

MULTI TASKING MACHINES

Roland Taylor looks at those machines that can be used for a variety of jobs

The last two decades have seen a spate of new courses spring up across the country, some having been established on land that originally grew crops whilst others were integrated into existing parkland.

Wherever they have been built the landscape has been altered, in some

cases considerably. Future generation will look on these as complementing, improving or desecrating the existing countryside. This has very much been the case with famous landscapers of yesteryear such as Lancelot Capability Brown. His work still raises the question today - vandal or



genius? Throughout the 1700's he travelled the length and breadth of England creating gardens for the aristocracy. His designs were on a large scale, lavish and certainly revolutionary. Artificial hillsides changed flat landscapes and extensive water features were created by damming streams. Groups of trees were planted to draw the eye to some distant focal point. The only things that were missing were tees, fairways and greens. As far as is known he had no connection with golf, but his work and vision included a lot of what could be considered to be close to golf course architecture. Some of Brown's original landscapes could well now form part of an existing course.

In constructing a new course the placement of the greens and their adjacent fairways, bunkers and tees is of prime object, but for the overall image to be right attention to visual effects and existing features should also play a significant part in the final design. Whilst visiting a course under construction a few years ago it was pointed out to me that the architect had incorporated a lake near a green not only as a hazard to the unwary golfer, but also to reflect the church in the background. Water features





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and banks of flowering shrubs such as rhododendrons for late spring colour and acers for autumn to set off the rich green of the playing surface are good indications that landscaping practices have at some stage been involved.

Naturally, as far as maintenance is concerned, the main focus must be on the playing areas. However, it is easy to forget how much of the actual landscape is also man made, especially after it has been established for a few years. Unless some degree of management is carried out nature will, at some stage, take over and the original concept can eventually be lost. Trees die, lakes silt up, rampant vegetation takes over and erosion

destroys dunes and hills. Steams and watercourses become choked with weeds and flooding creates unwanted water features. Land management by necessity is an integral part of any course programme.

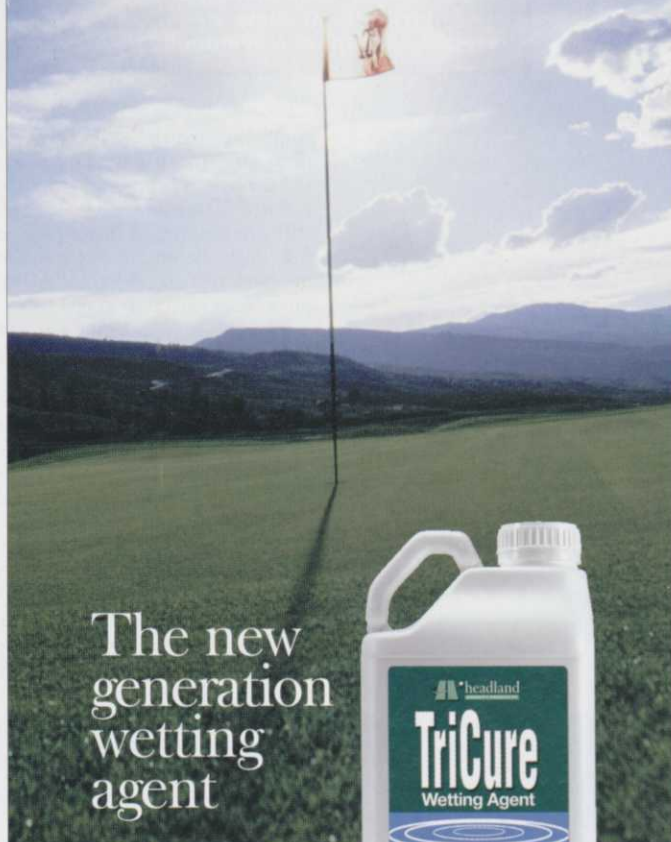
Fortunately, there are machines on the market that will make the operations easier and faster. Having this type of equipment readily available is the ideal situation, but unless there is sufficient all-year-round work for it the capital investment is not warranted. The alternative is hire and there are now specialist outlets offering this type of equipment for either long or short periods. This also enables a course to carry out a true evaluation of the machine's capabilities at only a minimal financial outlay.

Earth moving

At some stage there will be a need to carry out work on the underlying soil. This could involve building a new tee or bunker, replacing worn areas of turf or dealing with an erosion problem. Having removed the turf the soil may require attention as in some cases it is likely to be fairly compacted.

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springs to mind and whilst these will do an efficient job in breaking up the soil structure other operations will be required to prepare a suitable bed for either seed or turf. A better proposition might be one of the specialist machines that are now available that produce an ideal tilth in one pass.

Once the turf has been removed stones may litter the surface and need to be extracted. In the past women were employed in agriculture to collect stones which were then used to fill potholes in the lanes and roads. Enterprising manufacturers soon came up with a mechanical solution. Today's landscaping stone rakes or buriers are spin-offs from those agricultural machines and are a highly effective answer.

A stoneburier uses the reverse rotation of its blade system to throw the soil and stones into a grille; the soil

passes through while the stones drop down and are buried. With the rakes there is the additional operation of collecting and disposing of the stones. Tractor powered units or pedestrian versions are available.

Either a compact tractor or skidster is the ideal power source for a wide range of landscaping machinery. When it comes to moving large amounts of earth a front loader is needed. There are plenty of these around and very likely most readers will already have one. Buckets come in a variety of widths and carrying capacities. Other necessary attachments for preparing sites are scraper and levelling blades and again there is a wide choice.

Backhoes are fairly specialist pieces of equipment, so hiring a complete unit is often the best option in most cases because a tractor fitted out to



perform the same operation cannot usually be used for any other task. For confined areas or where access is restricted a skidster with a backhoe attachment is a solution. There are specially designed ditching buckets for clearing out silted-up ponds or watercourses.

If a deep, wide trench is needed then the backhoe is probably the best choice, but when it comes to laying cables, irrigation systems or drainage a specialist trenching machine is the answer. These will produce an adequate deep and wide trench with minimal disturbance to the surrounding area. They come either as self-powered units or as attachments for a tractor or skidster.

Erosion

Wind and water can play havoc on exposed sites and slopes, especially if these consist of light or sandy soil. The sediment washed from them gets into watercourses and drainage systems where it can silt up and cause a blockage. Sand is often blown onto the course and once it is ingrained in the turf can act as a highly effective, unwanted abrasive, especially on mower blades. Any ground cover that would help to stop erosion occurring will be difficult to establish under these conditions. The seeds are washed away long before they can put down a strong root system. Some assistance is needed to aid their development. This is available in the





form of three-dimensional matting, which traps the soil and gives the plants a better chance to colonise. These products which are said to be adapted for most types of slope are rot proof, lightweight and easy to install.

Over-seeding

For carrying out this operation there is a wide choice of purpose built tractor-mounted or pedestrian machines now on the market. Some form of slitter or spiker unit produces a concentrated pattern of openings in the soil. Either a brush or rake then ensures the seed is incorporated into the earth and finally a rear roller firms the ground and closes the holes. A wide range of both hopper capacities and working width is available. However, not all manufacturers recommend their machines for fine areas so do check the equipment's suitability for your purpose before buying or hiring.

Trees

These form an integral part of any landscape. Occasionally nature becomes highly destructive as was the case in the gales of the 1980's and with Dutch Elm Disease.

In both cases replanting had to be carried out on a fairly extensive scale. On most courses this operation will be necessary from time to time as trees die, become infected or are blown down. The fastest way

to carry out this task is to use an earth auger to make the holes. This can be either a hand-operated unit, or an attachment fitted on a compact tractor or skidster. When planting trees using this method it is important to ensure the soil on the sides and bottom of the hole is loose enough to allow the young roots to penetrate the surrounding area. Earth augers are an alternative way of digging holes for tree planting and have the added advantage of being ideal for fencing or putting in gateposts.

Other tree work may require the services of a tree specialist.

Where once a golf course was part of the surrounding landscape it is often now the only green oasis in a concrete jungle. They effectively preserve all that is left of the original landscape.

The same applies to coastlines, heath, moorland and parkland. In all these areas they form a buffer for flora and fauna to survive that would otherwise be lost. But some controlled management is needed if they are to flourish.

For some readers what effectively is estate management is down to someone else and their only concern is the playing surfaces.

For others their responsibilities cover all aspects related to the course and its surroundings. Fortunately, they are well catered for when it comes to landscaping machinery.

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