



**Scott MacCallum travelled to Coventry to visit Agco's European Headquarters and home of the famous Massey Ferguson machines ...**

# Going back to their roots



Above: Edmund Hillary used this very tractor on one of his expeditions to the South Pole. It now has pride of place in the Massey Ferguson museum at Coventry

Right: The huge production operation at Coventry

Rumour has it, and I am in no position to deny the fact, that the first of the many words I have subsequently uttered was "tractor"... or rather it was "tacta", but I'm assured everyone knew what I meant.

Now, and again I'm in no position to prove it, I'm pretty sure that the vehicle which so enthralled me that it induced the power of speech was a Massey Ferguson "tacta."

It was, therefore, a huge nostalgic moment for me, some 38 years later, to visit Coventry's European Headquarters of Agco, BIGGA's latest Golden Key Supporter and see the famous machines coming off the production line.

Massey Ferguson has been a name synonymous with tractors for almost 70 years and the union between Canadian, Daniel Massey, and Ulsterman, Harry Ferguson, is as significant in its sector of the industry as the famous coupling of Mr Royce and Mr Rolls.

Incidentally there was a Mr Harris, a manufacturer of harvesting equipment, who gave the company the initial name of Massey Harris Ferguson but the Harris name was dropped in the 50s to give us the name known the world over.

"You can trace the company back to about 1847 when Daniel Massey started to build agricultural machinery in a farm workshop in Ontario," said Tim Lawrence, Agco's Sales Manager - Grounds Care.

"He joined with Allinson Harris, who was doing a similar job with harvesting equipment and between them they built the bulk of their business on exports. The story moves forward to the 1930s when a link was forged with Harry Ferguson, whose three point linkage went on to transform modern agriculture," explained Tim.

Harry Ferguson was a remarkable man known for his inventions and his pioneering spirit. He was the first man in the British Isles to build and fly his own plane and a replica of the plane hangs in a Belfast museum. He also designed the suspension systems on the Lotus racing car as well as work on the famous Jensen sports car.

In the 50s Massey Ferguson was the true giant in agricultural machinery and with a 50%-60% share of a market, which in the UK at the time represented 55-60,000 tractors a year.

"Every farm has virtually had a Massey Ferguson tractor on it at some point," said Philip Evans, Product Marketing Manager - Specialist Products.

The tractors have been built at the Coventry plant since 1946 when Harry Ferguson formed an agreement with the Standard Motor Company after the war. Such was the success of the tractor production that it squeezed out the car production and Harry Ferguson eventually bought the site and continued to develop it to the stage that it covers 45 acres and boasts full manufacturing facilities and a 15 storey office block which can be seen for miles. The plant employs around 1500 people with the figure varying depending upon production rates.

I must admit I'd always associated Massey Ferguson with big red machines but, looking round the factory, I was interested, not to say a tad disappointed, to learn, and see, that they have other colours in their portfolio. They'll always be red to me, though.

Harry Ferguson died in the late '70s and just over 10 years ago Agco was formed.

"Agco was the result of a management buy-out of the Deutz Allis tractor brand in the States and took over the North American distribution of Massey Ferguson, effectively running the North American business for us. This relationship flourished to the extent that Agco eventually said that if we ever wanted to sell Massey Ferguson they'd be interested. A figure was set and the deal done," explained Phil.

Now worldwide dealerships number between 8-10,000 and there's no part of the world untouched. In fact they've been spotted in jungles, deserts, even on the South Pole where Edmund Hillary had use of one during an expedition.

"There were doubts whether an agricultural machine would even work in such cold conditions but, in the eight years it was there it never failed... not until it arrived back in the UK, someone drained the antifreeze and the block cracked," smiled Phil.

That very machine now has pride of place in the wonderful Massey

Below: A Massey Ferguson 1250 fitted with mid-mounted deck and spray tank

Bottom: One of the new quad bike breed which can be used for a variety of tasks







Ferguson museum which is also housed on the site.

The pioneering spirit also extends to tractor manufacture and the company has helped other companies develop factories in far flung places on a licensee basis.

"We've done this in places like Turkey, the old Yugoslavia, Libya, India and Mexico and we send out partially built tractors for them to assemble and as they develop their skills they move towards making and supplying their own," said Phil.

The company re-emerged as a force in ground care about two years ago having initially dipped its toe in the market about 15 years ago.

"We had an association with Iseki where we'd build around 500 tractors for them and export them back to Japan," explained Phil, who said that both companies had benefited from the other's experience - Iseki from Massey Ferguson's expertise in bigger tractors and Massey from Iseki's expertise in 15-40 horsepower tractors.

"Having said that, we felt many of the dealers we were using in the ground care sector were non-Massey Ferguson specialists and we wanted to take time to consolidate - step back and ask ourselves where we were going and what we were doing," said Phil.

In the intervening period the dealer network for the sector was strengthened considerably to the extent that they can now look to the future with confidence.

"We targeted more of the big Massey Ferguson dealers who were interested in grounds care and spreading their overheads over both the agriculture and grounds care sectors and we involved and developed these people," added Phil.

With the reestablishment now complete they are now looking for steady growth within the market.

"Golf courses need lightweight and compact tractors and we can offer them," said Tim.

The current range of products includes compact tractors from 15-38 horsepower; a diesel ride-on 24.5 horsepower tractor with mid-mounted decks. There is also the 2200 range of specialist turf tractors and quad bikes which are becoming increasingly popular especially when the ground is wet.

They are also finding a lot of 75-80 horsepower tractors going out of the factory with turf tyres on them and they know full well that they are going onto a golf course or into a local authority.

"Looking ahead I can see the front cut rotary being a good machine for us as it fills two markets, local authority and golf. It is a long term project for us," explained Tim.

The company sees Saltex and BTME as the two key shows in the industry for them and it was at Saltex, where the size of stands gives them the opportunity of showing the complete range, in '99 that the assault of the grounds care market was rejoined.

"Customer reaction to Massey Ferguson is always very positive and this goes back to the days of the TE20," said Phil.

"The name is one that most people would know anywhere in the country and if they buy a Massey Ferguson product they know they will only have to travel a few miles in either direction to find a dealer. The products are well engineered, well developed and have a good support package in terms of parts.



Above: Cab interiors have functional switchgear and familiar control layout

"Also the products are easy to use. Whether you jump on a tractor with 20 horsepower or one with 80 horsepower you find the controls laid out in the same place and you are not having to learn a totally different package each time. It's the same with the 15 to 38 horsepower compact tractors," said Tim.

The decision to become a Golden Key Supporter of BIGGA was came as a result of the first impressions of the Association.

"I liked the approach and organisation of BIGGA itself. They are well organised and produce good quality publications aimed at the market we want to get to," explained Tim.

"It is good that we ally ourselves to professional organisations and when we looked at BIGGA we were impressed by what we saw and what they were doing for the industry around it. There is so much more to Golden Key than us just paying money to you and it all goes towards

helping to give BIGGA members a very good package," added Phil.

Training was always at the forefront of Harry Ferguson's mind and he was instrumental in setting up a training centre at nearby Stoneleigh - when you're buying a £200,000 combine harvester the two day training course that goes with it must be welcomed!

"We have always felt that training is a vital part of the whole package and that extends to our dealerships as well," said Phil.

Well, many years on from my initial brush with the company I can, on behalf of the Association, welcome Agco, manufacturer of Massey Ferguson "tactics", to the family of BIGGA's Golden Key Supporters.

