

# The need for backup

Roland Taylor continues his look at cylinder mowers and assesses the importance of local manufacturer support

The Royal Worlington Golf Club, where Prince Albert and Queen Victoria's son played golf while regularly attending shoots at the Elvendon Estates in Norfolk, is a nine-hole course opened in 1893, and is situated on the edge of the Norfolk Breckland, which is renowned for its sandy soil.

As a result the club has taken on the mantle of an inland links course. Since the course was built there has been little alteration and the wide undulating fairways abound with bunkers for the unwary player. Cambridge University practice and play all their home competitions on this course.

Head Greenkeeper Bob Gee has been at the club for forty-five years and for cutting the large raised tees around the course he uses a Sisis Teestar triple that was bought just over two years ago.

Bob said: "Previously we had a Huxley triple which we were very pleased with. When it came to replacing this mower we tried a number of other machines before deciding. We found the Teestar was easy to operate and above all the operator visibility was excellent.

"You can clearly see, even with the boxes on, the edge of the tees, which avoids dropping down the slope. All the controls are within easy reach and the driving position is ideal, like armchair mowing.

"The only criticism I have is the positioning and poor design of the throttle control. For a machine of this quality it certainly could be improved. However, this is relatively minor compared to all the advantages we find when operating this piece of equipment."

The greenkeeping team carry out daily machinery maintenance. For repairs and other service work they use a local technician who calls regularly, or in an emergency, to carry out necessary work.

Bob went on to say that they have found this method of maintaining and caring for their equipment works exceedingly well. He also added that because he supports Ipswich Football Club he would like all his machinery

to be in blue and white livery. There would appear to be a very slim chance of this ever happening.

The Sisis Teestar has three hydraulically driven, floating cutting heads that give a 1.82 metre mowing width. There is a choice of six or ten bladed cylinders so the machine can be used on greens as well as tees.

The three-wheels have permanent drive to provide traction and reduce turf damage and the mower has a low centre of gravity to give it stability on slopes. If grass collecting is needed then the boxes and concaves are said to be easy to fit or remove when not required. The Teestar is designed and built in the UK.

Thorpe Wood Golf Club originated as a part of the Peterborough Development Corporation project back in the 1980s. It is a two 18-hole course split by the River Nene.

Head Greenkeeper Dave Walden and his team have their work cut out keeping both these courses in tip-top condition. Up until two years ago they cut their fairways with gangmowers. After having demonstrations of virtually every fairway mower on the market it was decided to buy two Roberine 1903s.

"We have found a considerable difference since using this type of machine. One of the main changes has been their machines' manoeuvrability compared to gangmowers and this has enabled us to create tighter fairways. Cross cutting is regularly carried out and this has added to the aesthetic quality of the courses," said Dave.

Another reason they selected these particular mowers is the backup support they get from their local dealer, Peterborough Garden Machinery.



Bob Gee of the Royal Worlington GC with his Sisis Teestar . Pity it is not in Ipswich Football Club livery.





The Allen Power National 68V Triple Mower is put through its paces at Thorpe Wood Golf Club.

Dave said: "They are only a few miles away and if we have a problem they react immediately. We cannot afford to be waiting for a dealer miles away to fit us into their service call schedule or wait days for replacement parts to arrive."

Dave added: "For the tees and the grass around bunkers we have been using Allen National triples for a number of years. Their low centre of gravity makes them very stable when working on bunker slopes and the sides of tees. They are very simple mowers to operate and for us ideal workhorses."

The Roberine has a Peugeot diesel with front wheel hydraulic drives and differential lock. There are five cutting units, giving an overall working width of 3.45metres.

The units have five-bladed reels and the cutting height ranges from 13mm to 70 mm. A joystick provides the facility of being able to mow with any number of units engaged or disengaged.

Ergonomic design is evident in the whole layout of the control centre and the seat's air suspension and automatic height adjustment provides adequate comfort during long periods of mowing.

Allen Power Equipment say they have been selling the National range of cylinder mowers for over 30 years. The machine is relatively simple in its layout, which for many is seen as a big advantage.

On good ground conditions a top mowing speed of 4mph is said to be achievable. A Briggs & Stratton engine provides power and the three free floating cutting units give a total mowing width of 1.72 metres.

Down on the south coast, a few miles from where the Normans landed in 1066, is Cooden Beach Golf Club which was opened in 1912. This 18-hole course is built on land that was once under the sea. The site is below sea level and as a result the water table is high.

"This can sometimes create problems, but there is also a plus side as we virtually never have to irrigate. The underlying soil is clay, so it also holds the moisture well," said Course Manager Stefan Antolik, who has been a greenkeeper for over 32 years, fourteen of them at Cooden Beach.

For his wide, long fairways and rough Stefan uses Lloyds Leda gangmowers. He explains his reason for this choice of mower, "Managing a golf course in today's climate is all about finding the most cost effective methods of producing quality playing surfaces.

"It all boils down to what a club can realistically afford, because there is a limit to how much members are prepared to pay. We have looked at alternative methods of mowing our fairways, but it is difficult to justify the cost of self-contained machines."

At Cooden Beach three sets of gangmowers are used and the fairway units are fitted with nine-bladed reels.

Lloyds Leda gangmowers look after Cooden Beach GC fairways and rough







Neil Green on one of his favourite mowers - the Hayter 424 Turf Mower.

Stefan went on to explain that when the subject of using purpose-built fairway mowers has arisen he presents the following example based on 60 cuts per year.

Self-propelled Mower cost £30,000. Life 5 years  
 Total cuts over 5 years = 300  
 Purchase price divided by 300 = £100 per cut  
 Ongoing Maintenance is 10% of purchase price.  
 The total price per cut of fairways is £110

Gangmowers cost £10,000. Life 15 years  
 Total cuts over 15 years = 900  
 Purchase price divided by 900 = £11 per cut  
 Ongoing Maintenance is 10% of purchase price.  
 The total price per cut of fairways is £12.50

The units are returned to Lloyds every three years for a complete refurbishment. For Stefan, who has been chosen this year as Sussex Greenkeeper of the Year, gangmowers are the answer because he considers them a sound investment that give years of service and are economical to run. They produce the results.

In 1997 the BIGGA National Tournament was staged at this course. The Lloyds Leda gangmowers have high carbon chromium steel reels and bottom blade to give long life and cutting edge retention.

There is a choice of 4, 5, 6 or 9 bladed reels. Roller bearings are used throughout the units, for smooth action and longevity. The standard model is 760mm wide with a 190mm diameter reel and there is a choice of cast or pneumatic wheels.

The giant version has a 6-bladed 250mm diameter reel. Towing frame mountings are available for a trio, quintuple and septuple of units.

The Leda Husky outfits three gangmowers and are attached to the tractor on a three-point linkage frame. Five and seven trailer-mounted systems are also available.

The Lloyds Pentad hydraulic 760/5 Gangmower is a trailer unit that allows the operator to control the five free-floating mower units through a box located on the tractor.

Approaching Ryston Park Golf Club from the south you leave the Cambridgeshire fens with their dark, rich, peaty soil and climb into the gentle landscape of Southwest Norfolk.

This nine-hole parkland course, which is almost on the edge of the fens, was constructed in 1930. On this higher ground, overlooking the flat landscape, the soil profile is sandy loam.

Neil Green, who joined the club as Head Greenkeeper two and half

years ago, has considerable experience when it comes to mowing grass.

One of his first priorities was to change the condition of the rough and semi-rough areas around the course. For this purpose he chose the Hayter T424 Turf Mower because of his considerable experience of using this machine.

A weekly mowing programme was established with a cutting height of 80mm for the rough and 51mm on the semi-rough. The practice area is mown to 25 mm. One year on and the areas have improved considerably and both Neil and the club members are very happy with the results.

Said Neil, "I chose the Hayter because I already knew that it would produce a quality of cut on relatively long grass. There are a number of small trees planted around the course and the machines manoeuvrability makes it easy to mow close to them.

"There are only two of us to look after the course, so time is paramount and this mower certainly has the high output we are looking for. The Hayter is very economical to run and as it is used for long periods comfort and ease of use are also important factors.

"The mower is occasionally used for cutting fairways and changing the units takes us under an hour to complete."

The fairways at Ryston are aerated once a month with a slitter. As the profile of the soil is sandy, drainage is good. Surprisingly, the course also holds up well in drought conditions.

"In the seven and half years I have worked with Hayter machines I have had very few problems," concluded Neil.

Ryston's Hayter T424 has five mowing units that produce a cutting width of 3.5metres with a mowing speed of 14kph. The mowing configuration can be changed at the flick of lever.

A 51hp Kubota diesel engine provides ample power and the 4wd with differential lock provides plenty of versatility for dealing with varying ground conditions. Hayter's say that the driving platform and engine cowling can be tilted to provide access, along the whole length of the machine, so servicing work can be carried out easily.

Which mowing equipment a greenkeeper decides is best for him will be based on a number of factors, but throughout the preparation of these features one aspect has stood out far above the rest - the local backup support provided by the manufacturers and suppliers.

The distance from the course of a designated dealer for a particular brand or mower is also significant. If service and supply of replacement parts is poor or mediocre then regardless of how well a machine performs retaining a greenkeeper's loyalty and support is going to be severally tested.