





**Roland Taylor cuts up rough as he looks at the best ways of maintaining those areas off the straight and narrow**

# Cutting up rough

Looking through a magazine dated 1927 recently I found a series of essays written by greenkeepers as part of a competition. They were asked several questions about their work and one in particular wanted to know what equipment they used. Hand machines were used by all for their greens and tees. The fairways were cut with a petrol-powered mower but no mention was made of the rough, in all cases. Gangmowers were available around this time, but the rotary mower was yet to be invented so one has to assume on some courses once the ball went off the fairway players were in deep trouble.

Being man-made a course has to harmonise into the natural landscape and this can be parkland, heathland, moorland or seashore which if left to its own devices will start to encroach on the playing surfaces. While the areas immediately adjacent to the fairways, the rough are under a tight management programme beyond these other areas needs have to be taken into account as far as control is concerned.

The rough is a significant part of the game, the wrong kind can have distinct disadvantages, especially on courses where player numbers are of major importance. The main reason being wayward shots that take a long time to find slow up the game considerably. This can be the controlling factor when it comes to deciding the type of rough produced.

The areas adjacent to the fairways require a similar turf management

schedule with only the major difference being in the height of grass left after mowing. There is an abundance of equipment now on the market to deal with these areas and those outside the main playing surfaces.

## Cylinder mowers

These were and still are the traditional method of cutting and now come in various configurations. Trailed gangmowers are still used on many courses and little has changed in their basic design. The development of hydraulic systems and drives lead to the introduction of the new units that, whilst still being towed, have the advantage of constant power to the cutting units and the ability to lift the

mowing units for working around obstacles or transportation. A number of these types of machines are available.

The next progression was the launch of self-propelled mowers with either three or five cutting units, probably the most common type of equipment used today.

On all cylinder units there is a limit to the length of grass they can handle. A major governing factor is the number of blades on the reels - the less there are the longer the grass that can be tackled. The down side of this is that the quality of finish is affected as the cuts per metre drops. The introduction of the rotary principle offers an alternative mowing solution.



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## Rotary mowers

The first trailed rotary mowers appeared on the scene in the early fifties. These belt driven units were powered from the tractors PTO and had a mowing width of up to 14ft and were originally developed for orchards.

Greenkeepers soon recognised the benefits this type of machine offered when it came to cutting their rough - the length of grass and other vegetation was no problem.

Today, there are a number of trailed machines available including ones made up of small independent cutting heads that freely float and are said to follow the ground contours closely. Recent years have seen the introduction of high output wide self-propelled ride rotaries. These are made up of independent hydraulically driven cutting heads. Like their cylinder



counterparts these machines have all the benefits of ease of operation

Other developments of the rotary principle have been recycling systems. These chop the cut material into fine pieces and are said to deposit it back deep into the sward.

A point worth remembering is that gang mowers have been doing this since they were first introduced.

Whilst collecting grass is not generally a viable proposition on the areas under review there are a number of high output ride-on rotaries with collection and high lift emptying now on the market.

They also have the advantage that they can be used for leaf collection and some have attachments such as wide scarifiers and rotary brushes for hard surfaces like car parks.

## Flail

The flail principle will deal with a wide range of vegetation lengths and the trailed versions usually have a collection facility. They can also be used for scarifying and leaf collection.

Further back from the fairways growth can often be thicker and whilst it may not be cut very often there are times when this is necessary. Both rotary and flail machines will deal with this situation. For steep banks, ditches or river sides there are the tractor mounted long arm flail heads which can also be used for hedges. For confined areas smaller pedestrian rotaries and flails are readily available.

Brushcutters are ideal for clearing scrub, bracken and heather. These are now available as handheld units or ride-ons. The former should not be confused with the grass trimmers.

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They are more powerful and were originally designed for harvesting small trees. Nylon line cutting heads are available in addition to saw blades. Some manufacturers offer back-pack models for use in difficult areas.

The ride-on brushcutter is designed to deal with all types of vegetation including saplings and is compact enough to get into tight spots. They are the answer for clearing woodland paths or cutting fire breaks. On courses that have small tree plantations this type of machine is suitable for grass and weed control.

Flicking through recent issues of this magazine it is evident that there is now considerable emphasis being placed on creating natural havens on courses where flora and fauna can thrive. These areas require specialised

management and the occasional use of machinery to ensure dominant species do not completely take over. When considering equipment for the rough it is a good idea to also take into account these areas, as often there is a machine available to cope with both types of conditions.

Talking to golfers it is clear that they are out to enjoy themselves and the average players are going to finish often, or sometimes, in the rough. While it is designed to keep them on the straight and narrow if it is too high or thick then they are going to be unhappy and will be lodging complaints or not be coming back. A point worth taking into account when deciding how long to leave it and how often to cut it.



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