

Matt -trick hero

Matt Le Brun is head greenkeeper at the RJ National, a three-hole, GEO certified course on the outskirts of Ipswich. Kevin Marks visited him recently to see how he maintains the course for his employers, Ransomes Jacobsen, a BIGGA Gold Key Sponsor

Matt is the head greenkeeper (and the only greenkeeper) looking after the three-hole golf course at the European headquarters of the international turf maintenance equipment manufacturer, Ransomes Jacobsen.

Seasoned greenkeepers may think a three-hole course would literally be a walk in the park - but in just 18 months, Matt has made this job into a vocation.

He dreamed of becoming a professional golfer and recorded his first hole in one aged just 11 - but eventually realised he was not quite



up to professional standard.

So, he joined Milton Park Golf Club in 2005 as an apprentice professional, and began taking a real interest in the 'other' side of the business.

"I became more involved and more interested in what was going on around the course," he said, "so in 2007 I got a job at my home club of Ely. I subsequently achieved NVQ level 2 and obtained my spraying certificates, as well as gaining excellent experience of general greenkeeping duties.

"After a spell at Heijman's Contractors in the Netherlands I saw this job advertised on BIGGA's

website, and after a rigorous interview process I began my two-year contract in January 2011.

"Being a GEO certified golf course puts us in such illustrious company as courses at St Andrews, Celtic Manor, and the Montgomerie in Turkey."

The RJ National was the brainchild of David Withers, the managing director at Ransomes Jacobsen, now president at Jacobsen in the USA, who wanted to build a small golf course close to the company's manufacturing facility. He reasoned that if he could produce a course that had different grass species on each of the holes



and fairways, then it would be ideal for testing the company's mowers and demonstrating their capabilities to customers and prospects. He also wanted to use the course as an educational and training opportunity for young, aspiring greenkeepers and that's exactly how it's turned out.

He persuaded golf architect Howard Swan to design the course and with input from the STRI, who return every six months to evaluate the course, there was a determined effort to construct the course in accordance with the highest environmental principles. The ground was broken in June 2007, seeding commenced in the autumn and it was officially opened in October 2008.

"I inherited a young golf course following a very harsh winter with snow mould damage on the greens," Matt says. "But I'm not left completely alone to manage the course as I'm mentored by Norman Fenwick, course manager at Ipswich Golf Club.

"His advice has been invaluable. He's from Wearside with a very direct manner, but he knows the art of greenkeeping inside out. I can honestly say that I would have made more mistakes if it wasn't for him."

Matt has relished his unique chance to try out up-to-the-minute equipment on the course.

"One of the great things about this job is the opportunity to use some

of the latest and most innovative equipment in the industry. We have a large demonstration fleet, so I get to use a whole range of machinery from pedestrian mowers to large tractors.

"We have a close working relationship with Wiedenmann and they have been a great help with my aeration programme. After aeration I then top dressed with pure sand.

"In the first six months I was working long hours to bring the course round; I was scarifying and overseeding and I changed the fertiliser programme reducing the granular and introducing a liquid input.

"Because of the large number of customer visits and product testing I didn't want to leave granular fertiliser on the course and have it re-distributed by the footfall of visitors, so I changed to liquid applications.

"As part of my job I've been able to test the enhancements to the Jacobsen Eclipse 322 hybrid and all-electric riding greens mowers.

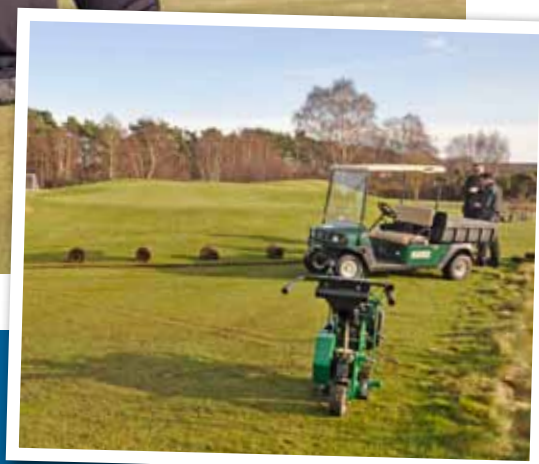
"I've evaluated all the GreenTek range – vibrating roller, scarifiers and de-thatchers and I tested the new three-wheel drive system, long before it went to market.

"One of the real highlights so far was a product video, filmed here. It involved a remote controlled helicopter filming from various angles.

"I had to drive across the course with the helicopter fast approaching



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and swooping over my head as I drove by. It was being controlled by a guy some 30 metres away and was quite scary!

“I’d like to think that under my short tenure, the course has become more established and has certainly got a lot more definition.

Without a doubt, it’s the best place I’ve ever worked; the people are so professional, everyone is willing to help and give their time and there is so much knowledge here.

From the engineering team, who keep coming up with new and innovative equipment, to the guys who actually build the mowers in the factory, the trainers who have collectively hundreds of years experience and knowledge, and the sales and marketing people who make sure that we keep putting the professional ace of the business to the marketplace.”

It’s very clear that despite only managing a three-hole course, Matt has thrown himself into what is a hugely varied and full-on role.

So, if you’re a young and aspiring greenkeeper, still on a college course with the aim of forging a career and you see an advertisement for this post, don’t hesitate; send in your application!

The types of grass seed at RJ National

Tee 1: Bar 10

45% Barlexas 2 tall fescue
25% Perennial Rye grass
30% Rhizomatosis tall fescue
Trial grass that did not work as well.
Overseeded with dwarf perennial rye grass and removing tall fescue

Green 1: Bar 2

25% Viktorika slender creeping red fescue
25% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue
15% Barbride chewings fescue
10% Barking browntop bent
10% Heriot browntop bent

Tee 2: Bar Platinum

30% Bargold dwarf perennial ryegrass
25% Barpearl slender creeping red fescue
25% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue
20% Barbirdie chewings fescue

Green 2: Bar fescue

25% Barbirdie chewings fescue
25% Bargreen chewings fescue
25% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue
25% Barpearl slender creeping red fescue

Tee 3: Bar 4

40% Chopin strong creeping red fescue

30% Bartwingo dwarf perennial ryegrass
15% Bartender smooth stalked meadow grass
15% Barpearl slender creeping red fescue

Green 3: Bar all bent

50% Barking brown top bent
50% Heriot brown top bent

Fairways: Bar 5

30% Slender creeping red fescue
25% Baroxi chewings fescue
25% Bargreen chewings fescue
15% Julius smooth stalked meadow grass

Test area/Football pitch: Bar 8

35% Romance dwarf perennial ryegrass
30% Barlennium dwarf perennial ryegrass
15% Barcrown slender creeping red fescue
20% Julius smooth stalked meadow grass

