



# Only Perfection Will Do

**James de Havilland** writes with his regular insight into current machinery

**There are occasions when there is so much to say that it makes it almost impossible to know where to begin.**

**A visit to The Belfry in North Warwickshire can leave you like that.**

Ask anyone who has played The Brabazon for the first time or seen the superb maturing of the PGA National over the years. They will be forgiven an initial mumble as they try to find a way to let you know what they have experienced.

For the writer, a visit to greenkeeper's workshops at The Belfry was. Situated at the western end of the 17th on The Brabazon, the complex can sometimes be glimpsed

in an extended TV shot down the approaches. For those fortunate enough to be allowed inside, however, it soon becomes extremely clear that the superb appearance of The Belfry has a great deal to do with what is carried out within the unit's boundary fences.

"We look after all the equipment on this site in-house," says Director of Golf Courses and Grounds, Kenny Mackay. "It is our primary task to ensure that Head Greenkeeper, Neil Smith, has all the mowers he needs every morning, prepared and ready to go at 6.00am. And by ready I mean correctly set to the precise cut height he requires as well as being fuelled up and checked."

Kenny adds that the greenkeeping team is not encouraged to check the machines over either, a point that initially seems a bit strange. Many a workshop manager is only too keen to see those that use equipment check the oil and fuel levels before starting up. His argument is that it is the job of the workshop team to ensure any item of kit sent out to do a job is right.

"That is not to say we do not want the greens team to know how to look after equipment," adds Chris Minton, Head Mechanic. "In fact we are starting a series of short courses that explains the mechanical side of the mowers and equipment to those that are using them. Feedback

**MAIN PHOTOGRAPH:** The Brabazon course is maintained to exacting standards, sharp mowers enabling the greens team to deliver a dependable and consistent finish. Tremendous effort goes into keeping all the mowers used at The Belfry in tip top order.



suggests this is really appreciated. What we do not want is anyone adjusting settings that we have done in the workshop. It is our job to get it right and if something does go wrong we are in radio contact to ensure we are on hand to correct it if a problem arises.”

It is perhaps worth putting the work that is carried out by Kenny and his team into perspective; this will explain why they insist it is they, and no one else, the sets up the kit they use. Consider first the 550 acres plus that makes up The Belfry. Next the need to keep three courses and 54 holes in peak condition despite handling between 115,000 to 120,000 rounds a year.

Then consider the number of mowers they look after.

At any one time, up to six fairways, four greens triplex, nine greens pedestrian and five tees mowers will be in action. Then there are three mowers for the roughs and, the list goes on.

In simple terms, Neil Smith will have a team of up to 50 to organise. Kenny and Chris have to ensure each and every one of them has a machine that is set up to deliver the cut Neil demands.

“Besides myself, I have Steve Townsend working with me ‘on the spanners’,” adds Chris. “Part of our job is to ensure the mowers are sharp, all grinding being car-

ried out by us on site. We have a good relationship with Bernhard and Co, our membership of their Premier Club ensures we get a new set of grinders every two years. This guarantees we are always using the latest equipment which helps us keep on top of the job”.

The Toro mowing fleet has helped in the latter respect, the fairway mower cylinders now having a relief cut into the blades from the factory. This saves cutting one in. Chris also checks each and every cylinder prior to allowing it to be used. A pile of green paper test strips is evidence of this as he checks the cylinder across its working width. This is another reason why he does not



## International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association (ICGEMA)

Chris Minton has become a keen supporter of the web based ICGEMA, its forums enabling him to 'talk' with course mechanics around the World.

He suggests greens staff have long had associations and magazines that specifically target their needs, but there are few outlets that are dedicated to those who look after specialist golf maintenance equipment.

"I have found I can tap a query into a forum and get an answer from someone in the US," he says.

"Manufacturer technicians are also members of the ICGEMA, and you can sometimes get a reply from someone who works for Toro or Deere.

"It is a useful tool for me."

**Log on to [www.icgema.org](http://www.icgema.org) to find out more.**

want anyone using a mower to 'fiddle' with it.

The degree of self-sufficiency at The Belfry extends to tackling routine drainage work and even undertaking projects that can include installing sleeper walls and waterfalls to protect and enhance famed water features. A look around the machinery compound highlights just how diverse the equipment fleet is.

"We keep a good stock of fast moving parts here," adds Chris. "We have recently installed a rack system to make it easy to access everything and I keep a running stock check to ensure we always have certain belts, blades and filters on hand.

"Although we order parts direct from our key suppliers, we actually buy through our local dealers, Abbey Mower Supplies for Toro and

Turner Grounds Care for Toro and John Deere respectively."

Chris has a dealer service background, a point that he used to help persuade Kenny that working with local dealers is the way forward. It is an approach that has worked well in the three or so years Chris has been at the belfry.

A key development in 2008 was the decision to purchase, as opposed to lease, a 67 strong golf buggy fleet. Including hotel service vehicles, there are a total of 84 vehicles electric petrol units that now need looking after, specialist Brendan Mason having been brought in to manage them. He has a dedicated service and charging zone near the hotel complex, so this side of the operations is separate from the Greenkeeping complex.

Because the management of the equipment fleet is well structured,

both Kenny and Chris can plan ahead. Certain tasks have to be put on hold during major tournaments to avoid noise being picked up during TV coverage. As an example, all grinding work is carried out ahead of schedule and machine wash-down is restricted to specific times.

"Chris maintains accurate machine service records," adds Kenny. "He will read off the hours on all units to ensure they are serviced in line with the manufactures recommendations. This enables us to adhere to any warranty conditions. It is inevitable that he has to spend a fair part of his time doing 'paperwork' but that is all part of running an efficient workshop. We just have to remember it is our job to provide Neil Smith the kit he needs to do a first class job. It is something we take great pride in doing."

**TOP LEFT:** The workshop parts store carries a range of fast moving parts, a new rack system making it easier to the right components quickly. A parts inventory is kept to ensure restocking is not overlooked.

**TOP RIGHT:** The use of the latest Bernhard grinding equipment helps Chris Minton and Steve Townsend on top of keeping all mowers sharp. Quality of cut is the key workshop priority.

**BELOW LEFT:** Steve Townsend inspects, adjusts and tests the performance of a pedestrian greens mower. Although greens staff are encouraged to know what makes a mower tick they are not 'allowed' to adjust any settings.