

Future shock?



James de Haviland urges you to keep up to date with developments in the machinery world

Take a look back over the past 10, 15 or even 20 years and it is clear that whilst some equipment has just got larger and more sophisticated, other items of kit have helped introduce new techniques such as precision overseeding and precise aeration. But what is the next big thing you should be aware of?

At present, the market for totally autonomous mowers is still in its infancy with models, such as the Etesia Robot, having won favour with those seeking a straightforward maintenance mowing system. But the Etesia can be set up to collect golf balls as it mows and only cut grass where it is needed. It's fitted with five discs running at 3,500rpm. The unit is designed to leave a clean finish over frequently mown turf. Height of cut can be adjusted to between 22mm to 88mm. Workrate is put at 3,600 m²/hr, one machine having the potential to keep up to

20,000m² under control. The unit only mows grass that needs cutting, working at random and returning to a fixed charge point when it runs low on power.

Twenty years ago, a self-propelled fairway mower was seen as something only well-off golf clubs could afford. For some, even a powered hydraulic gang was considered something of a fairway mowing luxury, drag gang sets earning their stripes on many a fairway well into the nineties and beyond. These days, trailed gangs still have a place but ride-on fairway mowers dominate, their cost to performance ratio making them 'affordable' for even less well-off courses.

Other items of kit that have become 'mainstream' include aerators. Again, some may get the forks out to aerate a green but not many. And by aeration it is also worth remembering that hollow coring, deep aeration and the manner in which wide area aeration to include fairways can now be carried out is

something a previous generation of greenkeepers would wonder at.

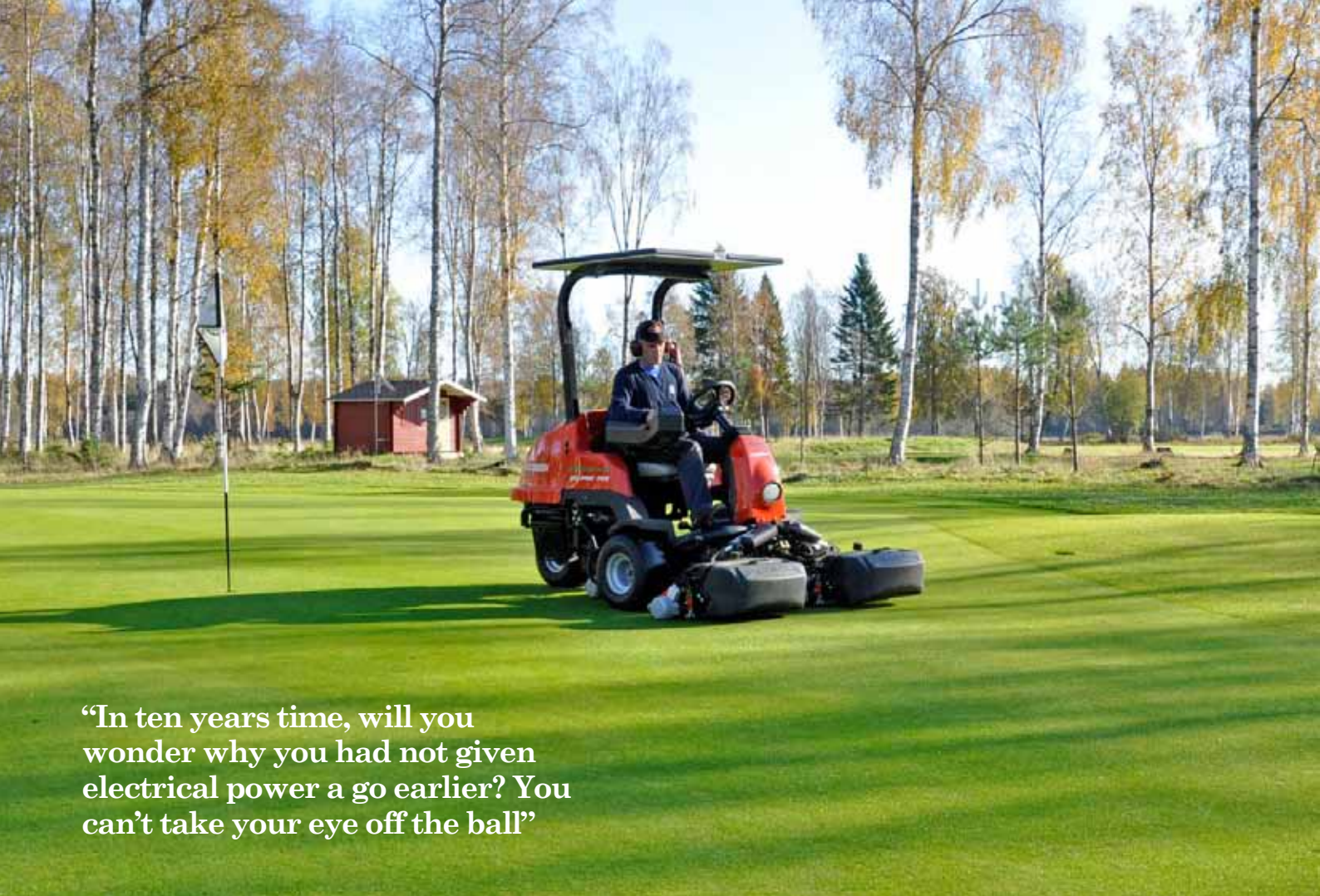
So, what is the big news in machinery development these days? That is not an easy question to answer. As an industry, the golf sector saw great expansion from the 1980s and with it the levels of mechanisation rapidly increased. The last three decades have really seen some new ideas make their mark. Now, however, it could be argued that product development has perhaps overtaken innovation.

If you could drive a 1990s era fairway or greens mower alongside a 2012 model you would appreciate that development is every bit as important as innovation.

For some this may be seen as an opportunity to suggest you can quietly overlook machinery developments and concentrate upon other aspects of course maintenance. This is to overlook those developments happening all the time. Some are not going to make a revolutionary change to the way

ABOVE: Baroness LM283
BELOW: the Etesia Robot





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a course is tended, but they could help save some time or do a job more efficiently.

The key is to keep an eye out for changes, be prepared to try new equipment and not shy away from demonstrations. A good example is to consider a hybrid mower or one with full battery power. Think gang mowers versus ride-on and petrol versus diesel fuelling.

In ten years time, will you wonder why you had not given electrical power a go earlier? You can’t take your eye off the ball.

With a 49hp engine and five gangs, the Toro Reelmaster 7000-D is right at the heavy end of fairway mowers, with the capacity to cope with fast growing grass in a season typified by 2012. It offers a 3.07m width of cut and can be set to mow between 6.35mm to 63.5mm. Of course this model is not for everyone but never has there been so much choice. Unless you look you may miss out on a model that is best suited to your specific needs.

Now consider a mainstream model, the John Deere 8500E E-Cut Hybrid mower followed the 2500E greens mower to the UK market, the former first being launched back in 2005. Although this type of mower is not fully electric, hybrids have done a lot to help the all-electric cause, the motors

powering the cutting units having proven dependable and efficient.

The Jacobsen Eclipse 322 in its all-electric guise was first seen in 2009, this mower doing away with not just an internal combustion engine but hydraulics too.

Plug in mowing may take a while to become mainstream but few can argue against the appeal of the technology. It has variable mowing speeds to a maximum of 9 km/h and transport speeds up to 14.5km/h. The all-important frequency of cut or clip rate can be adjusted from 1.27mm to 6.35mm for the 11-blade cylinder and 2.03mm to 9.91mm for the 7-cylinder option.

Utility vehicles have long had the option of electric power, but those looking for a general purpose unit that is at home in easy going as it is coping with tougher terrain may prefer a petrol or diesel engine.

The Cushman Hauler 1200X electric model could change that with its 450kg capacity and power to cope with steep going. Payload is a generous 450kg and maximum speed will be around 25km/h.

Do you know what has changed in the utility vehicle market? Have you tried an e-Gator from John Deere or Toro MDX with battery power?

Baroness mowers, such as



LM283, have no electronics and employ simple levers to raise and lower the units. Options run to 5, 7 or 9 blades and collectors. No groomers or brushes, just easy to adjust and well made cutting units. It has straightforward hydraulics and simple all-wheel traction, but do not confuse this with poor mowing ability. The units are precision items.

So the question remains - do you know just how much equipment choice you have these days?

INSET ABOVE: Cushman Hauler 1200X electric and **MAIN ABOVE:** the Jacobsen Eclipse 322