

**Roland Taylor looks at how best to kit out a workshop to ensure it gives you best value for money...**

The utility vehicle designed specially

# In the Shop



A mower has gone down at a critical time, the club has a major match planned for the next day, so the course has to be in pristine condition. You have contacted your local dealer's service department who said they will get someone out to you as soon as possible. It was, however, intimated that they were extremely busy, so cannot give a definite time when their man will arrive.

In such a scenario how you must wish you had the same facilities as the greenkeeper who sat next to you at the last BTME seminar. He had his own workshops and service technician to maintain and repair his equipment. He also had a lot of machinery so could justify the costs involved in setting up such an operation.

For many greenkeepers this type of full-blown operation is not a viable proposition. However, there are certain steps everyone can take to keep equipment in good working order. While not providing the opportunity for an in-house major overhaul, a regular servicing programme will contribute considerably to a smooth operation and reduce the risk of unwanted breakdowns.

To do the job properly may require some initial investment. An outside hard surface with some form of drainage is needed for cleaning down machinery. Mowers work in a hostile environment and a build-up of dust, grass clippings and mud can cause overheating of the machine's

engines and hydraulic drives. Performance and efficiency go out the window and the risk of trouble escalates very quickly. Cleaning down, has another advantage, it enables you to inspect the machine for any signs of damage or potential problems, such as fractured welds, chafing hoses, missing nuts and bolts or oil seepage.

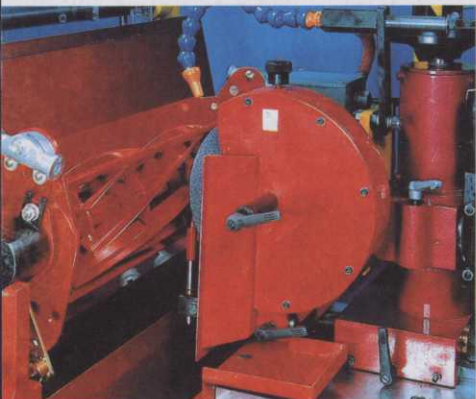
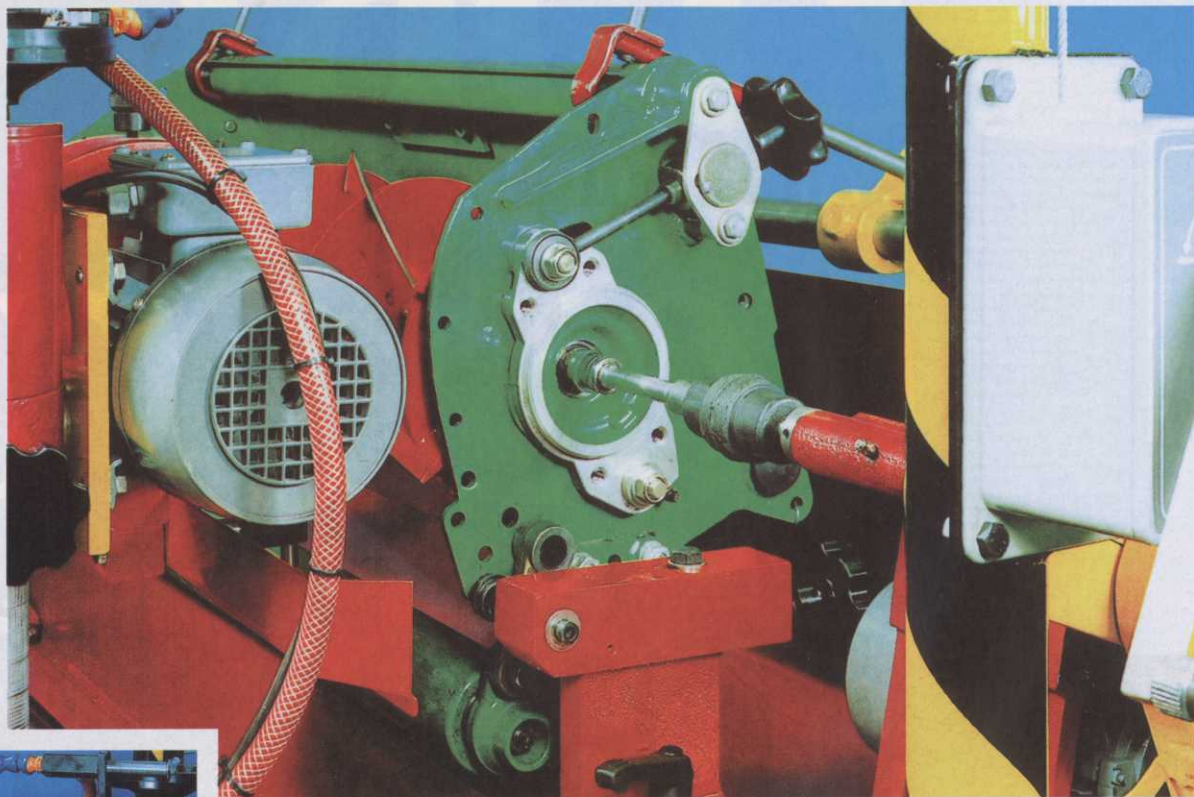
A pressure washer is ideal for carrying out the job fast, and there are plenty on the market to choose from. Electric motor, petrol and diesel models are available with prices ranging from approximately £400 up to £3500 for electrically powered, cold water versions. Petrol and diesel units are priced between £1200 - £4000.

An inside area should be specifically set-aside for carrying out maintenance, this could be a cordoned off part of the machinery store. There needs to be plenty of light and space to work round equipment. All the necessary tools and lubricants should be readily available.

Health & Safety and Fire Regulations need taking into account when setting up such a working area.

Although servicing can be carried out without one, some form of lifting workbench is worth the investment. Scrabbling around on a cold cement floor is no fun and getting to some parts of the machine will be difficult. It is far easier to

# In the shop



work on raised up equipment. The addition of a hydraulic workbench also eliminates the risk of back injury through having to lift smaller machines on to a static bench.

Other useful items are oil drainage trays, battery charger and a small compressor. When it comes to tools, having the right one to hand does help to speed up

the operation. A full set of spanners and sockets are a 'must' plus any special tools for a specific machine are well worth buying.

Naturally, keeping mowers sharp and correctly set is also part of the programme and the budget may not go to a cylinder and bottom bed grinders, so a specialist workshop has to be used.

Most modern ride-on mowers have the facility for back-lapping the cutting units. For machines where this is not available there are portable back-lappers. These are electrically-driven and the outlet drives are adjustable to suit most makes of mower. One of these will set you back between £750 to £1000 and it does mean you can quickly put a cutting edge back.

Another useful piece of equipment is a bottom blade facer. The front face of a mower's bottom blade is vulnerable to damage and wear. As a

result, the quality of the cut is affected. There are now units available that precision-grind a front edge in approximately one minute. They are priced from £299.

For those courses that have the resources, facilities and staff for an in-house cylinder and bottom blade grinder there are distinct advantages, especially relating to a machine's downtime. There are two systems to consider - spin or relief angle grinding. Each has its pros and cons, so before deciding it is worth having a demonstration. The price range will be in the region of £5250 to £11,750 depending on the model. It is worth keeping an eye out for second-hand units.

At the beginning we talked about setting up a maintenance programme. Details of each machine's requirements will be covered in the user's manual. As a rough guide the following will need carrying out:

#### Oil changes.

Cleaning or replacing air filters.

Checking hydraulic fluid levels.

Checking the tension of any chain or belt drives.

Resetting cutting units or backlapping if necessary.

Greasing where necessary.

Inspecting Hydraulic hoses for signs of leakage or chafing.

Safety guards for damage.

Plus any other requirements as laid down by the manufacturer.

Observation can avoid a lot of hassle later. By spotting a potential problem early, action can be taken to avoid a major one occurring.

Depending on how often the equipment is used will determine the servicing cycle. For mowers it will probably be once a week during the cutting season.

In addition, the engine oil and hydraulic fluid levels should be checked every time the machine is used.

Servicing can be assigned to a member of staff or the operator. Most suppliers will instruct those responsible for looking after equipment on the procedures, at the time of its delivery. For those that have full time mechanics there are manufacturers' service schools available.

Having a servicing area and operating a planned maintenance programme pays dividends. Well-maintained machinery is less likely to cause problems. It operates more cost effectively and produces a better performance, plus, when it comes to replacement, its residual value may well be higher.

From little acorns come mighty oaks - one day you might have a full in-house workshop like your neighbour at that BTME seminar.