

# Behind the scenes at Toro



We lift the lid on the secrets behind the success of Toro, a BIGGA Gold Key sponsor, and its UK distributor Lely

**If you follow sport, the chances are Toro's footprint will have made its mark on some of the famous competitions you've enjoyed from the comfort of your armchair.**

As well as supplying machinery to the likes of St Andrews, The Belfry and Celtic Manor, Toro have a presence at Wimbledon, the Olympics and the Super Bowl as well as other glittering events.

The company's HQ is in Minneapolis in the US state of Minnesota, and also has manufacturing bases in Australia and across Europe.

My introduction to the UK operation begins in the hamlet of Spellbrook close to Bishop's Stortford at just one of these bases. Accessed via a narrow and winding lane and surrounded by rolling countryside, it initially seems an unlikely location for a manufacturer of large scale consumer and commercial products.

In 2005 Toro acquired the British mower manufacturer Hayter – who were based at Spellbrook – and now manufacture thousands of machines on site, as Chris Cooper, Product Marketing Manager, explains.

“The location may seem a little unusual but in fact it's ideal for us. Its close proximity to Stansted airport allows us to host manufacturers, clients and potential clients from across the world.

They can see how it all works and also see the machines in action.

“Although most machines manufactured and distributed here are for landscape contractors, councils and homeowners, it's a great insight into the Toro manufacturing process.”

Chris goes on to provide an interesting potted history of the Toro organisation.

Originally founded in 1914 to build tractor engines, they were

almost immediately mobilised to manufacture steam engines for merchant ships when the First World War broke out.

As if war wasn't enough of a hurdle, the Great Depression was approaching which slashed the company's agricultural sales.

However, in 1920 a Minnesota golf club approached Toro to create a motorised fairway mower. Five reel mowers were mounted on to the front of a Toro tractor – and the motorised golf course equipment industry was born.

**“For us, establishing a long-term relationship with the customer is key. We talk to our customer base constantly – this is absolutely vital”**

Over the last decade, Toro have acquired several organisations – including Hayter – to enhance various aspects of the business. The likes of Lawn Boy have helped them expand their consumer mower operation, while Exmark expanded their commercial mower line.

Chris takes me for an autumn stroll outside to cast an eye over the brand new GreensPro 1200 greens roller – and also points out a field on site where they're rigorously tested for hours on end in all weathers.

He says: “It's far from the most glamorous job, but it's an absolutely vital one.

In this industry it's common to see the fourth or fifth version of a machine, but that's not the way we operate. We insist that every product is tested intensely so the customer receives the finished article.

“It's a false economy to keep producing different versions to remedy problems.”

The next stage of my education sees me head north to St Neots in Cambridgeshire to Lely UK, long-term distributor for Toro golf, grounds and irrigation systems in the UK and Ireland.

It's based in a fairly unassuming building – but behind this quiet facade lies a hive of activity.

Intriguingly, turf machinery is just one arm of this organisation.

Another is the remarkable procedure of robotic milking.

I'm not sure words can do justice to this procedure which Lely have

led the way in automating so check out [www.lely.com/en/milking](http://www.lely.com/en/milking) for more if you're interested...

As well as the world of bovine manipulation, the company also offers forage harvesting solutions such as bales, rakes and harvesters plus much more – but it's the golf-related stuff I really want to get my teeth into.

It's a welcome opportunity to see the the likes of the Greensmaster TriFlex greensmower and other staples of the Toro range being painstakingly constructed, tweaked and finally completed before they become fixtures on golf courses across the world.

I also get the chance to meet the sales team who impress on me the importance of providing a friendly and personalised service.

Lely's Toro Key Account Manager Trevor Chard, who accompanies me on the visit alongside Marketing Manager Holly Jones, is particularly proud of this.





“For us, establishing a long-term relationship with the customer is key. We don’t conclude a transaction then abandon the customer. We’re proud of our aftercare service, and many of our customers are on first name terms with our colleagues which is superb.

“We talk to our customer base constantly – this is absolutely vital. We like to think we’re set apart by the quality of service we provide, our experience, product knowledge and ability to meet our customers’ long-term needs.

“The technology really has improved greatly during my time in the industry. It’s more durable as it’s of a better quality, is quicker, does a more professional job and is easier to operate.”

Lely was founded in 1948 and successful innovations such as the finger wheel rake and the Lely fertiliser spreader made an impact on the market.

But the big breakthrough came 20 years later with the launch of the Lelyterra power harrow – leading to a huge growth in sales.

Over the next decades, the company became synonymous with innovation, including patenting the unique modular cutting bar which was fitted to the Splendimo disc mower and various new versions of the aforementioned Astronaut automated milking system.

As always, the proof is in the pudding so the final destination is the prestigious John O’Gaunt Golf Club in Pottton, Bedfordshire.

Here, experienced mechanic and workshop manager Stuart Hall demonstrates the benefits of the

machinery, explains the process of grinding and enthusiastically praises Toro’s new ‘myTurf’ fleet management system.

Each machine at John O’Gaunt is fitted with a wireless hour meter which transmits data to a control box – similar in size to a wireless router.

Every time the vehicle passes this it sends information to the box.

This means a greenkeeper simply has to log on to the myTurf system to get every imaginable detail about every vehicle on their fleet.

It also offers online access to Toro manuals – a real space saver – and the ability to order parts at any time.

Because each vehicle in the fleet is monitored, myTurf ensures the correct part is ordered.

The system is currently more widely available in the US, and John O’Gaunt is one of the test sites – something which has delighted Stuart.

Stuart says: “I can’t imagine why any club of reasonable size would not have myTurf. The key is, you can view how much a machine has cost you in labour time, parts and repairs.

“This means at the end of the year you can see that if a machine has cost you £500 it’s worth keeping. But if it’s cost you £3,000 you have a strong case with clear evidence to go to your committee and ask for a new machine.

“It’s a no-brainer and I hope more clubs get to take advantage of it.”

Thanks to Trevor Chard, Holly Jones, Chris Cooper, Stuart Hall and all at John O’Gaunt Golf Club.

