



John Deere entered the UK golf sector in 1992, the company's growth having been strong. Now part of the big three, with Toro and Ransomes-Jacobsen, Deere has a wide mower offering. Options, such as a cab, reflects a demand for virtually year round mowing on some courses



Gang mowers, such as the Lloyds Leda, remained the key fairway mowing tool until comparatively recently. Modern ride-on fairway mowers can now deliver a quality of cut that would have seemed far in excess of what was required back in 1977

THREE DECADES OF EQUIPMENT CHANGE

By James de Havilland

Cast your mind back to the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. If it were possible to go back and look at how a golf course was managed back then, what would be the key changes?

For those who have been responsible for maintaining golf courses over the past 30 years or more, the expansion of year round play has to be one of the most noticeable developments. The luxury of a closed season has long gone, with year round pressure to keep the course in tip top condition arguably being the biggest challenge in the past 30 years.

That this demand has coincided with rapid equipment development is either a happy coincidence or a key reason why demands have been

able to rise; it depends upon individual viewpoints. Certainly Norman Fenwick, Course Manager at the Ipswich Golf Club suggests modern aeration equipment is among the mechanical developments that have helped to keep courses in play throughout the winter.

"Modern aeration equipment can be tailored to suit the season and weather enabling you to make it do what is required", he says. "We used to have just the choice of a slitter, chisel or solid tine aerators, these only really working effectively when the conditions were right for them. Now we have a range of needle through to hollow core tines that we can employ to do a specific job. The operation speed and variety of aeration equipment now available is a great help to us".



By the 1980s, Ransomes was producing its own greens mowers, the pictured Motor 180 and Tournament Triplex 171 being early examples. By 1984, the Triplex MarkII had a choice of brush or cutter attachments, quality of cut taking a useful step forwards



The Ransomes-Hahn Tournament Triplex was produced in the US, Ransomes importing it as a response to the Toro Greensmaster III. This first came to the UK in 1970 and was imported by Flymo International. In the USA, Jacobsen was the first to develop a ride-on greens mower in 1968. Powered by a 12hp petrol engine, the Ransomes-Hahn offered a 1.70m cut and could be supplied with verticutting, spiking and utility mowing reels. The first machine was sold in 1972, with 300 units having been sold by summer 1974



Evolution in greens mower design gathered momentum quickly, the Ransomes GT models first seen in 1987 featuring Kubota diesel power as an option, full hydrostatic drive and cylinder backlapping

Mr Fenwick is not alone in this view, of course, good aeration now being accepted as one of the key management disciplines that a good greenkeeper can exploit to keep greens and fairways playable, and looking good, year round. That is not to suggest there are hard and fast rules on how and when any type of aeration should be carried out. Individual experience continues to outweigh 'text book' practice, but there cannot be many in the industry who would want to see their equipment list pruned of their aeration kit.

"Mowing equipment has seen dramatic change as well. As recently as the mid-90s the trailed gang fairway mower was still dominant. The development and almost universal acceptance of ride-on fairway mowers has definitely seen an improvement in the quality of fairways", adds Mr Fenwick. "I would not say modern kit is necessarily more productive, but it certainly does a better job. For a start the latest machines will produce more cuts per metre and can be fitted with groomers and brushes".

He also adds that being able to mow in different directions is a key advantage over trailed gangs, a point those who have operated a set of venerable Lloyds Leda or Ransomes Sportscutter units will appreciate. Look at photographs and existing footage of past championships and the way in which the fairways are mown that will help to date them.

Ride-on fairway mowers have also evolved, the early models having cylinder dimensions that are now more likely to be associated with a commercial mower. That is not to say all fairway machines were like this. The Jacobsen LF100 of the early 90's demonstrated the way this type of equipment would evolve into much lighter machines. The ultra light designs now available would no doubt have been seen more suitable for greens mowing back in 1977.

"I think ride-on greens mowers were another key development, these machines starting to make an increasing impact from the 1980's",

adds Mr Fenwick. "Hand mowing will retain its place, no doubt, but the quality of cut offered by current ride-on greens mowers is such that I can see little advantage using a pedestrian machine, even for tournaments. The narrow stripe from hand mowing remains an advantage, but not much else".

The way in which golfing has evolved and course management developed in the past 30 years has been extraordinary. The demands for quality play have been driven by keen golfers. No longer content with playing a handful of local courses, modern golfers have not just greater national course experience but international exposure as well. For course managers this has helped to drive improvements in course quality, and not just for a few months of the year.

"Not so long ago green speeds were not necessarily known, with few golfers even knowing what a Stimp Meter was. Now green speeds are better understood," adds Mr Fenwick. "We now aim to get our green speeds as similar as possible and use Stimp readings as a tool. A few years back, this would have been seen as excessive even when preparing for a tournament. Now we try to maintain consistent readings year round. Yes, demands have certainly changed".

So would Mr Fenwick like to roll back the clock, and find himself in charge at the Ipswich back in 1977? In a word, no. The pressures in 1977 were still there, make no mistake, but they were a different set of pressures. Reverting to what are now obsolete practices is not something he would relish. It would, however, be a revelation to see how modern practice would have been received back in 1977.

"We have higher levels of staff training and standards are certainly a lot higher," he concludes. "So now we have the equipment and staff to help ensure the course can be maintained to an extremely high standard. The key pressure is to maintain a consistently high quality throughout the year."



The tine armoury that can be fitted to a modern aeration tool, such as the Wiedenmann Terra Spike models, is considerable. For many, the impact this type of equipment has had on the modern game is considerable, enabling many courses to remain in play year round