



One man went to mow!

By Peter Todd

How you mow your tees and surrounds depends on many factors: the terrain, the desired finish, obstructions, tournaments – the list is endless. And can the same mowers be used for both tasks? In this article Peter Todd, Golf Courses Manager at The London Golf Club, near Brands Hatch, Kent, talks about how he is using a range of mowers to cut both tees and surrounds on his two 18-hole courses and the factors involved.

Tees mowing is carried out here using both Toro Greensmaster 1000 pedestrian mowers and Greensmaster 3250-D, 8-blade ride-on triples. Use of triples in the growing season frees up valuable time that can be used on other essential tasks at a time of year when the advantages of using a triple tend to outweigh the disadvantages. Tees mowing of 18 holes takes approximately seven man-hours with a triple, or twice that with a pedestrian machine. The saving can be in the region of 600 hours a season on the 36 holes.

The use of walk-behind tees mowers is reserved for tournaments and out of season, when cutting conditions are more difficult. This minimises the stress and damage that can occur when using triples, particularly out of season, when thinner and slower growing swards are unlikely to recover quickly from tyre marking, for instance.

Steeper slopes where tees are shelved into hillsides and built up on mounds can also make triple cutting in adverse conditions difficult. The ease with which tight turns in restricted spaces using walk behind mowers can be achieved, makes this method more suitable and allows the operator to avoid the slope that triples would need as space to turn on.

Triples equipped with three-wheel drive are necessary on our steeply undulating site, improving traction particularly on slippery morning dew. The use of treaded turf tyres can also be used to improve traction as an alternative to slicks but operators need to

carry out turns with added care to avoid marking. Triples fitted with ROPS is also a must in our situation and is an important consideration before selecting equipment as not all manufacturers, like Toro, offer these as a CE certified option.

The tees triple also doubles up as an approach mower with a cutting frequency of twice a week on both surfaces, maximising the use of the machine. Heights of cut range from 10 to 13mm, summer to winter. Tee sizes vary from small tournament tees of 45sq m to combined tees of 280sq m. Striping with the narrower width of a pedestrian mower scales much better with the small tees than a triple. In addition, there are more options on cutting directions due to their ease of turning. Overall presentation and definition is enhanced when using pedestrian mowers.

Course furniture is kept low profile and to a minimum to make maintenance operations more efficient and to avoid the cluttered look. The use of granite distance markers, set level in the grass with the tee surface, allows the mowers to cut straight over the top and requires little maintenance. Ball washers are generally placed on the edge of the long native grass areas adjacent to the mown tee surrounds. Golfers can easily access them and few need moving for mowing. For tournaments, the addition of advertising boards, and so on, placed very close to tees for TV, makes walk-behind mowing the only option, as well as for presentation reasons.

For us, surround cutting starts with one width of a Reelmaster 3100-D Sidewinder triple, cut as a ring around each tee at 30mm. This is mown in the opposite direction to the clean-up cut on the tee itself, giving greater definition to shapes. Apart from this ring, the rest of the tee surrounds on the two courses are mown and presented differently.

The Nicklaus Signature course has long, large carries that blend seamlessly into the tee surrounds. These areas are cut using a Toro Groundsmaster 4000-D bat wing rotary at 60 to 80mm. In contrast, Ron Kirby's International course which has tall native grass roughs, carries with grass pathways cut through from the tees. These, together with the tee surrounds, are cut using the Toro Sidewinder triple.

Striped cutting in alternating directions produces chequered-patterned tees with surrounds mown in one direction as a contrast. Triple-cut striped tees do not present as well as those mown with a pedestrian due to the limitations of cutting directions and the cut width only allowing a few number of stripes on small and narrow tees.

Cutting directions of clean-up cuts – ie clockwise or anti-clockwise – are displayed on work boards for the staff to follow and alternated on a regular basis to avoid washboarding. The nature of the tee design is predominantly flowing curved outlines with rounded and kidney shapes. Preserving the perimeter shape of tees is easier to achieve using pedestrian machines with much greater accuracy staying on line, achieved by operators than with the use of triples. In time this can easily lead to loss of tee shapes and their size. Periodically it's worth reviewing these to ensure tees are not allowed to creep in or out in this way and temporarily re-mark outlines to re-establish the perimeters.

We like to offer players two distinctly different golfing experiences on both our courses. The flexibility of our mowers allows us to do just that on all areas of the course, not just on tees and surrounds, to use the machinery which is most appropriate for the prevailing conditions and also the level of presentation required, such as for tournaments or club events.



Above: Golf Courses Manager at The London Golf Club, Peter Todd

Opposite page: The Reelmaster 3100-D Sidewinder is used to cut a single ring around each tee.

Below: A Greensmaster 3250-D is used to cut tees at the start of the season.

