

Roland Taylor takes a leaf out of the old book using a variety of methods

# Shake 'n' Vac



Leaves look good on trees - it is when they fall that the picture changes. With the large fluctuations in the present climate there now seems to be plenty to clear up throughout the summer. Mild autumns have also meant they tend to stay on the trees longer. In the past a sharp frost or high winds and the clearing up operation could be completed in a matter of days - now it is done piece meal and you can never foretell when the fall will finally be over.

Every course has different requirements when it comes to leaf collection and in most cases if there are a lot of trees more than one piece of equipment will be needed.

Three basic systems are used on machinery specifically built for leaf and litter collection and these are - suck, blow (sometimes both) and rotary brush. There is a fourth method - rotary mowers. Their efficiency depends on the sucking or lifting action of the blade and the sys-

tems ability and effectiveness to deliver the leaves into a collector.

With suck and blow units their efficiency depends on a number of factors involved. At the heart of the machine is an engine driven impeller, which creates the airflow.

This critical component has to be aerodynamically designed and perfectly balanced. The housing also has to be exact. When used in collection mode, the leaves and litter pass directly through the impeller so it

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must withstand a constant battering.

Therefore both the way it is constructed and the materials used are very important in relation to its longevity. Some companies offer extended warranty on this component so when considering particular models with this type of system ask how long the impeller is guaranteed for.

The volume and speed of the airflow created will determine the machine's efficiency - this can vary considerably between different makes. The best way to determine which is the best is to try more than one unit under the same conditions and then compare the results. The same applies when collecting is involved. A really good test of a machine's efficiency is picking up wet leaves.

Engine power is another factor that needs to be addressed and there is plenty of choice in the pedestrian range.

#### Hand-held Blow/Vac

Out on the course, these are going to be the best machines for clearing

greens and other sites where access is very limited. Whilst the hand-held units are good for some areas, if a machine is going to be used for long periods then the backpack versions are a better choice. The hand held can in most cases be adapted for use as a collector, the only disadvantage of this is the size of the bag. If there are a lot of leaves you continually have to empty it. Some models include an optional extension tube for clearing guttering and open drains.

#### Pedestrian

In this category the choice is either blowers or collecting units and these are available as push or self-propelled. With the blowers the leaves can be windowed or made into heaps ready to be picked up.

As most collection models pass the material through the impeller this makes the number of times the unit has to be emptied less. An optional wanderhose is generally available and this is ideal for sucking leaves off areas such as greens.

One possible disadvantage of this type of machine is that they are mounted on wheels and these could mark the turf, especially when the unit is full.

#### Tractor powered

There are a number of specialist leaf and litter units now available. These have pto driven impellers. Like their pedestrian counterparts there are models for blowing the leaves into windrows or heaps, whilst others suck them up into large collecting hoppers, some with moving floors to make emptying easy. They have high work output and are an efficient method for clearing large areas. A wanderhose is usually an integral part of the system and this can be used for clearing ditches and emptying waste bins. Another method is the flail unit. These have a large capacity collector and the big advantage of this system is that other operations can be carried out including cutting grass and scarifying.

#### Brushes

One area that can present problems



when it comes to mechanising leaf collection is bunkers. For obvious reasons blowers and vacs are not the answer. A possible solution is a powered rotary brush - a few of these are now available. A nylon brush is mounted on a long shaft similar to a brushcutter. Because they are hand-held the amount of pressure to move the leaves can be easily adjusted to avoid disturbing the sand. They are also useful for sweeping hard surfaces and one course has used them for clearing beechnuts.

For large areas such as car parks there are the rotary brush units - these can be either pedestrians, self-propelled or tractor operated.

Some ride-on rotary machines can be fitted with one of these attachments

Large self-powered units are available but whether their cost can be justified will depend on the specific applications and requirements

#### Loaders

These are a very useful piece of machinery. The loader is a powered unit, which is clamped onto the tail-

gate of a trailer or vehicle buck. A wide mouth suction hose is used to vacuum up the leaves and they are delivered directly into the collecting receptacle. This type of unit is ideal as part of a system that uses blowers to direct the leaves into either windrows or one spot.

Leaf collection covers only a few weeks each year so investing in specialist equipment has to be carefully considered. In most cases more than one type of machine is going to be required. If an attachment is available for existing or new machinery then for many clubs this may be the answer.

Another possible solution could be to consider hiring. The only problem here would be determining when the machinery was needed. As other organisations within your locality might be thinking along similar lines there could be a shortage of available equipment when you need it.

We might curse about clearing up leaves each year, but one sobering thought is without them we would not exist, plus the fact they set off the greens and fairways in their summer and autumn livery.



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