

# Fairway mowers

James de Havilland reports

**No radical changes, but keeping abreast of developments is still important.**

**Although fairway mowers have evolved markedly over the past decade, the pace of change has settled, with 'new' models essentially introducing nip and tuck developments as opposed to anything radically different.**

This is actually rather refreshing. Although there is no such thing as a 'perfect' fairway mower, there must be few courses that are unable to find a model that fits their specific requirements. In some instances choice is limited by allegiance to one manufacturer over another, but few would argue there is no real choice these days.

One growing demand is for mowers that are physically lighter as it is increasingly necessary to mow fairways when conditions are less than ideal. Introduced at the end of

last year, this weight issue has been tackled on the Toro Reelmaster RM5410-D, RM5510-D and RM5610-D. These models weigh between 68 to 90kg less than their existing predecessors. To put this into the context, this is equivalent to saving the weight of an operator weighing between 10 and 14 stone.

It is arguably the saving of weight that is the biggest challenge facing manufacturers. When the late Colin Chapman briefed his designers, he reportedly suggested that they 'just add lightness' to improve their designs. That was difficult with racing cars; it is equally challenging with mowers.

The problem is too light a design may not be up to the rigors of everyday mowing. Ultra-light fairway mowers, diminutive 5 inch reels and 2WD have their place. Unfortunately that is not necessarily tackling a steeply undulating parkland course that is struggling to prepare its fairways following a few days of warm temperatures, heavy rain and rampant growth.

Another consideration is that modern mowers have to meet modern health and safety demands. A few years ago the thought of fitting a fairway mower with any form of cab would have been considered unusual. These days, many courses are looking at fitting air conditioned cabs to protect operators from both heat and ultra violet sun rays. Take one step forward and two back perhaps?

One area that has seen subtle change is the ease of servicing the cutting units. As fairway mowers are now delivering a quality of cut that would have amazed golfers a generation ago, the need to ensure this quality can be maintained cannot be over emphasised. The best mower in the world is hardly that if expected to work with dull bottom blades and reels.

The key is keeping an eye on what is happening and never being afraid to have a different make and model of machine demonstrated. Change may appear slow when compared year-on-year, but just look back to what was on offer 10 years ago. We have never had it so good.

**Toro Reelmaster RM5410-D, RM5510-D and RM5610-D mowers feature the company's Dual Precision Adjustment (DPA) cutting units. These are claimed to allow quick and precise adjustment of the bedknife from both sides. The aim is to ensure the cutting edge retains its keen to edge longer, so delivering a more consistent finish over an extended period. Operator comfort is enhanced by the fitting of new deluxe suspension seats, improved control ergonomics and a control panel which moves automatically as the seat is adjusted.**



Jacobsen ultra light fairway mowers can deliver a simply stunning finish. Of equal importance, these machines can mow with less risk of soil compaction both late and early in the season. The key is integrating machines of this type into the management of the course and having a heavier machine available should the grass 'get away'.



Spring can be a stressful time, accelerated grass growth not always being accompanied by the right conditions to mow it. Our changeable climate meant many courses were faced with spring-like rates of growth in August and September 2006. Modern mower choices need to reflect this, the retention of 'heavier' fairway mowers possibly being a necessity rather than a luxury in the future.





John Deere's new C Series fairway mowers are available with the company's established fairway tender conditioner with rear roller power brush for use on both standard and ESP cutting units. Apart from improving the condition of the turf by reducing thatch and standing the grass up prior to cutting, the system is also claimed to virtually eliminates clumping early in the morning when dew is lying on the ground.



In the not so dim and distant past, a trailed gang set was the only tool available for fairway mowing. Those courses still using this type of equipment may cast envious glances at neighbours with ride-on kit, but not always. For some, fairways are over manicured and forgiving. For the sake of the game, we all need to keep an open mind and remember how fickle fashion is. Environmental pressure may make regular mowing of fairways too carbon hungry; what then?





Claymore Grass Machinery is now importing the Shibaura SR525 fairway mower into the UK. It will be a tough call for the company to break into a sector dominated by the 'big three', but the new machine will certainly have its followers. Powered by a Shibaura 4-cylinder 27.9 kW (38 hp) 1,662 cc diesel, the SR525 has automatic or full time 4WD and can be specified with a choice of 7 inch reels with 7, 9 (standard) or 11 blades. As guide, the unit weights in at 1,280 kg.



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