

Greenkeeping on a tight budget does not have to be restrictive and can be the driver for best practice. Kevin Marks visited Bargoed Golf Club to look at the innovative equipment maintenance regime that is reaping great benefits for the members at the Mid Glamorgan club.

Maximum impact

Bargoed Golf Club is located 15 miles north of Cardiff, 350 metres above sea level in the Rhymney valley with stunning distant views of the Brecon Beacons. The club was formed in 1913, but it took a further 10 years to raise the funds to build the initial 9-hole course. In 1972 a further nine holes were added, at a cost of just £8,000, to produce the 6,049 yards long, par 70 course that is in use today. There are over 500 playing members including a very

strong junior section of 60 very keen youngsters.

The original nine holes were created from the rocky valley slopes following the natural ground contours, while the 1972 addition was built on nearby farmland and this has resulted in two distinct characteristics for the course. Head greenkeeper Robert Wilkinson often describes it as one half 'mountain links' with natural fescue grasses and heather and gorse lining the fairways, while the other half is a typical parkland course punctuated with trees and bushes.

Clive Poole has been the Greens Chairman at Bargoed for the past three years and said, "We have one of the best inland courses in South Wales, with immaculate greens and fairways. Although not the longest course in the region it offers an excellent challenge for golfers of all levels, while offering easy walking and spectacular views."

Like many smaller clubs, Bargoed has to keep a tight rein on finances, so it is vitally important that the annual greenkeeping budget of £18,000 is used to maximum advantage. This budget covers all greenkeeping requirements such as fertilisers, grass seed, top dressings, spare parts and lubricants but excludes wages and capital expenditure on new equipment. Far from constraining Rob Wilkinson and his

Below: The greenkeeping team of Paul Jeffries, 22 years at the club; Rob Wilkinson, 10 years, Richard Greenway, 14 years and the most recent member of the team, John Davey, who has just completed his first year at Bargoed



three-man team, working within the demands of the budget actually inspires them to be innovative in the way that they undertake their daily tasks.

A new 600 square metre workshop and storage facility was built in 1996 at a cost of £40,000 and integral to the design is a small kitchen and rest area, together with shower and toilet facilities. A special chemical store was also constructed to comply with H&S legislation. The workshop is the responsibility of Assistant Head Greenkeeper and Mechanic, Paul Jeffries, a self-taught technician from his days as an amateur rally-driving enthusiast. Paul has been with club for 22 years and will tackle any job however large or small, he even services, repairs and maintains the club's JCB. The workshop is a testament to his commitment; there's a place for everything and everything was in place, from hand and air tools to welding equipment and cylinder grinding machines to gang mowers

Below: Assistant head greenkeeper and mechanic Paul Jeffries on the pristine, 10 year old Ransomes GT Classic



and trailed aerators. They have also purchased an hydraulic pipe repair kit and carry out all their own puncture repairs, making it almost totally self-sufficient. However large a storage area is, it's never quite large enough and equipment has to be double-parked. This means that it has to be moved frequently to access equipment at the back. Paul Jeffries has looked at this and devised a clever method to alleviate the problem.

Every item of equipment, however large or small, is stored on wooden pallets. A hand-operated pallet truck is used to lift and move the equipment around the shed. There's no need to hitch any of the larger trailed or hydraulic equipment to a power unit or for any manual heavy lifting of smaller items, which is excellent from a health and safety perspective, a point emphasised by the inspector during their last H&S review.

Looking at the turf maintenance equipment is yet another revelation. Much of the equipment is over five

years old, but from the immaculate condition you would never realise it. This is epitomised by a pristine Ransomes GT Classic, now entering its 10th season, and looking as good as when it left the factory. Paul has lavished considerable care on this machine, including a complete overhaul, rewiring, respray and new decals.

The course uses predominantly Textron equipment including Jacobsen greens, tees, surrounds and rough mowers, Ransomes hydraulic gangs, an Iseki compact tractor and a Cushman Turf-Truckster with various attachments. However, head greenkeeper Rob Wilkinson also runs a Kubota G1900 rotary, an Allen National triplex, a Wiedermann verti-drainer, a Massey Ferguson 240 tractor, a Wessex greens sweeper, a Sisis scarifier, a 3-tonne 4-wheel drive dumper and the JCB already mentioned.

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Maximum impact



Above: Equipment is stored on pallets and a hand-operated pallet truck is used to lift and transport the items around the shed. This prevents any manual lifting and saves time and effort hitching to a power unit

Below: A section of the 'Mountain Links' part of the course featuring natural fescue grasses with heather and gorse lining the fairways



consuming task, it's just a case of a regular maintenance regime that everyone on the team buys in to. Oil and water checks and a visual inspection are carried out daily and it is the responsibility of the operator to wash down each piece of equipment used during the day. This is a policy that is followed with an almost religious zeal as the corrosive nature of macerated grass is fully appreciated by the team. This is done in a special wash down area using an industrial, heavy-duty steam cleaner, powerful enough to reach the most inaccessible areas on any machine.

"We purchased the steam cleaner second-hand about 5 years ago and it has been excellent. Being of industrial quality it is much more powerful

than most other machines and cleans the equipment brilliantly," says Rob Wilkinson.

Every week, each machine receives an extensive lubrication, with every grease nipple located and lubricated with a transparent grease. This involves putting the machines on ramps to get to every lubrication point, not just those that are visible.

This is followed every month by an intermediate service including the resetting of blades and back lapping with both an 80 and 120 compound, if required. Each winter, every machine is stripped down, completely overhauled and rebuilt for the following season. Every second year the machines are resprayed.

There's a report board in the workshop where notes indicating any faults or problems are posted so that rectification can be carried out as soon as possible. Each machine has a detailed logbook designed by Paul Jeffries containing a complete history of every service, maintenance and repair carried out. He also has parts books for every machine and ensures that when parts and spares are ordered, a part number is quoted every time, thus ensuring that the correct part arrives. Over time he has built up an extensive stock of parts and consumables, mainly items that are used regularly such as hydraulic filters, oil filters, drive belts, plastic drives, etc.

"This might appear to be an unnecessary expense," he says, "but it has been built up over a number of years and ensures that we have as little down time as possible. If I don't have an item in stock I can always call R S Bird our local dealer in Cowbridge

and they normally get the part to us within 24 hours."

Paul continued, "Readers might think that our maintenance regimes are excessive, but our policy is little and often; we never let things deteriorate. Regular maintenance at any club, large or small, is essential but here on our limited budget we have to get as many hours out of each machine as possible and this system works for us."

Rob Wilkinson added, "We used to lease purchase the machines in the past, but by making sure that we maximise the life of the kit we have been able to accumulate funds and we now purchase new equipment outright, as we have done when we bought the Jacobsen Turfcut and Iseki tractor last year."

News of the success of the service and maintenance work undertaken at Bargoed has spread to some of the smaller clubs in the valleys and they now use Paul Jeffries for some of their more difficult repair tasks. "This has worked well, as we sometimes carry out servicing and repairs in exchange for an unwanted piece of equipment which I know I can refurbish and use here at Bargoed," he said.

The final words are left to Club Secretary, Geoff Williams, "The club is very proud of the greenkeeping team, the way they maintain the course and look after the equipment. Lifelong learning is becoming the norm in all professions, especially greenkeeping. I hope that by sharing some of the practices adopted here at Bargoed that every club, however large or small, can benefit in the longer term."