

WORK HORSE

Versatility is important if you're going to get the maximum out of existing machinery or any new equipment you may be thinking of purchasing. Roland Taylor takes a look into the world of tractors.



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The best-laid plans can sometimes go pear-shaped and none more so than when Mother Nature is involved. Over the last 12 months, hardly a day seems to have gone by when the heavens have not opened. This winter must have taken its toll as even the hardiest of golfers have decided to stay indoors. A combination of the weather plus the foot and mouth outbreak is bound to have had some effect on the revenue a course is generating. As a downturn in funds

filters through, it is very likely that readers have to shelve plans, review their operating costs and reconsider replacement programmes or the acquisition of new equipment.

In times of financial constraint, everything goes under the microscope in an endeavour to keep costs down. Versatility is important if you are going to get the maximum out of existing machinery or any new equipment you may be thinking of purchasing.

Machinery

One of the most cost-effective pieces of machinery for any course is still a tractor. This prime mover when fitted with attachments can, with the exception of some fine turf applications such as mowing, carry out virtually all the operations required to maintain a course. Over the last two decades, arable farms have become larger with a resulting decline in the demand for small agricultural tractors. This has meant that manufacturers have had to turn their attention to the amenity sector in the interests of survival. At present, UK sales of compact tractors have levelled out to around 1800 units per annum with approximately 90% of these now being sold to the amenity, leisure and pleasure sectors. This swing in demand has seen a greater emphasis being placed on designing new models that meet the requirements of the market and there is now plenty of choice.

The tractor has well-proven systems for adding and driving attachments with just a single power source to maintain. Modern engine technology has led to the introduction of compacts with higher horsepower ratings and virtually no changes in weight or size to previous models. Certainly, in the present climate a compact tractor is worth placing high on the list for versatility.

More than just mowing

A number of large ride-on rotary mowers and flail units, which incorporate collection, will efficiently collect leaves thus saving the expense of either buying another machine or having to carry out the labour intensive operation of raking up. These units will cope with the rough and





are ideal for cutting and collecting on wild flower areas. Brushes are available for some models for sweeping paths and car parks and there are also scarifying units for large areas. By using these machines fully, savings can be made.

Turfcare equipment

In recent years a number of turfcare machines have appeared on the market using a single power source to which a variety of attachments or cassettes can be fitted. When considering this type of equipment the ease and speed of changing units is a factor that needs to be taken into account. One big advantage of this type of system is that it can be added to as and when required - thus spread-

ing the costs. It is also worth looking at existing equipment to see if there are any other attachments or optional reels available that will increase their output.

Hire

There is now a wider choice than ever before as more and more companies are offering comprehensive fleets of professional amenity equipment for hire. This is a sure-fire way of saving money on operations that do not justify the expense of buying specific machinery. Long and short-term hire schemes are available.

Fuel

Over the next few years, emission levels will have to be reduced and this has prompted several specialists to



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now offer conversions to Liquid Propane Gas (LPG). In addition to reducing all exhaust gases there is another major saving - the cost of fuel. Petrol and diesel prices are at present between 75p and 78 per litre - LPG is at least a third of this figure,

especially when bought in bulk.

Although there is an extra cost for the conversion plus a LPG storage tank, the indications are that the savings made will recoup this fairly quickly. Expert advice should be sought when considering LPG conversion - your local engine specialist will be able to advise.

Operating costs

Cutting costs in the golf course sector might be difficult because the operation is already highly streamlined. If you have been asked to reduce overheads it could be worth considering having a brainstorming exercise with your staff to explore if there are ways of keeping expenditure levels down. It is often surprising what comes out of this sort of session. Tweaking mowing cycles, especially on fairways, may make some timesaving. If carefully monitored, an extra day or two could be gained by increasing the cycles

between cuts. This would then release staff for other jobs.

Maintenance

The lack of regular maintenance has a considerable effect on running costs. Badly maintained equipment uses more fuel, takes longer to carry out the work, and the possibilities of a major breakdown are increased. If machinery has been well maintained and looked after it will also be reflected in its value when it comes to trade-in.

This is only a rough guide to some of the areas where possible savings might be made in the present climate. Each course will be different and dependent on the requirements of its management.

Let's hope it soon stops raining and warms up, especially at weekends, and any foot and mouth restrictions are lifted so golfers can appear in their droves and the revenue comes flooding into the coffers.

