



# WOW!

There are some statistics which, if they don't exactly blow your mind, make you go "Wow!" That was the very expression which left my lips when Rigby Taylor Managing Director Andrew Robinson told me how many deliveries the company made in the course of a year.

No, I won't tell you yet. Have a guess. Now bear in mind that this is not just golf clubs, but all of RT's customers but also appreciate that golf does represent a significant proportion of the business.

I can hear your minds working. Roughly 2,700 golf clubs in the country, not all Rigby Taylor customers but those who are probably make a number of orders during a 12 month period. Plus the other non-golf orders to football clubs, local authorities etc.

Not easy is it? Let's go all Bruce Forsyth for a minute. 20,000. Higher or lower? All those who said "Lower" sit down. 40,000. Higher or lower? Again all those who shouted out "Lower" take your seats. Now, those of you who are left - not that many I note. 60,000, you know the drill. Again those who said "Lower," got it wrong. The actual number of orders delivered by Rigby Taylor annually is 75,000.

That just shows the scale of the operation at one of BIGGA's founding Golden Key Supporter companies. It does tend to get forgotten but every time an order is phoned through or placed through the Internet a lot still has to happen to ensure it arrives at its destination and Rigby Taylor spend a lot of time and effort making sure it runs smoothly.

"We are spending over £800,000 on carriage alone every year and this is not passed on to the customer, provided they meet minimum order requirements," explained Andrew, as we sat in the recently-acquired Horwich Headquarters on the outskirts of Bolton.

It is a hidden cost however and Andrew is keen to work closely with the customer to ensure costs can be reduced and the savings passed on or invested in new products.

"I would estimate that we could save £250,000 tonne miles just by cutting down on distribution and getting some of our customers to bulk up on some of their orders," he revealed.

"With good forward planning golf clubs should be able to operate on four deliveries a year. We have nine vehicles and that normally covers most of our haulage but in busy times when people contact us with an order that's needed straight away we have to go outside our own distribution and hire in vehicles and that is extremely expensive.

"It's trying to be efficient and environmentally friendly. Having a decent lead time helps us because we can programme it in and deliver it when the customer wants it whether it be in March, April or whenever. Ordering early doesn't cost the customer any more as they aren't billed until they get it and we do offer 12 monthly payment plans where, at no additional cost, their anticipated annual spend is divided over the year," said Andrew,

adding proudly that the company had recently received a prestigious environmental award from one of their clients - Manchester United.

Andrew is also extremely proud of the company's customer service and believes the latest innovation will make a significant difference to what can be offered to Course Managers up and down the country.

"All our new vehicles are fitted with fork lift trucks and our drivers will be fully trained in using them so when a delivery is made we can store it wherever the Course Manager wants it, even if it's the top shelf. Ultimately, our objective is to deliver it to the 15th green if that's where the order is to be used.

"We've just taken delivery of our fifth one and at £85,000 a time they don't come cheap but we feel it is offering the customer another service. In our book customers come first," he said.

Andrew took over as Managing Director three years ago from Bernard Hedley, who continues as Executive Chairman, and since then has been involved in a programme of continuous improvement.

"We look at our product range on a day to day basis and are continually asking our suppliers to improve what they give to us. They love us to bits because what we do is help them to make the products better, we don't charge the customer any more but we all see the benefit from extra sales.

"For example with 'Breaker Triple' we've seen sales almost double in two years and with 'Activate', the extra rooting agent that has been added, has improved rooting by 30% at no extra cost to the customer."

The company was formed in 1919 when Herbert Rigby and Robert Taylor - the fine turf's equivalent of Mr Rolls and Mr Royce - got together in what has always been a rich industry heartland to sell degreasing solvents to the cotton and textile mills.

"Seeing that the textile industry was in decline they looked to diversify and set up a paint division," explained Bernard, who joined the company following a management buyout in the early 1980's.

A fertiliser division followed and the company's reputation was forged following the STRI man around the area making up fertilisers based on the advice given.

"We continued to extend the range of products including chemicals and grass seed and launched our own Mascot range in 1981," said Bernard.

What launched the company to what it is today was the brave decision to look beyond the natural boundaries of a regional company and open up in competition with a company in the south east and then subsequently

Scott MacCallum travelled to BIGGA Golden Key Supporter, Rigby Taylor's headquarters, in Bolton, to meet MD Andrew Robinson and Executive Chairman, Bernard Hedley.



Left to right, George Johnstone, Manchester United FC, Martin Gibbons, Evirowise, Andrew Robinson and Brendon Gott, Rigby Taylor



Rigby Taylor has invested in new vehicles with an onboard fork lift to aid and further improve in the delivery of their products to the customer

the midlands. Ironically, the company which had previously considered the south east to be their patch, Parkers, were later bought by Rigby Taylor.

The company now has six product divisions - fertilisers; pesticides; grass seed; speciality product like wetting agents and plant health products; white lining and top dressings. There is a staff of 150 with 35,000 square feet of warehousing at the Bolton base, another 20,000 square feet at the company's Guildford base and another 10,000 square feet at their Newbridge site, just outside Edinburgh. That's 65,000 square feet in total.

Servicing the products is a UK sales team of 50, recently expanded from 40.

"A high proportion are ex-greenkeepers. What we like to do is take users of turf products and teach them how to sell rather than take someone from outside the trade and teach them about greenkeeping. It's the better option," explained Andrew.

"It takes about three years to take a new rep and train him to become a salesman but they talk the same language as the greenkeeper. We take him up to almost the same level as an agronomist in terms of training. That's not to do away with the agronomist but to work with him and empathise with the problems being faced."

The extra 10 staff have been brought on board to help expand the customer base and service existing customers more effectively.

"It's the old 80-20 rule, 80% of the business is done with the top 20% of customers and a the new staff were taken on to work under our Area Managers to service and build up the smaller accounts," said Andrew.

Looking to the future Andrew feels that chemicals will develop to the extent that the quantities required will be much less than today. Indeed Rigby Taylor have just launched its first new fungicide in 12 years.

"Without giving too much away it offers a much greater cleanliness of

label, will be much safer and a minute amount of chemical will be used in comparison to the old style of fungicide. Compared with existing fungicides we'll be putting on a tenth of the amount of chemical.

"It is the way chemistry is going but the legislation on chemicals is helping to encourage the research," he revealed.

Andrew did admit that the biggest worry was still worms.

"The problem with the new legislation is that if it says on the label that it kills worms it's going to be put on one side. Chemical companies are working on it but the cost of developing is so high and golf is pretty much the only industry that doesn't want worms.

"There are other ways of getting rid of worms but they are all detrimental to the turf, reducing the pH for example."

Andrew did make a plea for greenkeepers not to be sucked into using off label products.

"BIGGA and the industry need to work together to try and stamp out the buying of agricultural pesticides. Yes, they save money but they are taking money away from the companies which are investing in this industry. And, of course, it is illegal.

"If a greenkeeper were to use a non-amenity product and a golfer were to be taken ill the golf club would be in for a serious claim and the greenkeeper could personally be fined.

"We are delighted to be Golden Key supporters of BIGGA because we feel education is the best way to ensure greenkeepers don't make the mistake of taking short cuts which are illegal and could cost them their jobs," said Andrew.

So the next time you take delivery of a Rigby Taylor product just think about the fact that it is just one of 75,000 the company will be delivering this year.

Does make you go "Wow" doesn't it?