

# HORSES FOR COURSES

**The new golf course at Newbury Race Course is destined to be a success if the effort put in by its Head Greenkeeper and the rest of the staff is anything to go by.**

**M**ark Anderson, Head Greenkeeper of Newbury Race Course Golf Club, has more reason than most to feel he was standing in the wrong queue when it came to handing out the easy lives. He doesn't let it get him down though, despite being one of the busiest greenkeepers in the country on one of the most problematic golf courses.

Busiest? That's quite a claim especially as the industry is not exactly renowned for its shirkers.

But how many greenkeepers can claim the following roles:

(1) Head Greenkeeper (2) He helped design six of the holes; (3) Licensee of the bar with name above the door – he had to go before a magistrate; (4) Barman; (5) Occasional chef doing everything from bacon butties to full roast dinners; (6) A Sparsholt College student on NVQ Level 3; (7) Handicap Secretary (8) Assistant Race Day Manager for the Race Course. Eight jobs!

Fortunately no-one's yet asked him to ride a horse but no doubt if they did he'd be in there mixing it with Willie Carson and Frankie Dettori coming up the final furlong.

"You've got to be adaptable," he says by way of explanation, although he admits he does take it to the extreme a little. "I'll always try something. If I can't do

it I'll find out that I can't and if I can it's another string to my bow."

Most problematic golf course? Another big claim but how many people can say they've got gun emplacements and even American tanks buried under their course as there are rumoured to be at Newbury.

"The 6th hole is on a dumping ground used by the US army. They stripped off layers of granite bedding and sleepers and deposited them all over Berkshire but most of it is still here. I believe there might even be a few tanks buried below the 6th green."

This does not just provide some unusual contouring but causes some major problems for the greenkeeping staff.

"Concrete posts are now beginning to come through. You don't know they're there until you've hit them with a machine because they're just under the grass. I put in a new bunker on the 3rd and we came across five feet long concrete posts just half an inch under the surface. All you can do is dig them out."

If that were not enough there is a gun emplacement under the 6th green.

"It's six to seven inches below the surface of the green but about three feet deep. We found that when we vertidraind for the first time, the back of the tractor started to lift off the ground.

"In the middle of the 5th fairway we have an area of hard core which is about a metre thick and two inches under the surface of

# 'We



Mark with some of the concrete blocks which have been removed from the course

the fairway which causes us a few drainage problems.

"What we've had to do is strip the surface and try to make channels by chiselling it out to give the water somewhere to run," said Mark, who is a former finalist in the Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

If that weren't enough there are other problems with trying to put drainage in on the 6th because according to archeologists it is an ancient Saxon burial ground. So they have to get approval before they can do anything.

"In the middle of the course there are another two gun emplacements and areas where they used to empty their cinder bins which are still complete inert and we can't grow a thing - it's pure clinker."

In his disarming way - pardon the pun - Mark describes the

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# also get deer, big time...'

problems thus, "It has certainly created a challenge which is sometimes enjoyable sometime not."

These are just some of the problems the course has but being in the middle of one of the country's better known race-courses brings other problems which would bring a tear to a glass eye.

"On National Hunt days the racegoers are allowed into the middle of the course where 12 of the holes are and they use the mounds around the greens to get a better view. We do fence off the greens but the horse racing world is the same as the golf world and fences are there to be climbed over not gone round.

"We get voluntary aeration when the ladies march over the greens in their high heels. Fortunately we don't have too many problems with horses escaping and running over the course

because they are usually in full flight and take a direct route across the green. They don't stand and do 'Riverdance' on the green.

"The knacker's van goes around the inside of the track with the horses and has a tendency to drive up the bankings on the side of the greens in a five tonne truck to get a better view if a horse goes down.

"The day after a race meeting the first thing we do is walk round and check the damage."

What else does Mark, and his team of four, have to put up with. Well...

"We also get deer, big time, and have had to put an electric fence around the 11th tees. We have a huge rabbit population and people who come three times a week pick up between 20 and 40 rabbits a time. It's not even denting the population."

If Mark has any benefits it is

that he works well with his immediate boss Dave Davey, the Works and Facilities Manager/ Golf Centre Manager, who has been extremely supportive in working a limited budget to the full.

It has meant Mark picking up the sort of wheeler and dealer skills which should earn him the title of Newbury's Arfur Daley.

"Most of our equipment is second hand and I've acquired it all for the grand total of £32,000. It's been fun and I've had a lot of help from Dave, who has had to OK the bills."

"At the moment we have between 10 and 15,000 rounds a year of which pay and play is around 8,000. I'd love to get that up to 25-30,000. My ambition is to suffer from compaction through play - it's also the ambition of my bosses and their accountants!"

"My ambition is to become the

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Cushman with Top dresser  
Ransomes Auto Surtees (2)  
Sorrell Roller  
Four Inch Greens Slitter  
Flymos (2)  
Wheeled Strimmer  
Hand Strimmer  
Scott's Fertiliser Distributer

top dog in my trade. Not the all seeing all knowing type but to get to the stage that I know the job and can go anywhere and make an improvement to a course -

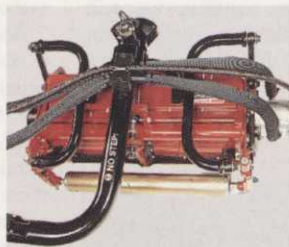
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Mark surrounded by his team

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"I want a Golf Club to be proud to have me rather than just be seen as a necessity – an asset to the club."

#### Mark's Spring Turf Maintenance Programme

Our spring maintenance is normally a continuation of our build up from winter. We start moving from the more physical maintenance – trying to put in drainage and doing construction – into the

realms of fertilisation to build up the grass for the coming season – girding its loins so to speak.

We give it a little bit of a kick with another application of winter feed 5-5-15 around mid March before getting into the realms of solid tining because the greens are so young – I wouldn't hollow tine yet.

We vertidrain with the Shattermaster last autumn we will hopefully solid tine again about April with an initial heavy dress-

ing of 80/20 top dressing. The fertiliser regime is all the way through the growing period with the teaspoon method keeping the grass fed but always on the want.

Not putting down full applications but putting down part applications but not leaving it too stressed that it is beginning to suffer. It needs to be wanting to put down roots to glean nutrients out of the soil.

Being high content sand greens it obviously leeches away rather quickly so that's another reason we do little and often. If we did apply large amounts of fertiliser it would only be leached away and it can be a very costly exercise.

The grass species which I use on the greens are fescues and bents are grasses which are associated with poor fertility and to encourage those types of grasses I want to keep them wanting rather than fat cat fed.

I change my fertilisers regime yearly as using the same over a period of years leads to problems. I'm not a great believer in straight fertilisers – sulphates of iron, sulphates of ammonias because I believe that restricts bacterial growth through the root zone.

Applications of organics through spraying Turfmaster Agrocrop etc.

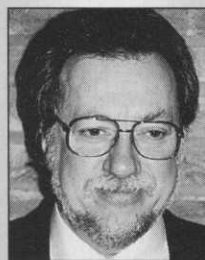
We do have to be careful with fertilisers, specialised chemicals, selected weed killer and fungicide worm control and wetting agents because it can affect the horses.

Our watering is from a bore hole. We handwater but hopefully if we make enough money I'll have a water system within the next couple of years. We've got water beside each of the greens and we lay out hoses and manual sprinklers.



Hard at work removing turf

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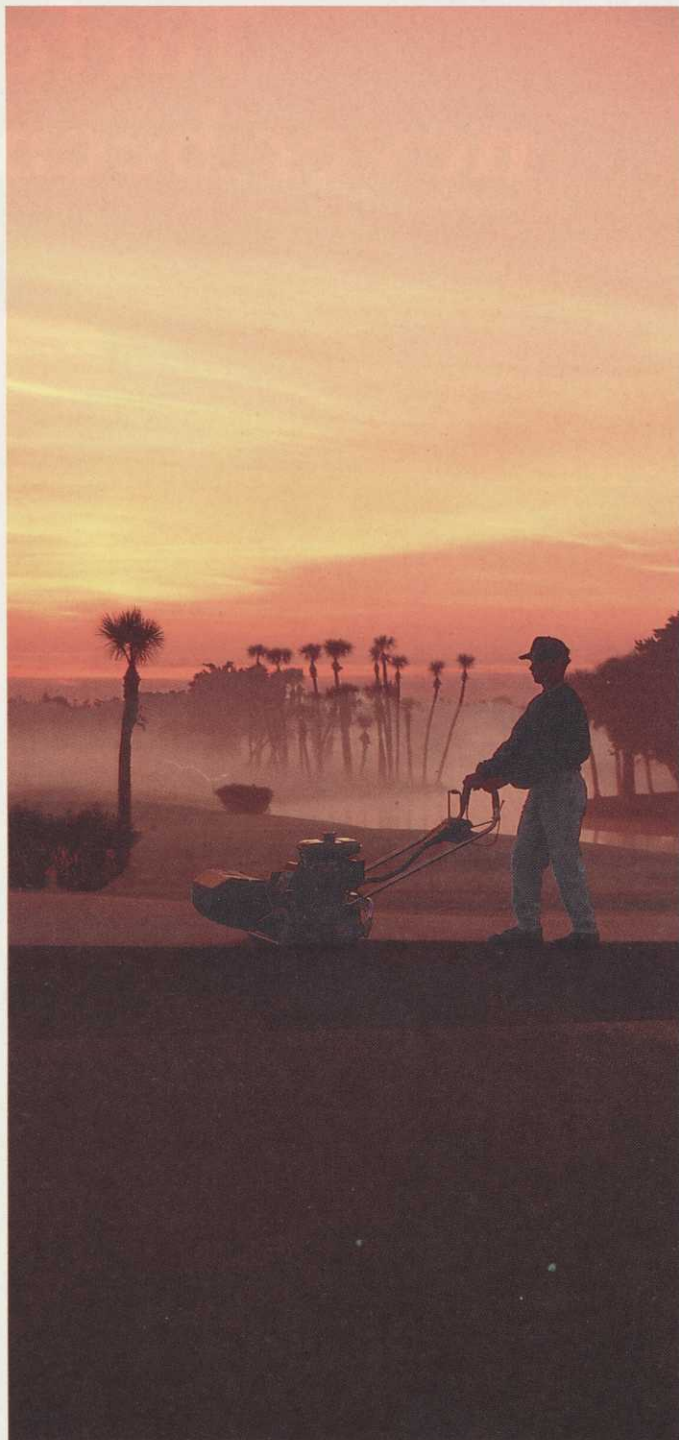


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# the Learning experience

# Health and Safety at Work

**D**oes your golf club employ five or more people? If the answer is yes, did you know that the law requires the club to have a written statement detailing the general policy, organisation and arrangements that have been put in place to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees.

This statement must be on display or be readily available for inspection at all times.

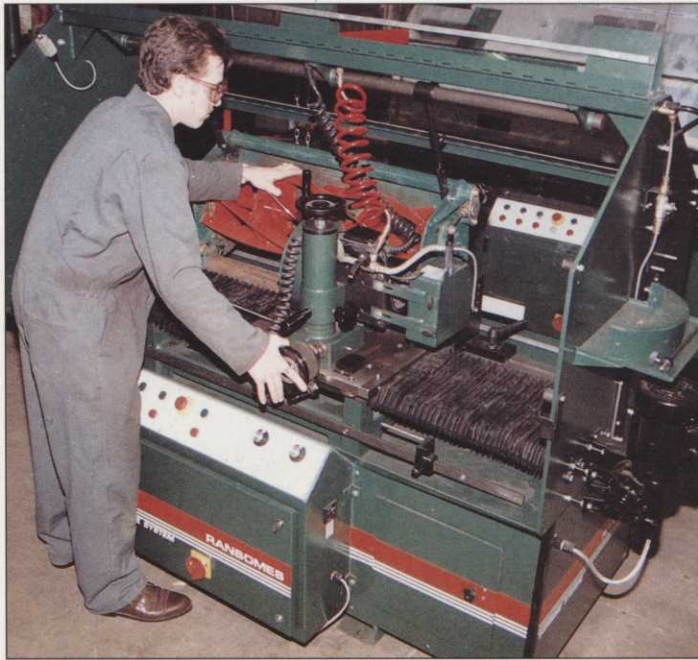
And that's not all. Under the same law – the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act) – employees also have a legal duty to take reasonable care of themselves and others and to co-operate with their employers regarding their legal obligations. Contractors don't escape the net, either. They are legally bound to ensure that their activities are not a danger to themselves or to others.

The fact that this legislation has been on the statute books for more than 20 years makes it all the more disturbing that there are still many employers and employees who are unaware of its existence, let alone its implications.

Enforceable by the Health and Safety Executive on local authority courses and by the District or Metropolitan Council at privately-owned clubs, the penalty for non-compliance with the HSW Act can range from a fine of £5,000 for individuals and £20,000 for organisation up to an unlimited fine and even imprisonment in serious cases.

If that wasn't enough, six additional pieces of legislation were introduced in 1993 in response to European directives aiming to harmonise health and safety standards across Europe. The new regulations actually support rather than add anything to our existing HSW Act with the result, says Roger Bainbridge of leading safety consultancy firm, IRPC Group Ltd, that Britain leads Europe in health and safety matters.

"Having both the Health and Safety Commission and Executive means that we are probably the only country in Europe with a permanent and dedicated agency to report on and enforce the appropriate legislation," he commented.



**Full safety measures must be followed when using workshop equipment. Never allow an untrained person to operate a machine without skilled supervision. Below: the 'CE' marking shows that a machine has passed rigorous safety tests and is certificated as safe for use as tested**



"The problem is that virtually every work place in the country is bound by the regulations and the HSE has neither the time nor the resources to check on them all. The onus lies very much with individual companies and organisations to ensure that they are complying with the law.

"If they don't know or understand what they should be doing, then advice and guidance is available from the local authority environmental health department or the health and safety executive."

If both advice and practical

assistance are needed, specialist consultancies such as the IRPC Group are able to tailor individual programmes to answer, control and implement all health and safety matters required by law, taking the burden off the employer.

Ignorance of the existence of a piece of legislation is no excuse in the eyes of the law, stresses Roger Bainbridge. "The rules were made for good reason," he said. "Ignoring them, flouting them or delaying their implementation is storing up trouble. Meet all the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act and you'll not just improve the safety of everyone involved with the club's activities, but you'll also satisfy the latest European regulations."

Two principal areas of concern on golf courses relate to the safe use of machinery and pesticides. Both activities should be covered thoroughly by the club's health and safety policy with particular emphasis being placed on sound instruction and training of staff.

Under the HSW Act, it is unlawful to ask or allow someone to use a machine if they have not been instructed in its safe and proper use by a competent person. If, for example, the club's engineer is ill or on holiday and a cutting cylinder needs regrinding, it should be taken to the supplying dealer rather than ask an

untrained person to attempt the job.

The law demands that all operations be assessed to determine their potential risk. Having identified a hazard and its associated risks, it is the responsibility of managers to determine who is likely to be affected and to examine the existing safety measures and controls, ensuring that these are followed. They should then consider whether any additional measures can be taken to minimise the risk further.

Grass cutting and pesticide application are two jobs with clearly identified associated risks. If a task has to be carried out, it is essential that the most suitable equipment is used, that it is properly serviced and maintained, and that it is operated under the safest possible conditions.

Staff should be trained in a machine's correct use and should be supplied with appropriate safety protective clothing and safe and properly maintained equipment. If an employee chooses not to use the safety equipment supplied, he or she can face personal prosecution for contravening the HSW Act.

Similarly, manufacturers go to great lengths to design safety into their equipment, a fact certified by the 'CE' marking which should be found on all powered machines now sold within Europe. Altering the original specification of the machine in any way could affect its safe operation and invalidate the 'CE' marking, causing problems with insurance claims in the event of an accident.

Golf course staff with concerns or queries about any aspect of health or safety are advised to speak first with the club's management to ascertain what general or specific arrangements have been put in place.

The IRPC Group is able to provide club management, committees and directors with comprehensive advice and assistance with golf course health and safety issues. For further information, contact Roger Bainbridge on 01455 894222.

■ Next month: We take a closer look at those golf course operations demanding particular attention to health and safety.

# From TEE to GREEN



Photograph courtesy of The Oxfordshire Golf Club

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The number of golf courses in Britain continues to rise steadily and golf course designers are well aware that trees and woodlands can be used not only to enhance the amenity of the course but also provide an opportunity for improving its strategy. However less well known are a number of problems specific to the well being of trees on golf courses. John Nicholson of Eamonn Wall & Co explains

#### The growth in the popularity of the game of golf

There are currently 1700 golf courses in England, 118 in Wales and a further 440 in Scotland, this century seeing a rapid rise in the popularity of the sport, especially "south of the border" In fact, in 1888 there were only 57 courses in England and 73 in Scotland.

Although most of the early courses were links the vast majority of courses created over the last 80 years have been inland such that these now out-number the former by a factor of six to one. Most of these inland courses have varying amounts of woodland.

#### The history of trees within design

Trees and woodlands played little or no part in the design of golf courses until the first quarter of the century, when golf progressed to the heather and pine heaths of Surrey and Berkshire. It was in this period when it is said that the first tree planting plan was included in the designs of H.S. Colt. (Cornish 1982), Colt however was still very reserved about the use of trees within the strategy of a golf course.

"Trees are a fluky and obnoxious form of hazard, but they afford rather good protection, and if a clump of these exists at such a spot it might well be considered justifiable to leave it standing." - H S. Colt, *Some essays on Golf Course Architecture*, 1920.

Trees can be used not only to improve the aesthetics of a golf course but also as an integral part of its strategy, however, great care must be taken when doing so as the three dimensional hazard a tree forms can easily become detrimental to the quality of play. It is therefore wise to have regard to the fine line which divides woodland design from golf course architecture and one should not be afraid to draw on the services of a recognised architect if so required.

#### Trees at risk from golf balls

Trees are at risk on golf courses. It may not be thought that golf balls do a lot of damage but they do. A golf ball weighs 45g and



Severe damage to a sycamore tree on a golf course

# Bark to basics

travels at between 70 and 80m per second (up to 180mph).

Anything material that comes within the line of play is therefore likely to suffer severe damage. Because of the large numbers of rounds of golf which are played annually on most courses (typically several tens of thousands) then by sheer chance alone contact with trees on the golf course

is inevitable.

Golf balls can affect both young and old trees alike. Damage to the bark, cambium, phloem and xylem layers is often so severe that the tree is permanently disfigured. Crown die-back may occur as a result of damage to the trees transportation system. Young trees can suffer by being snapped at the point where they

emerge from the protection of the shelter.

The shelters themselves may be damaged, and if not replaced quickly the sharp edges of the shelter (as a result of impact damage) can inflict often fatal abrasions to young trees.

Trees on certain parts of the golf course are more likely to suffer damage by golf balls than in


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