



# TRACTORS THROUGH THE YEARS

By James de Havilland

Back in 1947, Brockhouse Engineering introduced its BMB President tractor. Powered by a 29hp Morris 8 petrol engine, a new one would have set you back £239 in basic form, a rear linkage and PTO coming as an option. Considered light and powerful for its day, the President tractor was a popular 'groundsmans' tractor, with many remaining in use into the 1980s. For some, however, its main claim to fame was that it was a tractor that replaced the golf course horse.

Each generation of greenkeeper tends to see a pretty major development within their working lives. One that has been largely forgotten is the dramatic change brought by moving from horse drawn equipment to tractor power. It is all too easy to overlook this massive change, many people not realising that it was not until after the end of WW2 that the horse started to be displaced not just on farms but in other sectors too. Milk floats through to short haul carriers relied on horse power into the 1960s in many parts of the UK. As

for mowing, older courses may well find the fairways were horse and gang mown far more recently than many would think.

Although the President tractor mentioned initially is one that many may well remember as a typical gang mower tractor, there were others that were pressed into this role, typically drawn from the entry level range offered by the main agricultural tractor makers. As farm tractors got bigger, the small tractor class was expanded by the introduction of Japanese made compacts.

With so many courses now using dedicated ride-on mowers for all mowing duties, it is easy to forget how grass cutting has evolved. But for those who enjoy a look back, the following pictures may be of interest.

*With thanks to Ransomes Jacobsen, Kubota UK, Lloyds and Co Letchworth, Massey Ferguson, John Deere and Michael Bird.*

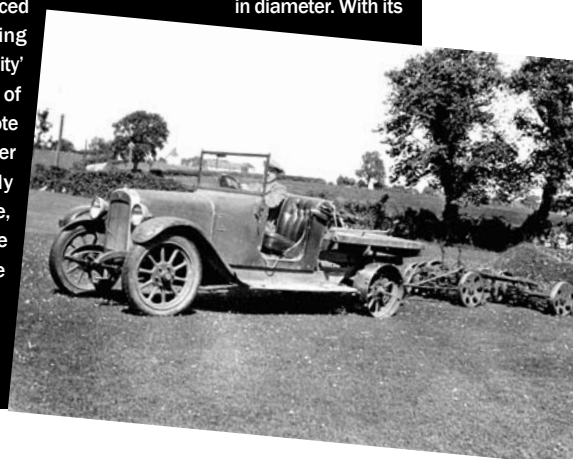
## Horse Power.

It is all too easy to forget that we relied on horse power to mow turf, with this form of power still prevailing into the 1950s or possibly even later in some areas. The animal pictured is not wearing turf overshoes, the latter being commonly fitted to help avoid damage to the ground. In the background, it is evident that working in a straight line was as much a priority then as it is today. Also look at the Lloyds gang mower, and note how the leading gang set have dual rims on the outer wheel sets. This was to help boost traction to the unit in a turn, the mower operator needing a great deal of skill when working in tight spaces and in less than ideal conditions.



## Austin Car and Gang Mower.

Believed to be based around an Austin 20 Tourer of around 1924, this circa 1931 picture clearly demonstrates the desire to be less reliant on true horsepower. The rear of the car has been completely re-worked to provide a load platform for greenkeeping requisites and tools, the lugged steel wheels on the back axle appearing to have been built using the original wheels and spokes. To achieve a lower forward speed, the rear wheels are also reduced screen and comfy looking seats, this course-built 'utility' must have been the envy of all who saw it in action. Note the size of the gang mower drive wheels. Probably geared for a horse's pace, they would probably have spun the cylinders at quite a lick when the 'car' was run up to speed!





### Ferguson FE35 Municipal.

An interesting picture of a 'prototype' Ferguson FE35 'industrial' tractor. Taken at the Banner Lane, Coventry, factory, the 34hp FE35 was only produced between 1956 and part way through 1957, its distinctive bronze and grey finish making it something of a collector's item today. A more sober red and grey paint scheme was adopted when the tractor 'brand' was changed to Massey Ferguson in 1957. The tractors were re-badged as the MF35. Developed from the 'grey Fergie' TE series, the FE35 featured a live PTO, a great advance as it separated the PTO from the tractors forward speed. Note the rear tyres, this pattern doubling up for both industrial and turf use. When used on golf courses, tractors like this were often fitted with worn or road front tread tyres. The prominent ribs of a new agricultural tyre would damage the turf, particularly in a tight turn.

### 57 Mark 1.

Manufactured by Ford at its Basildon tractor plant (still in business building current New Holland tractors) between 1965 and 1975, the three-cylinder 47hp Ford 3000 had 8 forward and 2 reverse speeds. Taken in possibly 1969, the pictured unit is seen powering a Ransomes 57 Mk 1 hydraulic gang mower. In its day the Ford 3000, which replaced the Fordson Super Dexta, was considered light and powerful for its size, with a good number being sold to golf clubs. Fit decent flotation tyres and forty years on it would not look out of place on a course today. The mower is also interesting, hydraulic gang sets enabling Ransomes to meet the demand for a wide-area cylinder mower that could tackle longer grass, deliver high levels of productivity and still leave a decent finish.



### Kubota B7100.

Kubota entered the UK market in the early 1970s, its light and genuinely compact tractors proving a hit with greenkeepers. There were reasons other than size that made these models appeal; for starters they offered a wide choice of gear speeds and they also tended to be pretty oil tight. The tractor shown is a 16hp B7100 with knife tine aerator working on a fairway. This tractor was produced from the 1970s, its genes still being evident in the company's current 'B' model line-up. Tyres purpose developed for use on fine turf helped allow tractors to be used for a wider range of duties, with ancillary equipment being developed to help exploit what a tractor had to offer.





**400 with 365.**

Pictured in 2001, this 35hp John Deere JD4400 and JD365 trailed gang mower combination may not look to have moved the tractor game on by a great deal, but appearance is deceiving. Hydrostatic drive, genuinely turf friendly tyres and a proper ROPS frame are three clear developments, 4WD and power steering making this model more versatile and user friendly than earlier designs. Often overlooked is operator comfort. Spend a few hours behind the wheel of an old tractor and it is clear that there has been a great deal of progress.

**MF 240 Golf.**

The 45hp Massey Ferguson MF 240 is a good example of how agricultural models were adapted to suit the needs of amenity and golf users. The 8 forward speed transmission would go down to 1.62kph. Although the turf tyres fitted are narrow by modern standards, they were a real step forward, particularly at the front. Add a ROPS frame and run the exhaust down the side, and this tractor would no doubt still appeal to a number of golf courses. This picture is from the early 1980s.



**Carnoustie Leda 7tr May 2007.**

Substitute the Kubota tractor up front with a pair of well trained horses and the chances are you could go mowing with this set of trailed Lloyds gangs. OK, there would need to be more than a few changes to the mower to gear it up to work at a horse's pace, but the point is tractors started out as a simple replacement for animal power. A three-point linkage and PTO are now essential to operate modern attachments, but it has not always been that way.