



The Tractor Factor

Some names just roll off the tongue as though they were always meant to be linked together. Morecombe and Wise, Torvill and Dean, Rolis and Royce, Marks and Spencer but in the world of tractors there can be no more a fruitful union than that of Massey and Ferguson.



Just as Eric and Ernie, Jane and Christopher, Henry and Charles, Michael and Tom formed alliances known the world over Daniel and Harry laid down the beginnings of a similar legacy almost 75 years ago and since then their tractors have become a worldwide institution.

Massey Ferguson tractors can be found in every corner of the world - Sir Edmund Hillary even took one to the South Pole - and there are literally thousands of Course

Manager and Farmers who have had reason to toast their faithful old red machines.

The company is now entering a new era and although tractors may no longer be assembled at the famous Banner Lane factory in Coventry - Beauvais in France is the main manufacturing base - the drive to ensure that Massey Ferguson remains in the elite band of tractor manufacturers is as strong as ever and the future looks bright.

Banner Lane will remain the UK Headquarters of Massey Ferguson's parent company of Agco until next year but a new custom built facility is currently being developed for the company at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire, to handle Massey Ferguson and the other companies which operate under the Agco banner - Fendt, Challenger and Valtra all producers of superb tractors in their own right.

That new era extends to Massey Ferguson's recently appointed Ground Care and Utility Vehicle UK and Ireland Sales Manager, a man well known to virtually everyone in the fine turf industry.

Colin Gregory only took up his new position in June but he is already well on his way to ensuring that his extensive list of contacts, friends and associates are au fait with the qualities of the Massey Ferguson range. He has also been quick to sign Massey Ferguson up as a Golden Key Supporter of BIGGA to renew a personal relationship with BIGGA that goes back to the Association's formation in 1987.

"We have eight tractor ranges from 16.5 horsepower up to just under 300 horsepower with everything in between. In fact, if you were to line up

every variation or tractor and tyre combination it would stretch for miles and miles," said the man whose enthusiasm for the industry is measured in gallons not teaspoonfuls.

Colin joined the fine turf sector 25 years ago and is beautifully placed to chronicle the changes within the industry since then.

"When I started, golf courses were using small compact tractors for aeration equipment but then there was a spell when they moved away from the compact to utility vehicles like the Workman, Cushman or Pro Gator. Now though there is a tendency to go back to compacts again but much more powerful versions than before.

"Back in the early 80s I was selling compacts up to 30 horsepower but now we have a situation where small compacts - 16, 18, 21 horsepower don't go well on the golf course and people are looking for 27, 30, 35, 40 or 47 horsepower because they need the power for larger tools like vertidrains and deep slitters. Indeed golf courses which don't run a fairway mower need a fairly powerful tractor to pull gang mowers."

However, the benefits a tractor of whatever size can bring to a golf course are growing and Colin feels the old need to have one large tractor with turf tyres has also changed. One thing is for sure, while the market for tractors for golf course use has grown so has the competition with at least a dozen companies out there trying to attract the golf course business.

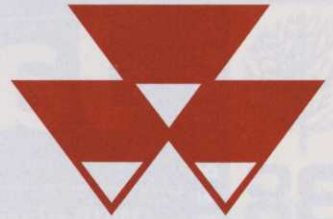
"We are synonymous with tractors. We don't sell ride-on rotaries or cylinder mowers we are predominately a tractor company and that's why people should come to us if they are looking for a tractor," he said, showing evidence of his well honed selling skills.

"Years ago it used to be that a golf course had one large, 60 or 65 horsepower tractor, but now golf courses are buying tractors up to 80-90 horsepower similar to what local authorities do, to run the really big kit."

"Golf clubs can now have more than one tractor, a small one of perhaps 20-25 horsepower, a middle range one of around 45-50 horsepower and perhaps a larger one of 75-80 horsepower depending upon the equipment they have at the club."

And while tractors can be ordered with any array of bells and whistles and Massey Ferguson can oblige, Colin is firmly of the view that there are many people who'd rather keep to the basics.

"You can get too much sophistication and people don't want it as there is more to go wrong. Rather than an electric switch they want to pull a lever so they can get a feel for what they are doing," said Colin, who took time out of his schedule to meet many of his greenkeeping friends and customers at The Open at St Andrews.



MASSEY FERGUSON

Scott MacCallum meets up with Massey Ferguson's new appointment, a man who has been around the industry for 25 years.



The history of the company can be traced back to the mid 1800s and links two men on two continents.

Daniel Massey started to build agricultural equipment in a workshop in his home of Ontario, Canada, in the 1840s, while Ulsterman, Harry Ferguson, was the man who created the three point linkage which transformed modern agriculture. The remarkable Mr Ferguson was the first man in the British Isles to build and fly his own aeroplane while he also designed the suspension system on the Lotus racing car.

The union between the two men came in the 1930s and by the 50s Massey Ferguson was a true colossus in the agricultural machinery industry with as much as a 60% market share which translated to as many as 60,000 tractors a year in the UK alone.

Colin is keen to eat into market share of the golf tractor market and at the time we spoke he was in the process of recruiting a Sales Manager for the south with another coming on stream for the north and Scotland shortly.

"They will be set up with demonstration equipment and will work closely with the dealer network. If we have a potential new customer keen to look at a Massey Ferguson it is important that they see one in situ," he said.

"Many of our dealers have people with fine turf experience but the more successful we are the more likely they will be to appoint a specialist in ground care. Dealers can bend my ear whenever they want and we will put in demonstration equipment wherever they want to help them with sales."

While tractors are Massey Ferguson's real claim to fame it would be wrong to overlook their AgTV quad bikes that were launched a few years ago. Superbly constructed with a frame which enables tools to be carried around the golf course the AgTV has quickly found favour with Course Managers as a means of getting around the golf course effectively.



"The market is increasing and you do see more of them on golf courses not as a replacement to the utility vehicle but as a means of getting across the course. Our 250cc machine is a two wheel drive machine while the 300, 400 and 500cc come in either two or four wheel drive with automatic on the top two models and fully independent suspension."

Colin was delighted to have renewed his association with BIGGA and sees the opportunities it brings to meet people as extremely valuable.

"I enjoy meeting people and getting to know what they want and what they need and BIGGA provides opportunities with events like The Open, Harrogate and Regional and Section events. It's what BIGGA is all about and what I'm all about," said Colin, as he fielded calls from all over the country on his overworked mobile.

He is a big supporter of Harrogate and is delighted that the introduction of ClubHouse has seen more Club Managers and Club Secretaries attending the Show.

"It's all down to results and if you get the Club Manager or the Secretary going round with the Course Manager we are more likely to get sales."

He's also looking forward to attending Golden and Silver Key meetings.

"It's important to me to be involved not only with customers but competitors as well and I'm looking forward to meeting my colleagues from the other companies."

Meeting up with Colin again you can't help but feel that Massey Ferguson have made a very astute appointment. In football parlance he is the inspirational, hard working, been there and done that midfielder signed just before the start of the season. A man to turn losses into draws and draws into wins and you can be sure that the Massey Ferguson name won't be missing from any shortlist if one of his many contacts is in the market.

I wouldn't call him Roy Keane to his face though.