



**BIGGA Golden Key Supporter Scotts has seen some remarkable changes over the last two years and what has emerged is an impressive new company ready to face the future**

# Great Scotts



There are very few companies in the fine turf industry whose name you would expect to be known by the public in general... but one of those is most certainly Scotts.

Go into any garden centre or DIY store and you will see the name of the world's largest horticultural company emblazoned on products designed to make your garden grow strong and healthy.

In our industry it is also a name which is becoming increasingly familiar thanks to a remarkable one-two, one which would have Prince Naseem nodding in approval.

Looking to strengthen their position in the industry just over two years ago Scotts purchased Miracle Professional, the number two company in the British market. Then, less than a year later, not content with that piece of handiwork, they went out and bought Levington Horticulture, the number one company in the market, thus creating a formidable new force in the industry. The deal was completed in December '97 and since then much work has been done to ensure best use is made of this giant major corporate entity.

And that was no easy task. Each of the three companies had a well defined and established brand image and great care and imagination had to be taken to fuse them all together, retaining the best elements of each company and ensuring that customer loyalty was retained.

Remarkably in the joining together of Miracle and Levington it meant a marriage of two of the big chemical heavyweights and rivals from recent history. A series of Dr Who-style metamorphoses started off with Miracle Professional as ICI and Levington's as Fisons. Incidentally, ICI and Fisons were both agrochemical/fertiliser companies while Scotts have always been a horticultural company.

The professional amenity side of the business has its headquarters in what was the Levington base in Ipswich which is ideally placed for the research station in the nearby village of Levington itself. The home and garden business has its headquarters in Godalming.

"When the three companies joined we discovered that we had 40 different fertilisers across the range solely for the professional business," said Dave Steward, Product Manager for Turf and Amenity.

"When we analysed them we discovered that Levington had products which were virtually identical to Miracles and that both had products designed to take on the Scotts fertiliser range."

What has been happening since is that the best bits of each have been taken from each range to produce a better product.

"One example was the Turf Tonic for which the Levington analysis was 7-0-0 and Miracle's was 8-0-0 so we took the Miracle analysis and used the Levington granule which was superior," explained Dave.

As a result the number of products in the fertiliser range is now in the 20s.

"At the end of the day you've got to give people the flexibility. Some people like to feed a little and often so you give them certain formulations while others prefer to feed

once a year with slow release formulations," explained Dr Bob Daniels, Technical Services Director.

Having mentioned the number of fertilisers Scotts acquired through the take-overs there was little product duplication elsewhere in the portfolio.

"Miracle's main strength was in the pesticide products and chemical range while Levington's were strong in the Greenmaster fertiliser range and liquid fertilisers with Scotts powerful in slow and controlled release fertilisers," said Dave.

The melding together of different corporate cultures also had to be achieved for the company to move forward.

"We had to re-invent ourselves as a company and are now all Scotts and while the important thing is always the brand we want Scotts to be seen as the company behind the brands," said Bob, who was previously a Levington man.

The task then was to get the message across to the greenkeepers.

"I do believe we are succeeding but the process is far from complete," said Dave.

"First we had to say 'This is your old Greenmaster packaging and this is what it is going to look like in the new Scotts packaging'. The new style incorporates a hand icon which displays whether it is fine, regular or coarse granules or slow or controlled release.

"We have used display boards at shows like BTME to push the message home while we also co-sponsor BIGGA's National Golf Championship with Charterhouse so that is another opportunity to meet with greenkeepers."

With the complicated, but very necessary, restructuring work edging towards completion Scotts were able to give a taste of what the "new"







company would be delivering at Harrogate earlier this year when they unveiled Shortcut and wetting agent, Aquanova, two brand new products.

"Shortcut is really rocket science in this industry," said Dave.

It is a growth retardant which has shown itself able to reduce the speed of growth and the amount of clippings produced by 50% while at the same time developing greater root strength and shoot density.

"Since BTME it has been so successful we have sold out what we estimated would be our annual sales in six weeks and we had to go back to America where the product was developed and ask for more," said Dave.

It is a sign of the international nature of the business that product can be developed anywhere in the world and not necessarily purely in or for the amenity sector. Scotts form relationships with the producers of active ingredient who operate in the much larger agrochemical industry and offer them a route into a niche market they wouldn't normally touch.

"Shortcut was developed by international giant, Novartis, a company in a position to spend \$86 million to produce an active ingredient for the agriculture industry and we can maximise the use of that ingredient by using it in a much smaller industry but globally," said Bob.

Bob is also in regular contact with colleagues in the parent company Head Office in the States and they regular hold research and development conferences so information can be pooled from all over the world.

It is vital for the industry that we can continue to do this work - to carry out the fundamental development trials needed to secure MAFF

approval for actives in turf. But the industry has to play its part too.

"People can always go and get 'black drum' pesticides from someone else but if everyone does that we won't do the research anymore. We are in a business and whatever we do must be profitable."

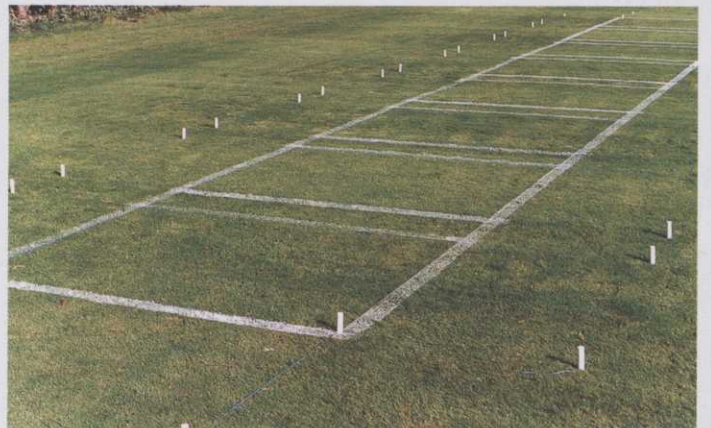
Looking to the future the company is well aware of the threat to many of its highly regarded products from the European bureaucrats who are currently reviewing all active ingredient.

"They look at the purity of the actual chemical then at the toxicity of it and then ensure that it can be used with minimal risk to human beings and the environment. You've also got to prove that the active ingredient works," said Bob, who chairs the European Crop Protection Association's Amenity Expert team which lobbies the forum directly in Brussels.

"There are over 700 active ingredient to go through the process and each one produces 55,000 pages of data. It is a huge process and it has to be repeated for each product which has the same active ingredient even if it only has 0.1% of it on a fertiliser granule. In the past you could do a lot of linking back to the active ingredient data but now all the studies on the actual formulation have to be done individually," said Bob.

"The process has to be finished by 2003 so there is a lot to get on with. If we don't get the products through they will just die. BIGGA has a role in lobbying the relevant people because a company like us can only go so far what really registers is when the end users themselves make a case," said Bob.

Since rumours about the purge on the chemicals began circulating many companies have turned their



attention to biological development but Scotts approach is to produce better chemistry which is acceptable to European standards while keeping a watching brief on the biological side of things.

"We've looked at the biological products but our feeling is that if it's got Scotts name on it it's got to work. With many biological products you can get good results in high summer conditions but that's not when the disease occurs," said Bob.

That is a point which is reiterated by the methodology which goes into producing new product.

"We don't play with the destiny of our customers. We can only succeed through the success of our customers so that ensures that we only produce products which work," said Dave.

"For any product to be truly viable for a business like Scotts it has to meet four criteria. 1. It's got to be effective. 2. It's got to be safe. 3. It's got to be reliable and 4. It's got to offer value for money. If it doesn't meet all four of these criteria it is not a product that Scotts is prepared to launch," he explained.

