

In motor racing, Britain's Nigel Mansell was always the ultimate perfectionist. Now, as the owner of Woodbury Park Golf and Country Club, he is applying the self-same principles...



Doing it right



Life in the fast lane? Nigel Mansell takes time out at Woodbury Park

In motor racing, Britain's Nigel Mansell was always the ultimate perfectionist. Furthermore, with 31 Grand Prix victories to his credit, few will argue that he "got it right" more often than his fellow competitors. Now, as the owner of Woodbury Park Golf and Country Club, he applies the self-same principles; his byword on course maintenance being: 'If you are going to do it, do it right, or don't bother doing it!'

There's a learning experience in that statement alone, one which is especially applicable to the golf course manager, for where machinery is concerned he must ensure that he has the right mowing equipment; allowing himself a head start in the race for superiority in golf course grooming.

To draw further from the motor racing analogy, had Mansell in his championship years enjoyed the racing cars used today by Schumacher or Hakkinen, the likelihood is that he would have won not 31 Grands Prix, but surpassed Prost's all-time record of 51 victories, for the racing car has evolved; far more sophisticated now than its counterpart of a decade or so earlier, yet surprisingly robust and infinitely more reliable. The same applies to grass cutting machinery.

So, do it right or don't bother doing it. Let's not forget that the golf game has evolved a great deal, and from early days of hickory and rams horn we've moved into boron spun fibres and space-age titanium. With this evolution, course conditions also have improved dramatically, so much so that today's level of maintenance is routinely equal to that which once was to be found only on a few very select courses.

Where to start is where smart thinking comes into play, for selecting a mower should begin by posing several questions concerning your own course conditions, your members' predilections and expectations, the type of terrain upon which you operate and the style of your greens, tees and fairways. In other words, assess the individual characteristics of your course and decide what you are trying to produce. If your members insist upon fast greens, only a mower that sits snugly upon the sward and glides effortlessly over the terrain will suffice, while if you're working with severe undulations, only light-weight machinery will meet your expectations and produce a smoother roll of the ball.

Machinery salesmen should be cultivated as a friend, indeed as your finest ally, for it is as much their responsibility to ensure that what you get is what you really want. Before assigning any order they should look thoroughly at all of your applications, knowing that if the mower doesn't deliver its promise they're unlikely to be around for a second chance.

Furthermore, a skilled salesman will look at the quality you've decided upon before applying his experience at selecting and demonstrating, weighing as carefully as you the challenge of finding a machine that, for instance, will cut wide areas of cultured turf yet still be efficient at grooming around the clubhouse, plus encircling trees and cutting banks without scalping.

Certainly a wide selection exists, with blade configurations and tournament bedknives, width of cut and thoughtful weight distribution now a matter of choice, while the



addition of turf-grooming fittings like verticutters, scientifically designed rollers, scraper rollers and guide wheels have all been introduced in recent years to make the grass cutter's task a more pleasurable one, and easier into the bargain.

Productivity has not been overlooked either, with many greenkeepers finding that wider cutting blades have not only increased their efficiency but produce a cleanness of cut that is unsurpassed. Trends in walk-behind machines have moved toward weight and weight distribution, the trend for slightly heavier machines meeting the demand for speedier and smoother greens without adding stress to the sward, while weight evenly distributed forward of the power unit removes any influence the operator might exert, while giving superior tracking. Fully

floating heads are another recent innovation, being easier to use and removing the weight variable of a fully loaded grass box.

Manoeuvrability in rough, trimming around immovable obstacles and long grass cutting is another factor that comes to the fore, thus the zero-turn machine has found an enthusiastic audience following the recent spell of unseasonably wet weather, which has tested the mettle of all grass cutters. As such galloping growth continues, those who put their trust in heavy-duty zero turn radius machines have had the last laugh.

Manufacturers today, acutely aware of labour costs and depreciation, are building many unseen and unsung benefits into their machinery which at first appear to be only a small part of the equation. If price is your main consideration, perhaps you should spare a



Woodbury Park boasts an impressive shedful of Ransomes equipment

moment to consider the inclusion today of many more sealed units, while preventative maintenance routines, the life blood of every working machine, have been made easier, in turn preventing premature failure, increasing the life of the unit and avoiding unnecessary down time. Operating comfort also is considered paramount, so noise levels are reduced by efficient dampening, controls fall more easily to hand, while access to engines and other components has become simplicity itself.

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