

**Redexim were the company which developed the Vertidrain and together with partners Charterhouse are making an impression on clubs all over the world. Scott MacCallum travelled to Holland to meet Redexim's President.**

# Making the earth move



I hadn't been working long in the golf business when I had the great fortune to be sitting in a caravan during The Open Championship at Turnberry in 1986 listening to Karsten Solheim describe to Sir Henry Cotton how he had invented the first Ping putter.

I really did feel in a privileged position to be able to sit and listen in to history being recounted by the very people who had helped to shape it. I got a similar feeling when I sat in an office in Zeist, Holland, listening to Ceese de Bree talk about how a friend, Arie-Jan de Ridder, and he came up with the antidote to one of the greatest problems in greenkeeping - compaction.

Ceese de Bree is the President of Redexim International Trading, the

parent company of Charterhouse, and the piece of machinery which owes its existence to the two Dutchmen was the Vertidrain.

"In Holland we suffered from a lot of compaction partly because of the low lying nature of the land and we spent a long time looking for a solution," explained Ceese.

At the time, in the early 80s, there was a great deal of cheap foreign labour in Holland and to give football pitches some relief it was not unusual to have 60-70 workers out with garden forks spiking.

"We wondered how we could replace the people with a machine and eventually realised that it might be possible to modify a cultivating machine."

Arie-Jan and one of his engineers dis-

appeared into his workshop and emerged sometime later with the very first Vertidrain, which provided a solution to a problem people had been wrestling with since the 60s.

"It was the first anti compaction machine built anywhere in the world," recalled Ceese.

Having produced a machine which could, and subsequently did, make a huge impression on the turf management world the next step was to protect the idea and maximise the potential of it. And this was where Ceese's legal training came into its own.

"I'm a farmer's son but I have been and still am a lawyer so I'm always thinking about contracts and how you should protect what you have. We founded Redexim together, patented the idea and came up with the name Vertidrain. We had originally named it the Verti Soil Drain but soon agreed on the shortened version. Verti comes from vertical action and the drain bit is obvious.

"It has become a famous name all over the world as has the act of it which has become known as vertidrain," said Ceese, which hauled me back to my school days and the conjugation of verbs - I vertidrain, you vertidrain, we vertidrain...

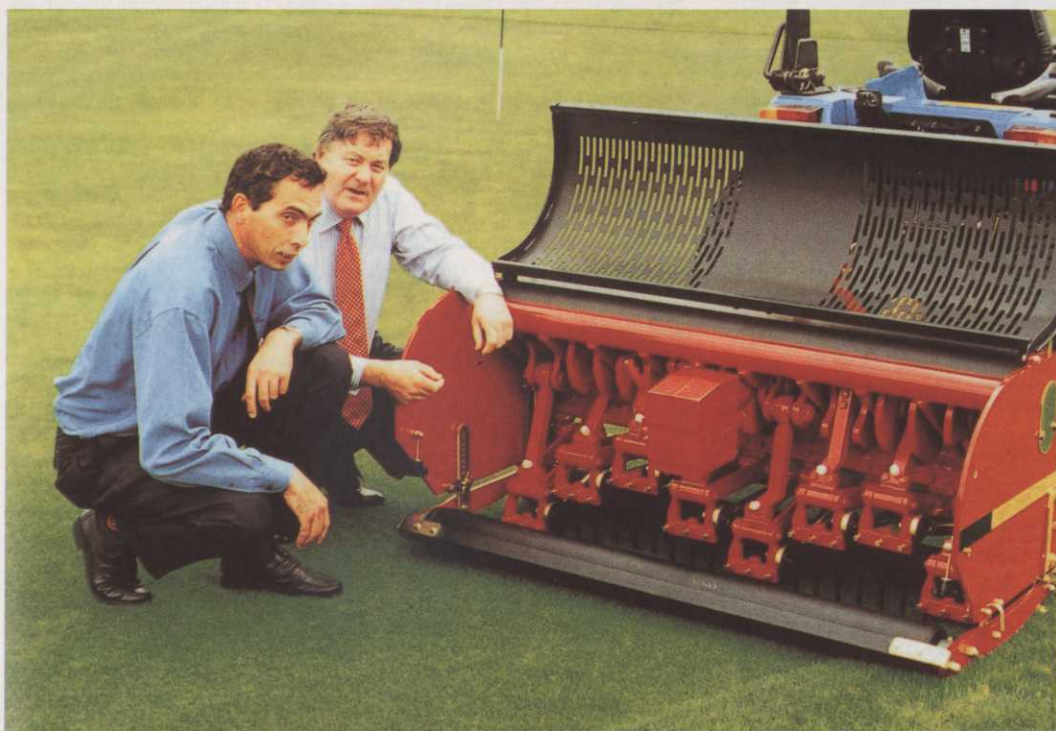
Initially the Vertidrain was seen as a tool specifically for sports fields and football pitches and it was only later that golf was seen as a potential market.

"People didn't appreciate the revolutionary nature of the Vertidrain at the beginning and part of the marketing was the education of people about its use. The first golf club to use it was Utrechts' "De Pan" Holland's equivalent to St Andrews but that was only on the fairways, not the greens."

Around this time Redexim contacted David Jenkins, of Charterhouse, with a view to enlisting the Hazlemere company to tackle the lucrative British market.

"Two people came over from

David Jenkins with Marinus Reincke examine a new piece of machinery



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Redexim and we demonstrated it at some courses in the London area. Jack McMillan, at Sunningdale, went ahead and bought one and was, to my knowledge, the first Course Manager to use a Vertidrain on his greens," said David. "I think that was one of the major breakthroughs," he added.

The Vertidrain began to sell very well but all the time improvements were being made.

The first machines were very unstable really because of the movement that was required to make holes in the ground down to a depth of 16 inches but every step the company made was carried out in a careful prudent manner.

"My philosophy was not to get too big at the beginning and take things step by step. We had to finance the prototypes and the improvements and secure patents all over the world. We do things slowly but do them well. We save money, own our own buildings and don't have to pay out to the banks," said Ceese.

He operates a flat management style which ensures costs are kept under control while at the same time giving key staff and distributors, a lot of whom have stayed with the company for many years, the flexibility to do their jobs.

Having broken into the European and British markets the next step was America and Redexim and Charterhouse jointly manned a booth at the GCSAA show while Walter Woods starred in a video highlighting the benefits of the machine.

"American superintendents are educated to university standard but our problem was that if a subject wasn't included in their list of core subjects they didn't believe it existed. We had to convince them that because they hadn't already heard about vertidrain that it wasn't something to be dismissed. It was quite an uphill battle," recalled David.

"We went out to the course and showed them it working and the physical evidence before their very eyes persuaded them."

Such was the developing relationship between Redexim and Charterhouse that a closer bond was forged in the early 90s and the benefits which have accrued from this marriage have enabled them to make a successful attack on the global market. It also led to the dual Redexim/Charterhouse logo which appears on the new BIGGA Golf Championship which they are co-sponsoring with Scotts.

"It is not so easy to explore the world on your own so together we have been able to do it much faster," explained Ceese.

To maximise this Ceese gave the



American business over to Charterhouse and in particular Marketing Director, Philip Threadgold, who has spent the last two years developing a distributor network across the length and breadth of the States.

"A lot of people said we were becoming an English company but I didn't say one word because I feel we are one company and whether it was English/Dutch or Dutch/English wasn't important.

"Likewise people wondered who was in power but my name is not important. What is important is what David is doing, what Philip is doing, what Geoffrey (Burgess, who sits on both the Charterhouse and Redexim Boards) is doing and what our engineers are doing.

"Let me stay in my office, lead a team of specialists and leave them to get on with it."

Among those specialists is Marinus Reincke, the son of the engineer with whom Arie-Jan de Ridder developed the Vertidrain and Redexim's Technical Manager.

"When we came together our first joint exercise was to design a Turf Tidy and we went to Marinus with a concept and he came up with drawings which were so detailed that we were able to take them straight to a manufacturer and say 'We want to build this,'" said David.

"From the moment we first spoke to having a running prototype was about

three months. I use this as an illustration, not because we are in the habit of rushing things, but because it shows our flexibility."

Speaking with Ceese, David, Marinus and Geoff you can sense the close bond between the two companies and the confidence that the union has brought.

"We are very good in the areas of vertidrain, seeding, top dressing and the turf tidy and there is nothing to stop us looking wider," said Geoff, the point is emphasised by both David and Marinus.

"Redexim has brought a strong financial backing as well as engineering expertise but Charterhouse has brought a range of products that has allowed Marinus to really start to look at a much wider range still," explained David.

"To my mind there was a lot of experience within Charterhouse in how to maintain golf courses particularly in the UK where the old established clubs have different soil structures to those in Holland," said Marinus, who joined Redexim in 1983 after his military service although he had worked as a contractor on a vertidrain during his school holidays.

Another long standing member of staff is Hessel Rozema. Hessel's business card carries his job title. But "Regional Manager" barely covers an area stretching from the Pacific Rim, through South

Africa and the Far East.

He has spent many years learning how to sell to the different countries and cultures within his patch and has seen compaction resulting from some unusual sources.

"In Thailand, for example, you often have a player accompanied by a caddie as well as an umbrella carrier which means you can get 12 pairs of feet with each fourball. That certainly adds to the compaction."

The future of Redexim/Charterhouse looks rosy but you won't get any outlandish predictions from the company's President.

The results of any crystal ball gazing Ceese de Bree does on behalf of Redexim is not something he publicises but he does know where his company sits in the scheme of the fine turf industry.

"We are not in the top league with the Textron's, John Deere's and the Toro's. We are at the top of the second league and we want to stay there."

As a confident statement of intent such words carry a lot of weight.

