

**Carol Dutton, herself a well known face in the industry, speaks with four women who prove that there is a place for the distaff side in what is a male dominated business**

# Twomen Top

Lynne Green

It's a well-known fact that the turf industry is a male-dominated business. However, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of women working in the industry. This is due to a variety of factors, including the growing awareness of the benefits of diversity and the increasing number of women who are pursuing careers in the industry. One of the most prominent figures in the industry is Carol Dutton, who has been a leading voice for women's rights in the industry for many years. She has spoken at numerous conferences and has written several books on the subject. Her work has inspired many women to pursue careers in the industry and has helped to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in the industry.

Despite the fact that the industry is still male-dominated, there are many women who are thriving in their careers. They are working in a variety of roles, from maintenance and groundskeeping to management and administration. They are also working in a variety of settings, from large commercial facilities to small, family-owned businesses. The success of these women is a testament to their hard work, dedication, and passion for the industry. They are proving that there is a place for women in the industry and that they can excel in a male-dominated field.



Alison Brace

Alison Brace is a young woman who is currently studying for her National Diploma in Horticulture while working at Woking Golf Club. She has had the smoothest career path so far. Although her parents wanted her to go to art school, she stuck to her guns and took her National Certificate in Horticulture at Sparsholt College while doing voluntary work at Weybrook Park Golf Club. Having shelved early plans to be a vet, Sarah, who always liked sport, was determined to work out doors, and approached a variety of sports venues for work experience. Weybrook Park accepted her, and led to her present position at Woking.

Despite Sally Doherty's triumph as Toro Student of the Year competitor last year, the professional turf industry is still a man's world.

Both BIGGA and the IOG report approximately 10 lady members each, out of a total of 6,600 greenkeepers and 4,500 groundsmen.

Saltex last year hosted over 400 companies exhibiting at Windsor, two of which gave women's contact names in the official catalogue, and this year's BTME did little better, with two of the 178 exhibitors sporting women at the helm.

What makes a woman consider entering such a traditional male bastion? How does she cope when she gets there? And are there any signs that attitudes are changing as we move towards the Millennium? I spoke to four brave females who by their very presence in the industry are defying the norm - two at the top of their respective companies, one deputy head groundskeeper, and a young student greenkeeper, to gauge their experiences.

Sarah Turner, who at 22 is the youngest of the four, and is studying for her National Diploma in Horticulture while working at Woking Golf Club, has had the smoothest career path so far. Although her parents wanted her to go to art school, she stuck to her guns and took her National Certificate in Horticulture at Sparsholt College while doing voluntary work at Weybrook Park Golf

Club. Having shelved early plans to be a vet, Sarah, who always liked sport, was determined to work out doors, and approached a variety of sports venues for work experience. Weybrook Park accepted her, and led to her present position at Woking.

Sarah's main problem on arrival at the club, was shyness. Course Manager Sandy McKechnie, who has spent 24 years in the profession, with 18 as Course Manager remembers.

"It took her six months to settle in, and she was very shy with all the men." Nevertheless, after that first year as a temporary placement, the club decided to keep her on, paying the course fees themselves Sandy, who has never worked with female staff before, now regards his latest protegee as a full member of the team.

"We would like to keep her when she has finished her course, the only problem I can see is that once she's qualified she is going to want twice the salary she is on now. I don't know if the club can afford it."

Sarah would be happy to stay. "The lads have been great. You get the odd joke but you just join in. I think a few more women are doing male dominated jobs now and as long as we're given the opportunity and are willing to do the work we'll be OK. Some of the work here is very physical and that's quite hard but you just have to cope," she said.

# Top women



Lucy Dalrymple

Alison Brace, Deputy Head Groundsperson at Brighton College, did not have such a simple start to her working life. Born an only child of office working parents, she was actively discouraged from attending agricultural college. After travelling for a year when she left school, Alison joined the Countryside Rangers which reinforced her belief that she wanted an outside job.

Alone at home, reading the local paper, while her parents were on holiday, Alison found the advertisement for a trainee groundsperson which launched her career. "There was no-one to say that I couldn't do it, so I wrote off straight away."

The job was with Brighton College, and Alison, who was laughing at herself when I spoke to her, for wearing a mohair jumper while scarring a cricket square, left her interview thinking "I can do that" and has remained ever since.

Now, six years later, and engaged on an NVQ Level 2 course in Turf Care, she insists that she has never encountered any hostility.

"I have never felt victimised, and being a woman can be an advantage. I was on a course two weeks ago, and it was the first time that I had not been the only female. If you are



Sarah Turner

the only woman present, you always get to know the lecturer. They tend to remember you and this can help your studies."

Alison admits that the job has become easier now that she has proved her worth.

"When I first started I had to work doubly hard to get the same respect as a man. In some ways, the doubt is always there. I suppose my parents have said that because I'm a girl I can't do this, and I still feel I have to prove myself."

Lucy Dalrymple, Managing Director of Arbor Eater, suffered no parental misgivings as she was born into the business. Her father was a tree surgeon who invented the original Arbor Eater wood chipping machine, and built one for himself before going into production. What is unusual is the fact that although she is the eldest of four children, Lucy's father chose her, rather than either of her two brothers, to join him in the business five years ago.

Starting in sales and progressing to the technical side, Lucy, who thinks that the key to her success is her obvious enjoyment of the job, her pride in both the Arbor Eater machines and the fact that she is able to continue the family name, admits that at first her technical knowledge and ability to diagnose faults over the phone took some customers by surprise.

"Certain types of men, who tend to be the older chaps, don't like being told by a woman, over the phone, how to fix a machine, especially if they have been trying to do it themselves for two days."

Lucy, who is not technically qualified, is certainly dedicated to both her customers and the machines.

"When the phone starts ringing, usually after 5pm people want answers quickly, and I try to avoid advising them to spend lots of money. If someone has ordered four fusible plugs, then I know that there must be a problem with the machine and I will send one of our engineers round. Our machines are like family. If you look after them, they'll look after you."

As Managing Director, since her

father's retirement last March, Lucy realises that she still has a lot to learn.

"I still have to phone Dad for advice when I don't know what to do, but I think he gets quite upset because I don't need him so much anymore."

Lucy's working history - secretarial qualifications gained after leaving school, which led to magazine production and an editorial job, before she joined an engineering company, gives only slight clues to her eventual career destination.

While co-ordinating engineering staff employed on oil rigs, she found a mistake on a technical drawing, which had escaped the attention of a group of highly qualified men.

"They had been studying the plan for some time, before I wandered over and spotted that a staircase had been drawn with the risers and treads reversed."

With her extraordinarily selective memory, which always remembers solutions to technical faults, (Lucy freely confesses that she forgets other things), and the fact that the family firm provided the opportunity to develop her innate skills, perhaps Lucy's rise to her present position is not so unlikely.

There is nothing in Lynda Green's family background or previous employment to suggest that she would become a Director of C. & P. Soilcare Ltd., but her love of machinery can be detected almost from the start.

Casting her mind back to one of her first jobs, after leaving school, Lynda remembers that the company, Lonnet Aviation, based at Ipswich Airport, was where she was deeply involved with aircraft. Later she worked for Suffolk Light Aircraft Maintenance.

"I spent hours in the aircraft hangar, doing anything and everything - stripping down aircraft fabric, putting wings on, helping to change spare parts, I couldn't keep away. Maybe flying from the age of 12 had something to do with it."

A series of administrative posts led her to the position of secretary to the Financial Director at Ransomes



Lynda Green

Simms and Jeffries between 1982 and 1984, where she became fascinated with the manufacturing process, and was often found in the foundry, watching the machinery being made. In 1991, Lynda arrived at her present company as Administrator, and, due to a sublime twist of fate became a Director and Company Secretary 13 months later.

Extremely dry weather conditions during the first summer following Lynda's appointment had been bad for business, all staff were about to be made redundant, and the company was to return to its former owner, Colin Pryce.

Lynda, who had fallen in love with the Terralift, was convinced that the company was worth saving. She talked to the bank and her husband, re-mortgaged the house, and with a third person, arranged to buy shares in C & P Soilcare Ltd.

The following Autumn, the company introduced the Deep Drill, and despite a serious theft in November 1994, which robbed the company of the majority of its equipment, including spare parts, the new management team have not looked back.

When I spoke to Lynda, she was one of the few people who had enjoyed last year's wet summer, as it produced the ideal working conditions for the Terralift, which had been working non stop.

"We are expanding" she said, "like my waistline," and confided that her husband, who is very supportive, was busy designing and constructing a new version of the Terralift, which promises to be faster, easier to handle and a prototype for Terralifts of the new Millennium.

On the subject of surviving as a woman in a man's world, Lynda says she's gotten away with murder.

"Sometimes I'll surprise customers by admitting I don't know the answer, and I'll give them the number for the STRI, BIGGA or the IOG. They always accept it. It's best to be honest, and both greenkeepers and groundsmen are happy to call these numbers."

Lynda's relaxed attitude, showing a security which allows her to admit

occasional ignorance, clearly breaks down barriers which could exist between two men, who feel that personal pride is at stake. She laughs at the memory of her first solo outing with the Deep Drill on one of the courses at The Essex Golf Club.

"There was no-one else free to do the job, and rather than let them down, I asked if they would mind if I did it. I couldn't make the machine perform in straight lines, and after the first day, Nick Warren, the Courses Manager, kindly suggested a better way of lining up the machine. He was right. It was much easier and far more immediate."

It would seem, if the experiences of our four ladies are anything to go by, that there is little to stop any woman joining the industry. She should be prepared to spend most of her working life surrounded by male colleagues but can expect little or no hostility, even when she is the first female employee at her work place, or the only woman on an educational course. Enthusiasm counts for a lot, and she may find that she needs to work harder than her male equivalent at the beginning of her career to prove to others, and sometimes, more importantly, to herself, that she is capable of fulfilling her ambitions.

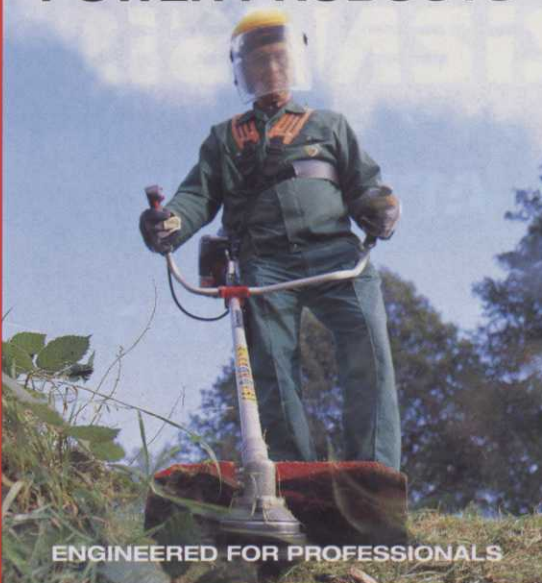
The advantages of being in the minority, appear to far outweigh the disadvantages - more attention from college lecturers, fatherly guidance from male superiors, more fun, and closer relationships with customers.

Of course, our four examples are all exceptions to the rule, and as such, almost certainly possess above average ability, force of character, and an iron will to succeed. Nevertheless it is heartening to realise that the traditional female nurturing traits have translated so well, not only to the welfare of people as customers, but also to machines and turf.

One thing is certain, if a woman is destined for a career in the fine turf industry, no matter how many wrong turns she takes, or how often she is persuaded against it, by either herself, or others, eventually she will arrive.

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