

# ROTARY MOWERS: EVOLUTION IMPROVES THE BREED

By James de Havilland

**At one time, the rough started where the fairway ended. Now there are semi-roughs or intermediate roughs and non-fairway areas that are mown to a standard that would have passed muster as a fairway not so long ago. How these areas are mown will obviously depend a great deal on resources and how the course is managed. For some, a rotary mower is the ideal tool.**

There is no point getting tangled in the debate over cylinder versus rotary mowing for rough areas or tees and green surround either for that matter. Off fairway mowing will have so many variables that making blanket comments is pointless. What cannot be denied is that rotary mowers have evolved; there are a range of models that can consistently produce a good, clump free finish to suit differing demands and applications.

This development has certainly helped many courses bring semi-rough and rough areas up to the standards that the modern game demands, in some cases helping to tame areas to the point where a cylinder machine has subsequently taken over. The key issue is that there is a mower choice to suit pretty much every demand.

There are some interesting rotary models to consider too. The Toro Groundsmaster 3500-D is offered with the now well established Sidewinder cutting system. This enables the three decks, offered in a choice of 68" or 72" overall widths, to be offset by up to 24" to either side of the mower.

For those unfamiliar with the system, key advantages include being able to mow up close to the edge of a bunker without the weight of the mower compromising the wall or using the offset to alter wheelings each time an area is mown.

John Deere has a different take on moving decks with its all-new 7400 TerrainCut. Offering a nominal width of 74" from its three 27" decks, the two outer decks are mounted to allow them to be drawn in to reduce the cut width to 68". The idea is that this will increase the overlap with the central deck, eliminating the chance of inter-deck misses over large undulations. Courses built on former agricultural land with ridge and furrow areas may well want to give this machine a try. It is designed to hug awkward terrain when necessary but expand out to its full width on level ground.

This is not the only trick up the sleeve of this thoughtfully designed mower. The JD 7400 system also allows either of the outer decks to be pushed out up to 15" from the standard working width. Like the Toro

Sidewinder, this allows close mowing up to a bunker edge or around a tree. The difference is that the other two decks remain in place. According to Deere this can help ensure the mower remains stable when working on a steep bank.

John Deere has also replaced its established 3245 C five 21" deck model with the new JD 8800. Fitted with an all-new power unit as used on the new JD8500 and JD8700 fairway cylinder models, the new model number matches up with its 88" mowing width. The five spun cast decks are of a similar design to those used on the JD 7400, their narrow 21" width enabling them to follow ground contours for a clean cut.

Jacobsen also take this rotary sector seriously, the company having at least eight ride-on models to choose from. These include the 192" HR 9016 with its potential to mow 16.5 acres/hour (6.7ha/hr) at the productivity end. The AR250, with its five 22" side-discharge or mulching units, has a still wide 88" cut and the rear rollers leave a good striped finish.

The Jacobsen AR5 has a slightly greater operating width at 90" and a different style of deck designed for mulching with a rear flap for rear discharge if required. This model will deliver a finish good enough for surrounds and intermediate roughs, the three deck AR3 suiting tee surrounds and around bunkers.

It is interesting to take a look at the decks on offer. Turn them over and take a look and it is clear that there is more to a rotary than just its blade. Even these vary in design. The Contour Plus rotary decks fitted by Toro to its Groundsmaster 3500, 4500 and 4700 models, for example, have air pockets in the deck that help draw the grass up so it is evenly cut. This is said to help in wet conditions.

Match contour hugging with carefully designed systems to help reduce the risk of scalping, and it is clear a modern rotary can help produce a good, even finish. Modern decks also have greatly enhanced clipping control, reducing the risk of clumps, even when mowing in less than ideal conditions.

For some, a rotary mower will never be anything other than a glorified brushcutter. For others, a rotary mower is the tool to keep a course consistent, with few penalties for members whose balls stray a few feet of the fairway. There are no definitive answers when it comes to mowing, but few will argue that maintaining consistency is easier if the right tools are available.





Powered by a 36hp turbocharged diesel, the all-new John Deere TerrainCut has three 27" decks. The 'Width on Demand' system enables the mowing width to be set at the standard 74" on level ground or reduced to a narrower 68". This will allow undulating ground to be mown with no fear of inter deck misses. All three wheels are powered to optimise traction



The controls on the John Deere 7400 are extremely simple. All it takes to adjust the mowing width or push out an outer unit is the touch of a button. The mower is a joy to use, with low noise and vibration levels



As demonstrated by this Jacobsen AR3, ride-on access to difficult to access areas is a key rotary mower strength. This particular model is purpose designed for this type of work, three-wheel drive and a pokey 33hp diesel combining traction and power



Jacobsen offer huge rotary model choice, the pictured HR 6010 having a 60hp power unit and mowing width of 116" or 127". Designed for tough rough mowing, the HR 6010 is just one of the company's offerings. Those seeking a finish good enough for intermediate roughs and the surrounds of greens and tee should consider the 90" Jacobsen AR5

Jeff Anguige, Toro's UK sales manager, suggests US golf equipment manufacturers have responded to the demands for rotaries that meet the UK's diverse weather patterns.

"Toro Groundsmaster rotaries are designed to work in all weather conditions", he says.

"Though every course is different and subject to a variety of conditions, our rotary mowers cope successfully and consistently achieve a quality finish. The Groundsmaster range has different blade options, including atomic blades. Unique to Toro, these give a superior finish and provide better grass dispersal through the large rear-discharge aperture. The optional recycling accessory also allows the operator total control over how cuttings are dispersed. A modern Toro rotary is designed to cope with the wide range of summer conditions prevalent in the UK and Ireland."

These sentiments are echoed by John Deere and Jacobsen. A modern rotary mower should deliver a good finish in less than ideal conditions, with modern designs including those that can mulch or rear discharge according to end user needs.



The Toro 3500-D with Sidewinder is a well proven design, its decks delivering a good finish. The ability of this model to work close to a bunker wall, hedge or tree adds to its versatility