

Are you ready for winter?

Stuart Hall, former Workshop Manager at John O'Gaunt Golf Club, urges you to take a few simple steps to ensure your machinery is ready for winter



It's strange to think that after the majority of the country has finally enjoyed a good, dry summer we're now starting to think about winter setting in, but its only round the corner – and all greenkeepers need to be ready.

Now is the ideal time to start a few pre winter checks, as we enter autumn, leaves and heavy dew start to interfere with early morning mowing. The extra moisture on the ground can find its way into every small space, so it's time to check your cutting unit's roller seals are sound to prevent water penetration and lead to further damage, a quick check now could save you the cost of a bearing replacement in the near future.

Also as the temperature starts to drop leading to frosts, ensuring your engine coolant has enough antifreeze protection is an absolute must. Protection of your engine's water jacket now can save you costly engine damage. You can buy good quality antifreeze testers now for around £12 - well worth the investment - but as a rule of thumb

most manufacturers recommend a solution of 50% antifreeze and 50% water.

However, most of them also provide a ready mixed solution, this acts as a summer coolant and frost protection all rolled into one, alternatively you can get a relatively cheap 10l container with a tap, add 5l of antifreeze, 5l of water and you have a year round mixture ready to go. If your operators have this to hand when they're doing their pre start checks, and you use it all year round, you don't ever have to worry about unexpected early frosts.

At the same time, as daft as it sounds, as the temperature drops and damp weather arrives giving the radiator a good clean out is essential. As dust and debris start to mix with the moisture in the air it starts to form a solid mass, this has a nasty habit of blocking the radiator's cooling fins. Then just as you're not expecting it the machine overheats, so it's well worth a having a look, then while you're checking the radiator, check the radiator cap itself. This important piece of the cooling system is vastly





overlooked, but it's an integral part that acts as a vent when overheating occurs. But, if the cap is in poor condition with a damaged seal or a weak spring, it gives the impression that you have an overheating cooling system when actually it's just a damaged cap.

Another good one to check early is the battery, again a check now could save you having to fork out for a costly replacement. Batteries struggle in cooler conditions and frost can wreck them if they're not in good condition, so now is the best time to check fluid levels. A simple tester is available from most dealers and show up any any cells in bad condition. At the same time you can clean up the terminals and apply a coating of protective terminal spray or electrical grease, then once complete why not check your charging system with a volt meter (normally around 13.8v) and the condition of your fan belt, all this only takes

a few minutes but can really save you money.

Lastly we come to fuel. Modern fuels have changed dramatically over the last few years, firstly petrol now goes stale in around three to six weeks and can really catch you out over the winter period as machines are used less frequently. You can either use a fuel additive, or a cheaper option is to drain petrol out of the tanks and carburettor bowls so when you go to use them next fresh fuel goes in and starting isn't an issue. Secondly as diesel now has a minimum of 5% bio fuel in it there is a greater chance of water build up and fuel freezing in your tanks, so if you don't top your machine fuel tanks up after each use, start doing so now as it helps keep condensation to a minimum and helps reduce bacteria build up.

All these tips will allow you to approach autumn and winter with your machinery ready for the freez-

ing temperatures and frosts – and many of these will take just a few minutes of your time but will save you lots of money and disruption when you least need it in the depths of a British winter.



about the author



Stuart Hall

Stuart began his working life in greenkeeping before moving to machinery maintenance, and became Workshop Manager at John O'Gaunt Golf Club. Earlier this year he accepted a role as Groundcare Services Manager for P Tuckwell Ltd, a John Deere machinery dealer supplying Ground care machinery near Stevenage. He covers Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, a huge area with many golf clubs, sports grounds, schools and colleges.