

Evolution in Action

The light and super light fairway mower offering has evolved over the years. A combination of reduced sized cutting units and a lower powered and lighter ride-on 'tractor units' can mean you can buy a true precision cut wide area mower

James de Havilland takes a look at the new breed of light fairway mower which have arrived on the market





Manufacturers typically offer a choice of 'light' fairway models within a range to give a choice of engine and cutting units. These models will be based around what amounts to pretty much the same ride-on unit.

A key to differentiating between light fairway mowers is to concentrate on the cutting units and to match these to the desired mowing height of your fairways. It follows that light and narrow units are better suited to high frequency 'light' mowing, so obviously how the fairways are managed will have a major impact upon model selection.

It also follows that larger units offer improved ability to tackle less frequent mowing and coping with a heavier cut when it has not been possible to mow for a more extended period than would otherwise be adopted.

Conversely, a light mower may be able to work on fairways that would otherwise be too wet to take the weight of a heavier model. It is one of those subjects that can lead to a somewhat circular argument. There are no simple 'if you do this, this type of mower is best' rules.

So how a light fairway mower, or

more often than not two or more light models, fit into the mowing and management of a course is in itself a subject. But the key is that there is a choice of equipment on offer, starting from narrower width, small unit 'super light' through to more conventional 'light' fairway mower designs. It is the latter that have seen a growth in popularity over the past decade.

Super light mowers

Introduced in the UK in late 2003, the now well-established five-gang Jacobsen SLF 1880 was the first of the true super light fairway models. Fitted with 5in/12.7cm diameter cylinder reels of just 18in/45.7 cm in width, this mower will cut 82 inches or just over 2.0m in a pass. A choice of 8- of 11-blade units are offered together with a choice of 25 or 33hp diesel engine.

And how much does the SLF 1880 weigh? From 959kg in 2WD and 998kg in 4WD form. This is spread between 24x13-12 front and 18x9.5-8 rear tyres - which should mean a really light footprint. By way of comparison, the latest 'light fairway' Jacobsen 2WD LF 550 weighs in at 1287kg with its

five 22in/56cm units raised. That is a significant difference.

That said, Ransomes Jacobsen suggests that the super light SLF 1880 - which has had a few design nips and tucks over the years - remains more of a niche player. It is the company's LF 550 and LF 570, which replace the LF 3400 and LF 3800, which are the key sellers as they both cater for more 'mainstream' light fairway mower needs.

The Jacobsen SLF 1800 no longer has the super light niche to itself, the five-gang John Deere 8000E E-Cut hybrid matching its 5 inch/12.7cm diameter by 18 inch/45.7 cm wide cylinder reels to offer an 80 inch/2.0m mowing width. The 37hp Deere mower drives hydraulic pumps for the mower's traction motors, steering and lift rams, with a generator powering the cutting units electric motors - the same system as employed on existing E-Cut Hybrid models in the company's line up.

Of equal interest is that the three-wheel tractor unit has smooth tyres as standard, John Deere suggesting the 8000E will leave a striped finish that will be similar to a ride-on greens mower. A choice of 7- or 11-blade QA5 units are

As with its competitors, Toro offers its Reelmaster 5010 series fairway models in specs to suit different needs. The pictured 5410 sits above the less powerful 5210, with both the 5510 and 5610 alternatives having larger cylinder reels. In outline, as you go up the range you get more power and larger DPA cutting units but also more weight. A 28hp 2WD 5210 will weigh from 1087kg.





offered, height of cut spanning 2 to 28.5mm dependent upon bottom blade bedknife and roller specified. Those heights of cut are not a typo either, reflecting the use of 'greens' cutting units on a mower that has the width to tackle a wider area.

Light fairway mowers

Toro Reelmaster 5010 models are the company's light fairway models, the four model line-up comprising the five-gang, 100in/2.54m cut width 5210 and 5410 with 5 in/12.7cm diameter cylinder reels and the 5410 and 5610 with 7in/17.8cm diameter units. Apart from cutting unit size, the remaining model differences are engine outputs of 28, 35.5, 35.5 and 44.2hp respectively.

Jacobsen LF 550 and LF 570 models essentially have the same unit stats as the Toro models, the 22in/56cm wide individual cutting units having the further option of a 9-blade cylinder. Power choice is 35.5 or 44.2hp for both models.

John Deere 7500 and 8500 PrecisionCut Fairway mowers, together with the 7500 and 8500 E-Cut Hybrid again they offer the same size units as the models from Jacobsen and Toro and same 100in/2.54m width of cut, the engine output of 37.1 and 43.1hp determining the model number.

ABOVE: The Sunningdale Golf Club, Berkshire, currently operates four Jacobsen SLF 1880 fairway mowers. These 'super light' models have a height of cut range from 7.62 to 17.78mm (or up to 23.8mm with a high cut kit). Narrow units and small cylinder reels allow good contour following. It all adds up to offering the potential for a really good finish.

BELOW: Superseding the established LF 3400 / LF 3800, the LF 550 and LF 570 have a range of new features to help cut maintenance and boost productivity. Power to the wheels is controlled by a 'drive-by-wire' electronic system designed to reduce travel pedal pressure and help eliminate wheel spin.

