

Agronomist Eddie Connaughton, of Grass Technology International Ltd, kicks off a two-part feature on annual meadowgrass by looking at what it is. Next month he provides tips on managing it

The subject of *Poa annua*, or annual meadow grass as we commonly refer to it, has had many thousands of words written about it over the last 50 years. Much of this has been to castigate it or recommend ways of eliminating the evil weed. However, little that I am aware of has been printed on how to manage annual meadowgrass where it forms the majority of a grass sward in our greens.

The aim of this two-part article is to discuss what annual meadowgrass is, how to control the invasion of greens and how to manage the species if so desired.

Decisions

One of the most difficult decisions facing the golf course manager/head greenkeeper is do you fight *Poa annua* or do you live with it? It is interesting to note that this is not a modern management decision but one that has been faced by people managing grass since the 1920s. As early as 1948, Dr Fred Grau, then national director for the USDA, published an article entitled '*Poa annua* - Friend or foe?'

As recently as ten years ago, I attended a conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, where the leading university researchers, agronomists, superintendents/course managers/greenkeepers and industry representatives gathered for three days to discuss the facts and fallacies of *Poa annua*. At the end of these presentations, speaking for and against *Poa annua*, the summing up statement was '*Poa annua* - Friend of foe?'

A decade on, through my agronomy work, I have seen many different situations of course managers and head greenkeepers having to make the choice of living with annual meadowgrass or seeking to get rid of it. This very point was highlighted during a visit I made to a course extending from nine holes to 18. The 9-hole course was 70 years old with established soil-based greens that evolved from continuous mowing and treatments of the area at the end of the fairway which became the green.

The club decided to extend to 18 holes and had modern sand-based greens built with fine fescues and bents sown after

construction. After allowing time to establish and then opening for play with great excitement, the new greens went 'bad' after a year of play. The fine fescues and bents declined and in came the annual meadowgrass in its coarsest form. The club was now experiencing the wrath of annual meadowgrass in its purest form, tufts of coarse-bladed grass taking over from fine-leaved fescues and bent. The *Poa annua* made it virtually impossible to produce any kind of level putting surface.

After my course inspection to determine why the club was having problems, and having explained that the fine grasses were declining and meadowgrass was taking over because of the construction, rootzone material and aftercare management, the captain and committee were confused. In their opinion, they had commissioned the construction of new greens with the best grasses and three years later 'meadow-

grass' was causing a problem. In the committee's innocence during all of this discussion, they asked what was the main species of grass in their existing nine greens. I explained that the old greens were predominantly fine-leaved established meadowgrass and I was immediately told that if the new greens were half as good, they would not need my advice.

The moral of relating this true story is that while I, as the agronomist, could find fault with the construction and the aftercare management, the ordinary golfer was only recognising that the old greens were good and the new greens were bad. It did not matter what the grass species was, but merely how the greens performed when using the putter. This type of experience makes you think on a broader level, that it is not only about the grass species present but about preparing the best greens possible with

the conditions and resources available to your particular site.

Every situation is different and individual to everyone's site but there is one constant in our climate and that is "wherever you are managing fine turf, you are going to deal with annual meadowgrass and the problems or challenges it creates". As an example, to compare the links of Great Britain which host the Open or Open qualifying with the heavy parkland low budget course is not a fair comparison for attaining the ultimate of fescue/bent greens as opposed to meadowgrass greens. Therefore, the management decisions of the links courses as opposed to the heavy parkland courses with regard to meadowgrass is quite different and it is important to realise this.

To further explain this, let's look deeper into what is *Poa annua*.

● See Page 12

Poa

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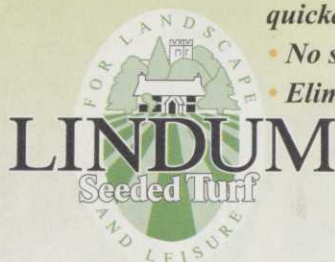
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What is *Poa annua*?

It is reported to be the evolutionary offspring of *Poa supina* and *Poa infirma*. It probably originated in the area between Pakistan and Yugoslavia. There are two recognised types of *Poa annua*:

1. *Poa annua* var 'annua' which is a bunchgrass with an upright habit of growth and produces a limited number of shoots and roots and normally survives from one to one-and-a-half years, and
2. *Poa annua* var 'reptans' which exhibits a perennial, stoloniferous habit of growth which seems to be much more prolific in stem and root production and continually replaces itself vegetatively.

However...

Poa annua by its very nature is basically a winter annual plant.

That is, its seeds, which are produced in the spring, germinate in the autumn and the new seedlings rapidly develop into a mature plant. Going dormant over winter, annual meadowgrass breaks dormancy early in the spring and later develops the profusion of seed heads which complete the life cycle for this type of plant. Thus, physiologically, after the seed head production period *Poa annua* has completed its life cycle and is ready to die under summer stress, or other related conditions.

Therefore, today's golf course manager/head greenkeeper has the ability and decision to make, do I live with annual meadowgrass or do I get rid of it?

More on this subject next issue.

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Education update

BY KEN RICHARDSON



Still time to go in for top prize

This month's column includes reminders on the Zeneca Premier Greenkeeper and Toro/Lely/PGA European Tour Student of the Year competitions, changes of dates for the next MGC examination and an update on N/SVQs.

Zeneca Premier Greenkeeper

Entries for the 1995 Zeneca Premier Greenkeeper of the Year are beginning to arrive at HQ. However, there is still time for more entries to be submitted. Entries can be from individual greenkeepers, greenkeeping teams or golf club committees and members and they can be made by returning the card in this issue or by writing to HQ. The first prize, for the winning greenkeeper, is an all expenses paid trip to Florida for the 1996 GCSAA Exhibition and Conference plus £500 to the winner's team. Runners up prizes include a weekend in London with tickets for a top West End show and a weekend for two at Aldwark Manor. Remember, the competition is to find the greenkeeper who gets the best from his course with the facilities that he has available and aims to recognise services to the greenkeeping industry.

Toro/Lely/PGA European Tour Student of the Year

Entries are invited for the Toro/Lely/PGA European Tour Student of the Year competition 1995 from colleges in the United Kingdom and Southern Ireland. Full details of entry criteria are given in a leaflet, obtainable from BIGGA HQ and most colleges and nomination forms must be returned to Aldwark Manor by May 31 1995. Regional finals will take place during September and the National Final will take place at Aldwark Manor on October 8/9.

Master Greenkeeper Certificate

Since the last issue of *Green-*

keeper International was printed, unforeseen circumstances have caused the dates of the MGC examination technique day to be moved to March 6 and the next MGC examination to April 28.

National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Discussions are continuing at Lead Body meetings on the revision and modification of Amenity Horticulture (Greenkeeping) Vocational Qualifications to make the qualifications more acceptable to all parts of the amenity horticulture industry. David Golding, education director with the Greenkeepers Training Committee, is continuing to hold seminars which describe the N/SVQ system, the problems of changing from a knowledge based assessment system to a practical, competence based system and the need for greenkeepers to become assessors and advisers. The N/SVQ system can only work effectively when assessment of competence can be done at the workplace ie on golf courses. Anyone wanting further information on how to become an assessor or adviser should contact me or David Golding on 01347 838846.

Library

I had hoped that BIGGA might be successful in acquiring some or all of the John Shildrick memorial library. However, a recent meeting of the National Turfgrass Council decided that all the books should be held in one library, that the books should become part of the National Library system and that only establishments with a full time librarian could be considered. Therefore, as they met all of these criteria, Myerscough College will receive the books. Our library is growing, albeit slowly, and I would welcome contributions from anyone who wishes to donate a book or books.

Send your letters to The Editor, Greenkeeper International, Aldwark Manor, Aldwark, Alne, York YO6 2NF or fax them on 01347 838864

Hard hats can give the wrong impression

With regards to the letter concerning 'hard hats', I wish to offer my feelings on the subject.

There is a golf course in the Torbay area with a lady greenkeeper who dons a green hard hat for her protection from the occasional stray Cayman ball.

I am grateful for Mr James Smith's concern for the protection of greenstaff, but the hard hat only covers a very small part of the body. It does protect the onboard computer, namely the brain, but leaves other vital parts of the anatomy unprotected and subject to severe bruising and excruciating pain.

If the greenstaff wore hard hats for safety reasons, I feel it would create a false sense of security for the wearer who would be even more at risk from the oncoming golfer, who would consider the greenkeeper to have been given adequate protection.

May I suggest we forget the hard hat and ask all golfers to respect the greenstaff in their very difficult and sometimes dangerous duties in striving for perfection for the benefit of others.

Martin Petherick, Waterbridge Golf Course, Devon

Such a success

To the executive director,

I would like to congratulate you and your staff who worked so hard to make the BTME show such a success. I would also like to thank the board of management who give up their time and the exhibitors - for without them there is no show. I have been to all the shows at Harrogate so far and the show gets better every year. As soon as you enter the exhibition hall there is a friendly atmosphere and let's hope the show goes on for many more years.

Ron Ullathorne, secretary of the Sheffield Section

GREENKEEPER'S LAMENT

The story true is often told,
Of Percy once a greensman bold,
As a bloke was not contentious,
But at his job most conscientious.

Twenty summers came and went,
While Percy often did lament,
How can I make my greens
sensational,
Just like those at Augusta National?

For you must dear reader pity,
Perce who had a greens committee,
Who yearly saw the National greens,
All lighted up on telly screens.

Looking at this turf like lightning,
Really could be rather frightening,
For Perce knew after the Masters' fleeing,
The committee quickly would call a meeting.

"Perce!" they'd cry all tongues a lashing,
"From the members we get a bashing,
They want us for it is fashionable,
To get our greens like Augusta National."

So they went and gave to Perce,
And now you'll see things getting worse,
I think the man's first name was Peter,
Who gave to Perce the dreaded stimpmeter.

With this tool they would stand tall,
And have greens to beat them all,
Slick and green with curvy bends,
On which they could impress their friends.

Well Perce tried hard to tell the facts,
But it availed not, they wanted acts,
"Give us greens like we desire,
Or Percy, you, we'll surely fire!"

Then Perce left the meeting site,
Though he had put up quite a fight,
They didn't want to know the reason,
Augusta looked so good each season.

So here stood Perce quite all alone,
To the vagaries of English climate prone,
Take-all patch and dollar spot,
Fusarium wilt, he'd got the lot.

No USGA spec greens for him,
What could he do just for this whim?
He reduced the height to speed the ball,
And in three months had lost it all.

With greens all sad and looking sick,
The committee the fault with Perce did pick,
And so they sent him soundly packing,
For they thought that he was lacking.

And now Perce doesn't tend his course,
He rather goes with cart and horse,
And feeling like the committee to throttle,
At each front door leaves a fresh milk bottle.

Alan Mitchell, course manager,
The Hampshire, Andover

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NEW HOLLAND

Massey throws its weight

Latest commitment to greenkeepers - from grass equipment division of multi-national company

It's hard to believe that Massey Ferguson's Grass Equipment Division was formed only two years ago because it has made so much progress in establishing itself as part of the turfcare scene.

Becoming the latest Golden Key member of BIGGA's Education and Development Fund is a further sign of their long-term commitment to greenkeepers.

"We've long admired BIGGA's education initiatives and the work that greenkeepers are doing," says Nick Kirby, the division's director, "but, of course, we are hoping to get their support in return."

Massey Ferguson is a heavyweight name with bags of heritage and multi-national status behind it, but the Grass Equipment Division is, to all intents and purposes, a company in its own right with its own budget and staff.

The division was set up in 1992 to "grow a separate business within the UK." For a long time, MF had seen the opportunity to develop its marketing operations in the golf and amenity sectors but had not had the product line-up to offer.

Headed by Nick Kirby and with a hand-picked staff of 15 from a variety of back-



grounds, the Grass Equipment Division now has a turnover of £5 million.

Mr Kirby came from Massey Ferguson Ireland to run the new division. His first big task, which took 14 months, was to negotiate with the Japanese tractor manufacturer Iseki to distribute its products in the UK.

Fortunately for Iseki, it already had links with Massey including a marketing agreement in Australia.

Mr Kirby's task was "to find competent, active dealers in all areas." In some cases this involved existing Massey farm machinery

dealers but the main criteria was to select outlets that had proven grass machinery expertise and experience. "This sector demands a high quality of specialist service," Mr Kirby points out, "and this could not come from the grass machinery business being a bolt-on to agriculture."

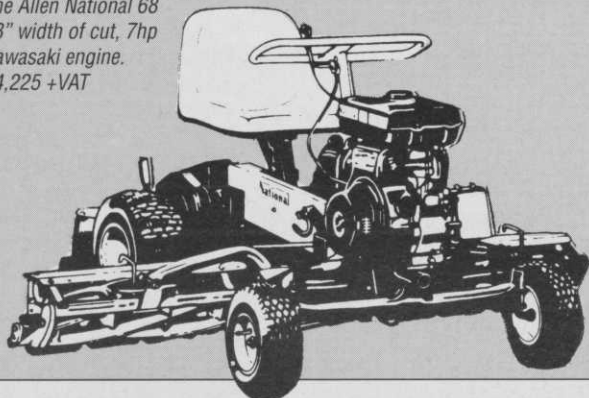
Of the 23 dealers appointed, only six are also Massey Ferguson agricultural dealers. Thirteen of the new network transferred from the old Iseki dealer network. The other 35 Iseki accounts were phased out.

The division set six 'standards for appointment' - and no dealer would be appointed unless they met all six. These standards were:

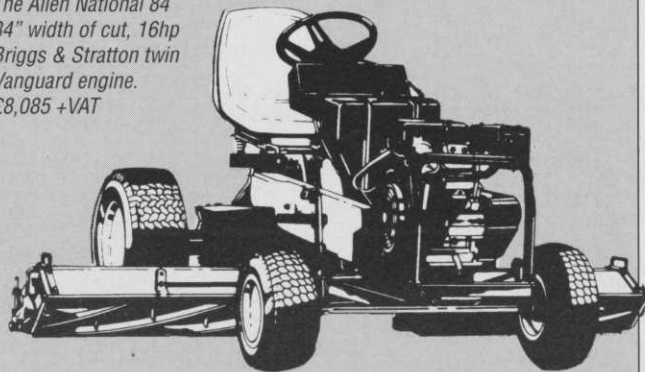
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Nick Kirby at Stoneleigh with some of the MF/Iseki machines

"There were no sacred cows – underpinning everything we did was the desire to build the best distribution network for the turf industry, and I believe we are now well on the way to achieving that," says Mr Kirby.

Streamlining and improving the dealer network from the Iseki franchise was just part of the restructuring that went on. Sorting out the stocking and distribution of parts was another priority. "We want to be one of the easiest companies to do business with," remarks Mr Kirby.

The parts distribution centre was moved to Massey Ferguson's headquarters at

Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. 94% of stock orders can now be filled from this warehouse and they are air-freighting less than 50 lines per week, compared with 200 a year ago. The warehouse at the former US military hospital near the Royal Showground holds six months' stock of fast-moving parts.

There have also been product improvements and additions, while rights to distribute the professional grass and grounds maintenance machines made by Swiss manufacturer Bucher were also acquired at an early stage.

"The line-up stands up against any other

range," says Mr Kirby, who points out that customers include top courses such as The Belfry, Woburn and Gleneagles.

In essence, the range includes MF's own line of 1200 Series compact tractors from 17 to 35hp and petrol-driven 30 Series lawn tractors; the Iseki TA tractors from 25 to 45hp; the Iseki TU compacts from 17.5 to 20hp; Iseki TX 16 and 18hp tractors; Iseki SF 300 front cut mower and the Iseki SG diesel riders.

At the recent BTME, a new mid mower deck was announced for the MF 1200 compacts and there are other product improvements planned for later in the year.

Mr Kirby, who started with Massey as a graduate trainee 14 years ago, says he enjoys being in the golf industry and selling these products to greenkeepers "because you're dealing with customers who know what they want".

As well as supporting greenkeepers by contributing to the Education and Development Fund, Massey Ferguson is also firmly behind the BTME. It is committed to exhibiting there in '96. "We're only interested in shows with a creditable customer base and a track record, and we're quite happy to see Harrogate as the only national show."

However, he stressed he will continue to support dealers at Westurf, Scotsturf and other regional shows.

"We see golf as the only stable part of the grass equipment business," concludes Mr Kirby. "We also see it as a sector which can actually develop because the rest is going through so much change."

Left: the MF1230 at work



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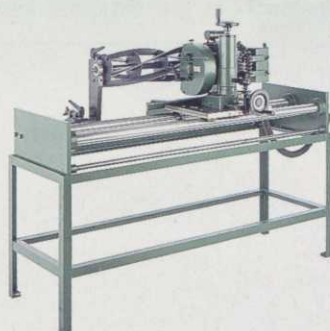
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HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Elizabeth I learned she was to become Queen whilst in the grounds of Brocket Hall. There are high aspirations too for the golf course built on the same site just three years ago

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Lord Brocket is rarely out of the newspapers these days, so why should his course in Hertfordshire be any different? David Stokes talks to course manager John Wells about the course, his maintenance programme, and its furniture...

The furniture around a course is like a well dressed man – you only notice it if there is something wrong. I visited John Wells, course manager of Lord Brocket's beautiful course at Brocket Hall near Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, to see what he's got on the Melbourne course. John has a policy of the fewer notices the better. "Golfers will walk right past notices and they are a hazard to greenkeepers, who have to cut round them," he said. "It's best to put most of the information on the scorecard and our members are the sort of people who don't need to be told how to behave. The less notices, the better the atmosphere the course has. People don't like to feel they are back at school."

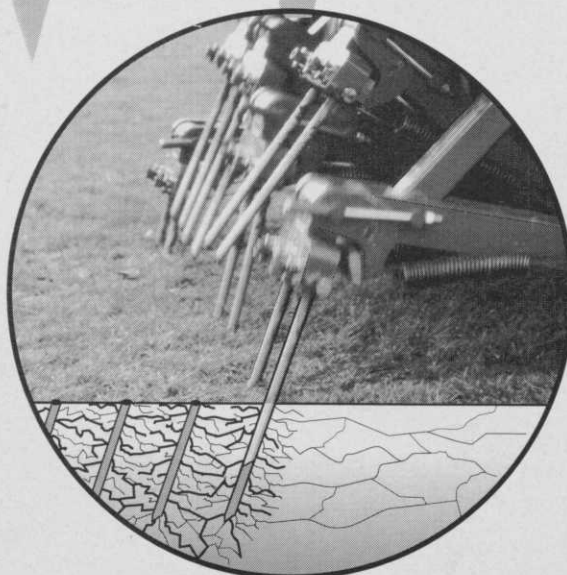


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