-on greens mowers

The modern greensmower is a sophisticated piece of precision equipment and there are plenty of features to look out for. Unlike the pedestrian machines, there are con-

siderable differences between the brands now available.

Initially, weight and ground pressure were cause for concern (echos of the past). Designers have addressed these problems and today's machines use the latest technology and materials to distribute the loads and keep weight to a minimum. It is worth sorting through the literature for all makes of triple greensmowers, as there have been some interesting developments in recent years.

### Mower heads

Very few greens, if any, are perfectly level, so a degree of both horizontal and vertical movement is necessary to avoid turf damage. Methods of mounting the units vary, with some manufacturers mentioning steering to avoid marking or scuffing when turning.

### Power

Every type of power source is now covered with a choice of petrol, diesel or electric. Noise level is an important factor and engine manufacturers have addressed this aspect. The results are power units that produce a higher torque at lower rpm, and as a result, both noise and vibration are reduced. Noise emission levels are worth checking out between different models.

### Ergonomics

The greensmower has got to be one of the most important pieces of

equipment on the course and, like all precision machinery, the more comfortable an operator feels and the easier it is to use, will reflect in the results. Seat positioning and adjustments, levers and pedals siting and console layouts all play their part and need to be taken into account when comparing different makes. Driving position and general layout can vary considerably. Other features that should be on the list for consideration include:

- Range of optional equipment
- Ease of interchange of attachments
- Monitoring systems, including engine and whole machine
- Safety features and early warning systems such as hydraulic oil leakages
- Maintenance and accessibility
- Availability of replacement parts and back-up service
- Operator training
- Finance packages to spread the load

### The Demonstration

While this enables one to access a machine's ability it is also an opportunity for those who will use it to find out if they feel comfortable operating it, so everyone should be involved.

### Third party endorsement

Supplier will furnish names of existing users but it should be borne in mind that they are likely to be



very satisfied customers. It is also worth doing your own thing and asking questions at shows and area meetings of the type of equipment other greenkeepers are using and its performance and reliability. I am sure you already do this.

The greens are the most focused point of every course. It is where the game is won or lost and where a greenkeeper's skills are most judged. A craftsman always buys the best and you deserve and need the best to keep ahead. Make sure you get it.

Finally, next time you fire up the latest greensmower with all its high tech spare a thought for your predecessors a 100 years ago, swinging their scythes in the early morning sunlight.

