



Modern units are easier to work on and remove for sharpening. Note also the access to the hydraulic drive motor and the routing of the hoses. Hydraulic leaks are increasingly rare on modern kit, but only if it has not been subject to unskilled maintenance attention.

PLANNING BETWEEN DEALER AND MANUFACTURER TO GET BEST MAINTENANCE

Making sweeping generalisations is always dangerous. That said, the way in which modern mowing and ancillary equipment is maintained has tended to settle into a pattern; dealers carrying out the first and possibly major services on new kit, routine maintenance being left to course personnel. But what about the need to carry certain spares and how well trained are those who are expected to keep everything running?

Although there remain a good number of golf clubs with pretty grim workshops, there is a growing trend that has seen equipment housing and workshop facilities improved considerably in recent years. No surprise in this; modern equipment soaks up a great deal of money and it needs setting up correctly too. It pays to look after it.

Manufacturers are doing their bit to reduce maintenance costs, modern machines proving typically easier to give a routine service 'in house'.

Details that can include improved access to lubrication points through to easier to drain hydraulic tanks and engine sumps are just part of the story. Consider cutting units that can be removed without skinned knuckles and rounded-off nuts reduce the effort re-grind bottom knives and cylinders. Then there are improved hydraulic hose runs that are less likely to chafe or even the wide use of radiator screens.

The problem is, making machines easier to service does not mean just anyone can set the kit up to work properly. In some instances, it could be argued setting up a modern greens triple is an art in itself. Trained personnel will always be needed to make any item of kit work at its best, but there is a real danger that the skills needed to look after modern equipment is under-estimated. Keeping modern mowers running goes beyond the need to keep everything greased and changing the engine oil and hydraulic filters.



Modern grinding equipment includes models that are easier to set up and operate than some older designs, but that is not to say they can be used by just anybody. The Bernhard Blade Rite 1750 is among the easiest to set-up in the company's range, and can relief grind with the bottom knife in-situ.



Storing equipment under cover, and keeping it clean, is a key maintenance task. If there is a shortage of workshop skills it can pay to hire in a trained mechanic to carry out routine and general servicing. Sharing resources with a neighbouring course can work well.



It can prove more economical to have a third-party to sharpen the mowers. There is no shame in picking and choosing the jobs that are carried out in-house. If someone who used to do all the grinding moves on, do not assume it is a job that can be picked up by existing members of staff.

Then there is the issue of grinding cylinders in-house. Modern grinding equipment is certainly more user friendly than it used to be, but to suggest this has de-skilled the job is way off the mark. To get the best from any make of model of grinder takes skill. If those skills are not available in the workshop, buying in a grinder will not see them develop overnight. There is no shame in having a third party re-grind your cylinders!

Similarly, a well disciplined workshop does so much more than just keep mowers in tip-top order. It is the details that help keep the equipment 'fleet' ready to go, such as ensuring tyres are inflated to the correct pressures, checking machinery returning from an intensive period of use is not stored needing attention and making sure certain fast moving parts are carried in-house to reduce downtime.

Those who have access to a good dealer locally may well be able to get round a spares stocking problem. But those faced with a bit of a drive to pick up spares, or have them delivered, really do benefit from having a few common parts on hand.

Where problems can arise is when there is a decision made to buy in a range of new equipment all at once. The chances are the new machines will differ from the replaced kit, even assuming the replacements are from the same manufacturer. There is always a risk that a carefully planned parts stock can quickly end up becoming obsolete.

As is so often the case, the key to ensuring maintenance can be maintained at a high level is planning. Forward thinking can help ensure fast moving parts for soon to be replaced equipment are run down, even if this may mean it is necessary to buy in the odd extra filter, blade or fastener to keep a machine going. Similarly, the type of parts that may be needed for new kit may differ from those stocked in the past. Here it pays to talk to the manufacturer and dealer, seeking advice on what parts it

will be a good idea to have on hand. It is well worth trying to work out a maintenance regime long before any new equipment deal is signed.

Terms and conditions relating to warranties need understanding good and early too. What servicing can be done in-house? How is a warranty claim handled? What is covered? How long does the warranty last? Can failed components be replaced in-house? If you do not ask these and other questions you may find a policy change could see the cost of parts you thought were covered coming with a bill.

Another vital issue relates to the use of spurious parts. A manufacturer's warranty will clearly state non-approved spares can impact upon a warranty claim. More important, it is best to maintain good relations with your supplying dealer. Buying genuine parts from them is a key revenue earner for them, so if you want their future support it is only fair to help them in return.

As to the manufacturers, it is fair to say most of them offer pretty similar terms and warranty conditions in real terms. There will be a few differences in the wording in the 'terms and conditions' small print, but these days a new equipment deal is unlikely to fall down through not offering pretty similar warranty cover. Although extended warranties may be offered, the cost of the total purchase and finance package is more important than how that final sum has been arrived at.

One final point is the status of those who look after the equipment. The skills and training required to look after greens and fairways has at long last started to be recognised more formally. Those with mechanical skills have an equally valid role to play. They too need recognition for what they do. It would be pretty difficult to keep everything in order without the workshop staff to maintain the equipment.