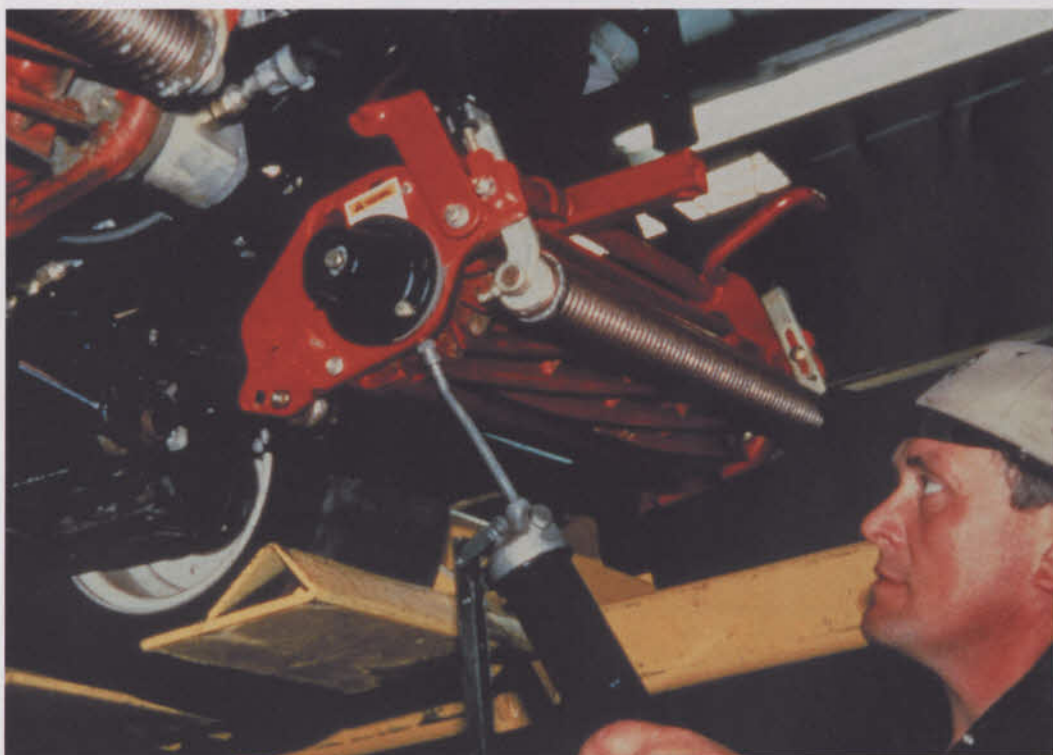




**Appointing an equipment mechanic is a trend which has been on the increase in recent years. Laurence Pithie, Director of Maintenance at American Golf investigates...**

# Nuts and bolts



The expectations as regards golf course condition and presentation have reached a level where no club can afford to have broken down equipment, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the local service engineer to put it right.

Even the average 18 hole golf club is likely to have equipment with a replacement value of at least £170,000. This has to be maintained in a responsible manner to achieve the machine's maximum life span and make certain of good investment.

The need to keep this equipment fully operational is paramount. It will operate better and more efficiently and contribute greatly to the successful management of the golf course.

# Nuts and bolts

## First steps towards appointing a golf course mechanic

When considering the appointment of a golf course mechanic, it is essential to weigh up the pros and cons involved in such an undertaking and investigate the implications.

On the plus side, the obvious benefits are that the equipment will receive regular preventative maintenance and will be serviced according to the manufacturers guidelines. Machinery will last well beyond the length of any lease term, repairs can be made almost instantly - assuming of course that the relevant parts are held in stock - reducing down-time. Last but not least, the cost of repairs will be considerably less than if charged for by the local dealer.

Naturally, there are many other hidden advantages to employing a skilled mechanic, such as innovative

## The importance of mechanics for American Golf

American Golf views the appointment of a mechanic as one of the key roles within the staffing structure. This is why one is employed at each of the 12 sites in the UK. Our parent company in the United States, the American Golf Corporation, shares our view.

The role of the equipment mechanic is defined in our Job Description as follows:

"An equipment mechanic is primarily engaged with the servicing and repairs of all golf course equipment and golf cars and, if necessary, the daily requirements on the golf course where this position is regarded as being one of a dual appointment."

The mechanic will also ensure that all equipment is maintained within the manufacturers guidelines and that it is in accordance with current safety legislation. Safety switches, guards and covers all need to be regularly checked and made good if required.

Other responsibilities include the ability to deal with hydraulic systems, cutting units, both petrol and diesel engines, welding and cylinder reel grinding.

The need for maintaining servicing schedules and maintenance records is also part of the mechanic's role as well as ordering parts as required within budgetary limitations and to approved company procedures. In some instances, the mechanic may also be involved with the maintenance of the irrigation system but another person is usually entrusted with this work.

In general, the mechanic plays a dual role on an 18 hole course and must be flexible in accommodating the needs of both equipment and golf course, whereas full-time machinery maintenance work is the order of the day on 36 hole golf courses.

It is also an advantage if the mechanic periodically operates the equipment in order to ensure satisfactory performance and to understand what is required from the perspective of an operator. This also serves as a break from routine servicing.

## Finding your mechanic

Enlisting the services of an

experienced and qualified person is not always an easy task since few mechanics are trained in this type of work. However, this is not really seen as a disadvantage since our mechanics have quickly adapted to their new environment.

Our experience is that most of the mechanics employed within American Golf have come from a background of mechanical engineering, plant hire fitting or from the motor trade, usually following an advertisement for the position in the local paper. Almost without exception, each appointed mechanic has quickly developed the necessary skills since much of the work involving engines, gear boxes, clutches and drive shafts is only a matter of different sizes.

The intricacies of maintaining and repairing moving cylinders, rotary decks and other items relative to this type of equipment have usually offered a different challenge but new skills are quickly learned and it is here that equipment vendors have played an important role.

## Training your mechanic

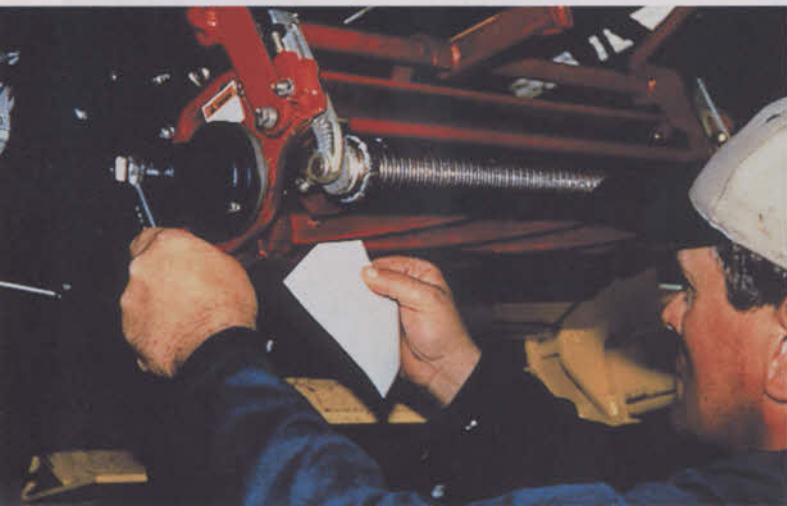
Training is an important part of American Golf's policy and many of our mechanics have benefited from a day or two spent at the local dealer's workshop, gaining first hand experience of the many problems occurring with much more frequency than usual when dealing with larger volumes of equipment.

The real benefit is that, within a short space of time, the mechanic can learn how to deal with and react to many different situations which may only arise once in a lifetime on any one course.

Companies such as Textron have also worked to create better understanding by providing several intensive training days created especially for American Golf's equipment mechanics. These were initially held at Kettering but have moved to the company's Ipswich complex where all future courses are to be run.

This type of training is viewed by American Golf as absolutely essential. It gives the mechanics an excellent opportunity to go into more detail on specific issues regarding individual machines. Experts are on hand to guide and give instruction as to the key areas to identify regarding future wear, servicing and on-going maintenance.

Aimed exclusively at small groups, training of this kind is essential as it



ideas for equipment improvements which greatly increase efficiency and productivity on the golf course. Cylinder grinding is an example of a task which is both necessary and costly but if carried out in-house can be done quickly and efficiently with minimal down-time and at a greatly reduced cost.

The only possible negative side to appointing a mechanic lies with the setting up of a workshop and the additional payroll cost. Having said this, if a mechanic is not appointed, another member of staff will still have to deal with repair work when their time could well be better spent on other maintenance work.



helps form close working relationships between club and company, with the mechanic benefiting from having a friendly contact to help with any ordering or technical queries regarding specific items.

Other aids to training are workshops manuals, parts catalogues and highly informative training videos.

These are the hidden benefits to be gained from appointing a mechanic and they help to keep the wheels in motion.

#### **In-house training**

With the building of a larger and improved workshop area at one of our clubs, we are taking the opportunity to design this area not just with all types of maintenance needs in mind but with the intention for the area to function as a training centre within American Golf.

Since this particular site is fairly centrally located, there is an opportunity to train newly recruited mechanics within the group and for an experienced mechanic or fitter to visit the centre and help with training.

American Golf see this as a further opportunity for the mechanic to work closely with the dealer. Learning is best as a two-way process and since we have a number of similar machines operating on different courses then what better way of providing feedback to the manufacturers?

The mechanic's input is vital to co-ordinate this information and pass on relevant details since many potential problems often only come to light well after the launch of a new machine.

#### **The example of St. Mellion**

St. Mellion International, which was purchased by American Golf this year, operated without the services of an in-house mechanic. Robert Brewer, course superintendent at this resort complex, was quick to hire a mechanic and this has made a significant impact on not only the improved performance of equipment, cost savings and quicker turnaround of repairs. It has also allowed other staff to concentrate on

the numerous different tasks involved in maintaining such a prestigious venue.

#### **Working with the rest of the team**

The mechanic's role at any of our clubs is to work closely with the superintendent by scheduling the timing and frequency of service work.

Involvement with the weekly work programme helps to determine when each item of equipment is being used and when it is available for servicing. Large wipe boards with a timetable format work well and help in the smooth running of each course.

Equipment breakdowns are inevitable but these can be worked into the routine depending on the degree of urgency.

Within American Golf as a whole, there is much operating similarity and one benefit of this is that as soon as a particular problem is discovered, information is rapidly disseminated to other users within the company via our voice mail system.

Networking within the group also helps us locate parts for machines which may not be standard items.

One recent example is that a mechanic found that glow plugs for a certain diesel powered mower were the same as those used in a well-known car but a fraction of the cost.

This information was passed on, with the result that all clubs using this piece of equipment have the part noted within their card index system. It is examples such as this which indicate how much time and expense a good mechanic can save a club by being resourceful and maintaining good records.

#### **The future - mechanics are essential**

The dependence on sophisticated equipment and a small but well-trained labour force is a vital element in the operation of the successful modern golf course.

Today's golfer is not just used to high standards but has plenty of playing options available.

A good mechanic is essential to achieve the necessary standard of excellence and we can expect to see more well-trained mechanics on the UK's golf courses.

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