

A Temple to excellence

Temple Golf Club has many progressive ideas of management both on and off the golf course.

Temple Golf Club sits high above the River Thames between Henley, Marlow and Maidenhead and when it comes to progressive management and consideration of conservation is also head and shoulders above most other

golf clubs. Head Greenkeeper Martin Gunn and his Chairman of Green, Malcolm Peake, have produced a blueprint which should provide the continuity to ensure the club's continuing and sustained improvement.

Among their work has been the introduction of a "natural" course management technique, a sustained commitment to conservation and the environment, the production of a regu-

lar newsletter, the division of responsibility among the green-keeping team and reconstruction work on the course itself while they also provide input to the R&A Turf Advisory and Research Working party chaired by Nick Park.

Martin took over in '91 having been First Assistant before that while Malcolm, who owns a retail business in nearby Maidenhead and was asked to join the club's Board of Management with a view to being Chairman of Green.



Malcolm Peake and Martin Gunn outside the clubhouse

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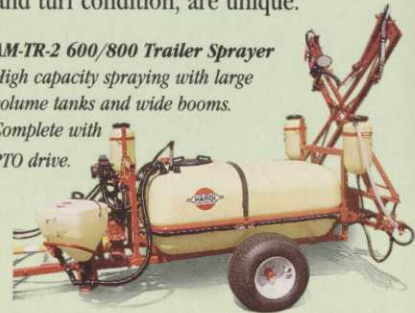
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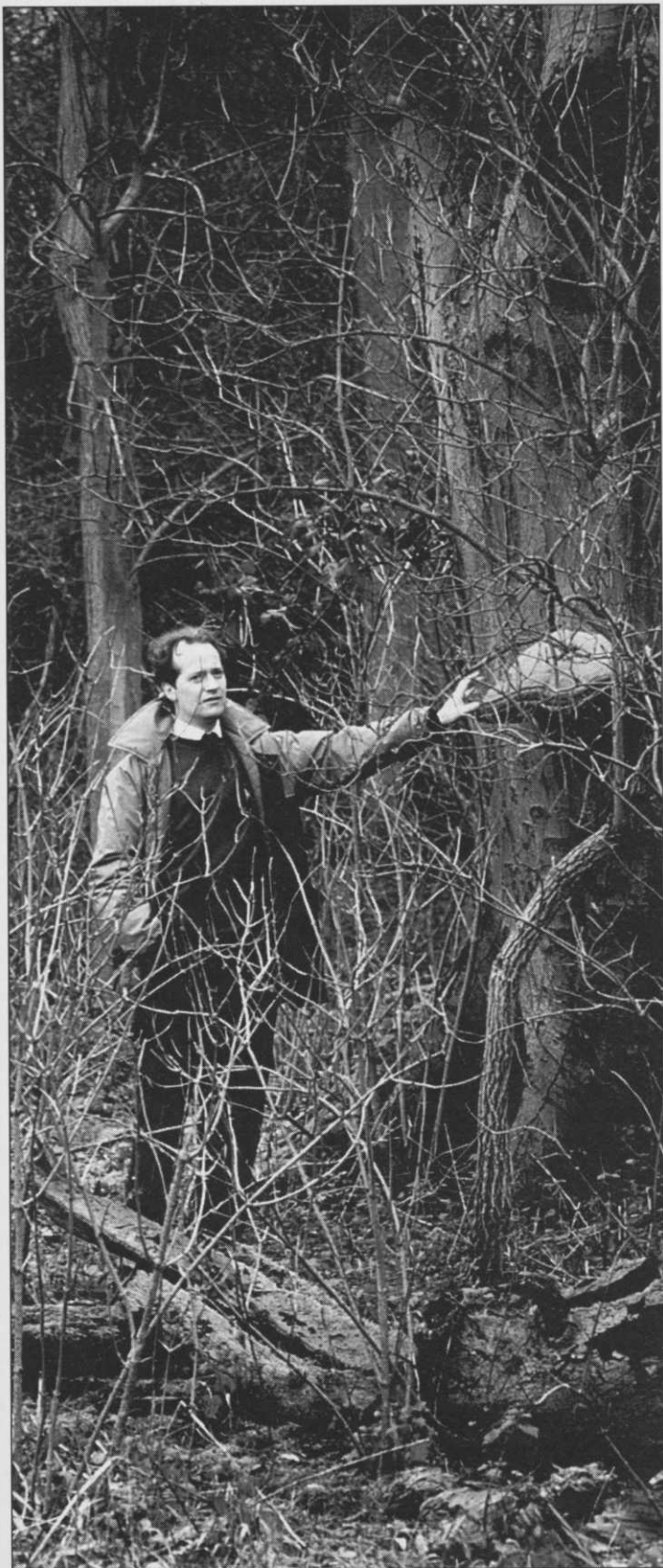
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Martin examines the fungi growing on the dead tree



A report had been done by the STRI in 1987 but little action was taken on the strength of it and when another report was commissioned Jeff Perris of the STRI said things had got worst since the first report.

"I knew things weren't right," said Malcolm by way of explanation as to why he sought out a job most self respecting golf club member wouldn't touch with a bunker rake.

"I've learned a lot since then and the Board invited me to serve a second term," he explained.

"The issues that Malcolm was shouting about gave me the carrot which I needed to grab. He was right in his concerns about the golf course but didn't know why, and I knew we could work together to improve things," said Martin.

Temple Golf Club had always been well presented but there had been very little hollow tining or aeration done on the course.

"We were well aware that the course would have to become a lot worse before it got better while at the same time it would require more investment," said Martin.

The new team would therefore be in the uncomfortable position of having a course not looking good but costing more money to get it to that state. Questions were asked.

"I use a very natural management technique with no overseeding and the greens have become stronger and stronger with bents coming back up to about 60%," explained Martin.

"Right at the start the conservation issue was very important to us as we wanted the natural grasses to return to the course.

A huge area of the course went from being well maintained at three to four inch high rough to meadow grass that you could go up to your waist in.

Temple Golf Club is owned by the Oppenheimer family and Raymond Oppenheimer was, along with Gerald Micklem of Sunningdale renown, a Doyen of English golf.

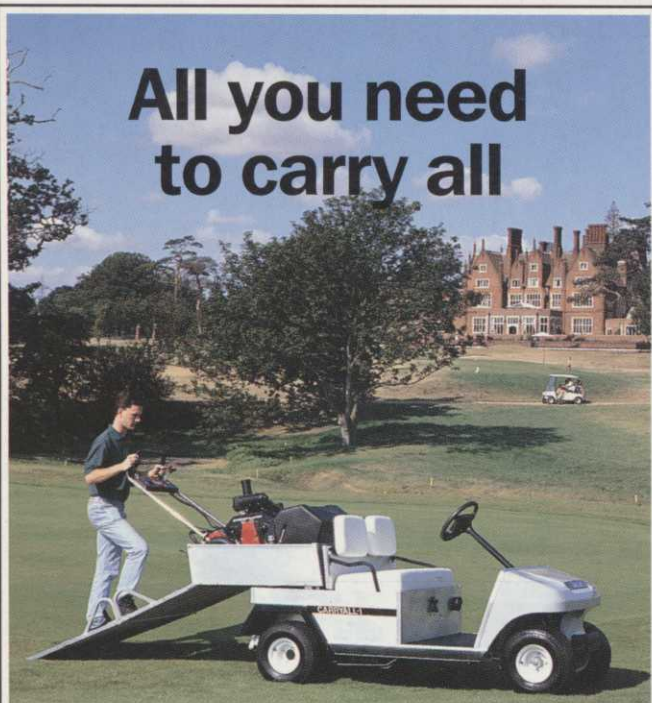
"The Oppenheimer family farmed locally and were involved in organic farming well before it was generally recognised. We were never asked to maintain the course that way but it seemed a natural course to follow," explained Martin.

'I use a very natural management technique with no overseeding and the greens have become stronger and stronger'

"The initial response was so negative it was unbelievable – 'this is not a nature park, it's a golf course' – but once they started to see species like orchids increase in number the same people who had been complaining at the beginning were ringing me up in the evening and saying that they had seen people walking about where the orchids were."

They are involved with conservation groups including the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Naturalist Trust and the Windsor and Maidenhead Urban Wildlife Group which produced

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a comprehensive report of the course in 1992 while they are also involved with David Stubbs and his European Ecology Unit.

"We have a tree, well out of the way of play, which is dead but has some wonderful fungi growing on it and woodpecker holes. There is absolutely no reason to cut it down and to me is a good example of golf and conservation working together. I've taken a group of 30 students from Hungary round the course. The conservation work has helped us to receive numerous grants over the years."

Martin also encourages students to visit the course to experience a working golf club and learn from the management techniques he employs.

He and Malcolm also produce a regular report for the members which keeps everyone informed as to work on the golf course as well as giving more general information about greenkeeping matters.

"The idea is to improve communication because if members know when something is being done and why it is being done they are more likely to accept it," said Malcolm.

The pair work extremely well together and make a point of visiting other golf clubs every three or four months just to talk to the Head Greenkeeper or Course Manager and find out how they see things and how they manage elements of their job.

"We've had a day at Woodhall Spa, a day at Sunningdale and, of course, Lindrick while at Royal County Down I organised a short visit to their Head Greenkeeper who was a marvellous man," said Malcolm.

"Nick Park also fixed me up with a day at Valderamma while I was in Spain. I had the opportunity to play but frankly it was too interesting and I used up two rolls of film just taking in how they operate there. You can learn from every course you visit."

Another scheme which Martin employs at Temple involves each of his five man team are trained and have designated area of responsibility on the course over and above their normal duties.

Deputy Head Greenkeeper

'Improving communication: If members know when something is being done and why, they are more likely to accept it'

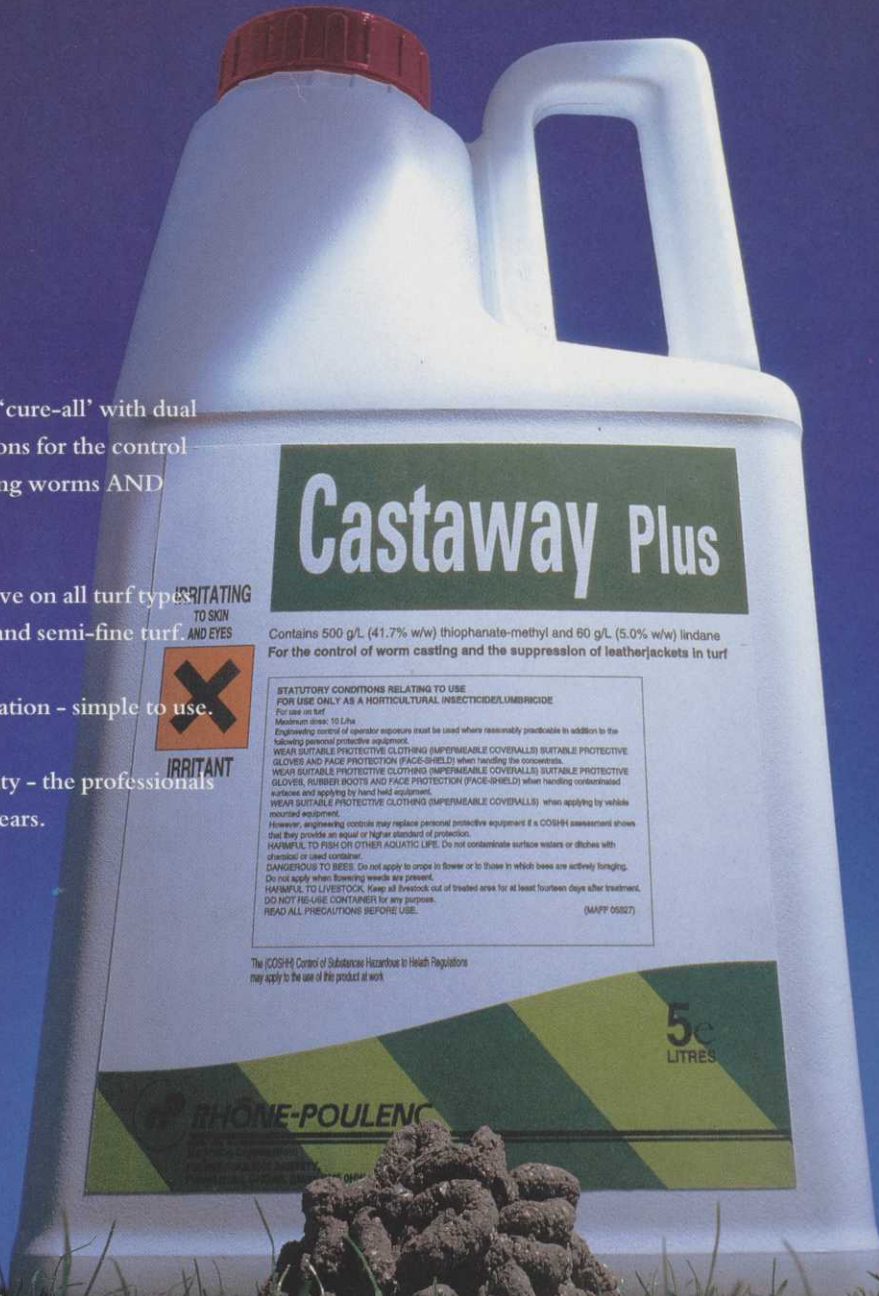
Gareth Austin is responsible for Woodlands, Boundaries and Amenity Horticulture; First Assistant Ian Hewitt for Equipment Repairs, Servicing and Maintenance, Data Recording and Spares; Assistant Russell Clark Irrigation, Installation, Repairs, Servicing and Maintenance; Assistant Saunders yet to be confirmed but possibly First Aid, Health and Safety while Trainee Tony Taylor is already interested in Engine Maintenance.

Having developed the staff and course management structures Martin and Malcolm turned their attention to the layout of the course itself.

"Raymond Oppenheimer

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never allowed any change at Temple without prior consultation with a golf course architect among them Henry Cotton, a former professional of Temple GC, Frank Pennick and Donald Steel. It was only natural for us to contact Donald when we had reached this stage of our development.

I rang him not just to talk about architecture but also because he has been Chairman of Green at Denham for many years," explained Malcolm.

"He came and asked what we wanted to do and we said that we wanted him to review the course generally. We decided to walk round the course and he would ask us on the tee what we thought and he would either agree or not as the case may be.

"Then he did us a report hole-by-hole which is now our long term plan of what we want to achieve.

"The more I talked to Donald the more I came to realise that we had some superb short par fours. We wanted to extend the course where possible, but not if it might be to the detriment of a hole.

Much of the work involved changing the shapes of the greens or, more accurately, returning them to how Willie Park Jnr had designed them in the first place.

"We are trying to return to Willie Park Jnr's design, and particularly the bunkering, and that is where Donald helped us," said Martin.

"It's quite exciting as we are getting quite close to it now. Reshaping the greens have given us an immense variety of new pin placements which some of he members haven't even seen yet," added Malcolm.

"I'm getting comments from members that they are now able to play chip and run shots and going back to playing shots they haven't done for many years. It is much more exciting."

All the construction work has been carried out in-house and at every phase, in fact, for all the significant work carried out on the course it is photographed and put in an album.

"This is very useful. We found

'Very few courses reach their true potential because they are prevented by the very people who misguidedly seek to improve them'

after the first two years that we need comparisons. People would conveniently forget how bad something once was and by showing them the photographs they could actually see the improvement which had been made. I was getting bored with people saying 'I'm sure that was better before'," said Malcolm.

The album and the monthly report to the Board will give the people who follow Martin and Malcolm a total history of what has gone on at the Club and they way it has developed and provide the continuity which is missing at many golf clubs.

"Very few courses reach their true potential because they are prevented from doing so by the very people who misguidedly seek to improve them. It is a damning indictment of the golfing population when you

consider that many of these people, in the form of committees, are responsible for the day to day running of the nation's golf courses.

It is hardly surprising that a lot of courses, many of them high profile, are in a state of decline," said Malcolm.

Martin adds a cautionary note to his colleagues not fortunate enough to have the continuity he enjoys.

"I believe that a lot of Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers are not going to survive this period unless the problems of continuity are solved. People are setting objectives almost on a year to year basis and you can't survive like that. You need direction which stretches for a period of time."

Martin has nothing but praise for his own Board of Management which has backed him to the hilt.

"I have seen a marked increase in my budgets in machinery and labour and we now have a different set of objectives. When I first took over the objective was "To Maintain the Golf Course" now it is "To Maintain, Improve and Take Forward the Golf Course' which is a very different concept."

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- Martin Gunn, Temple GC

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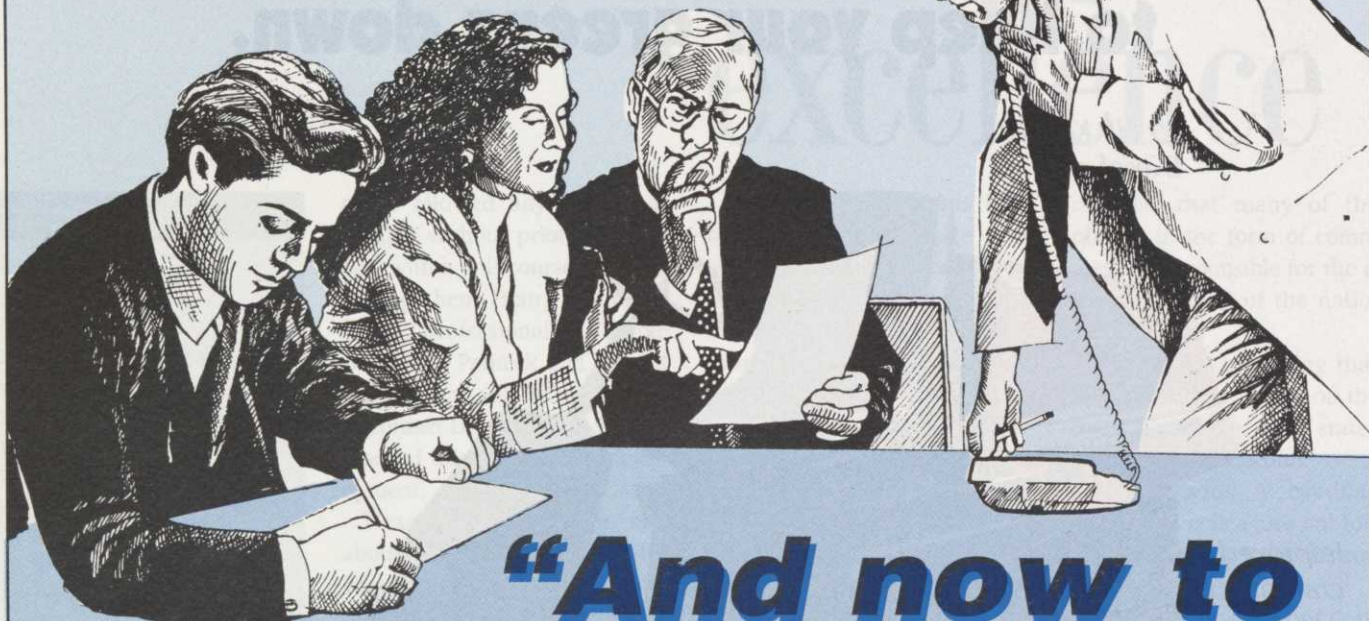
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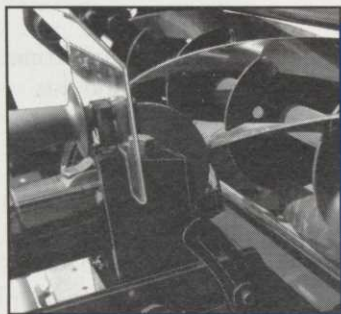
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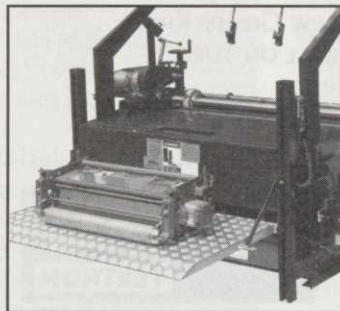


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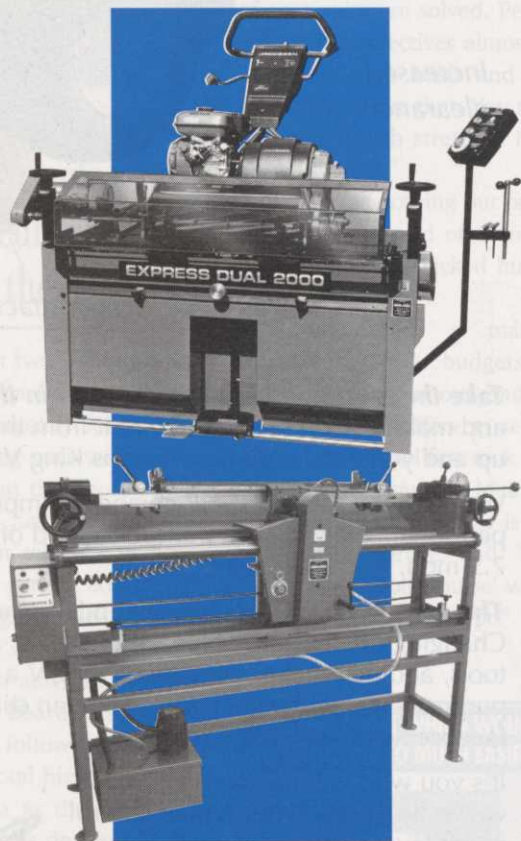
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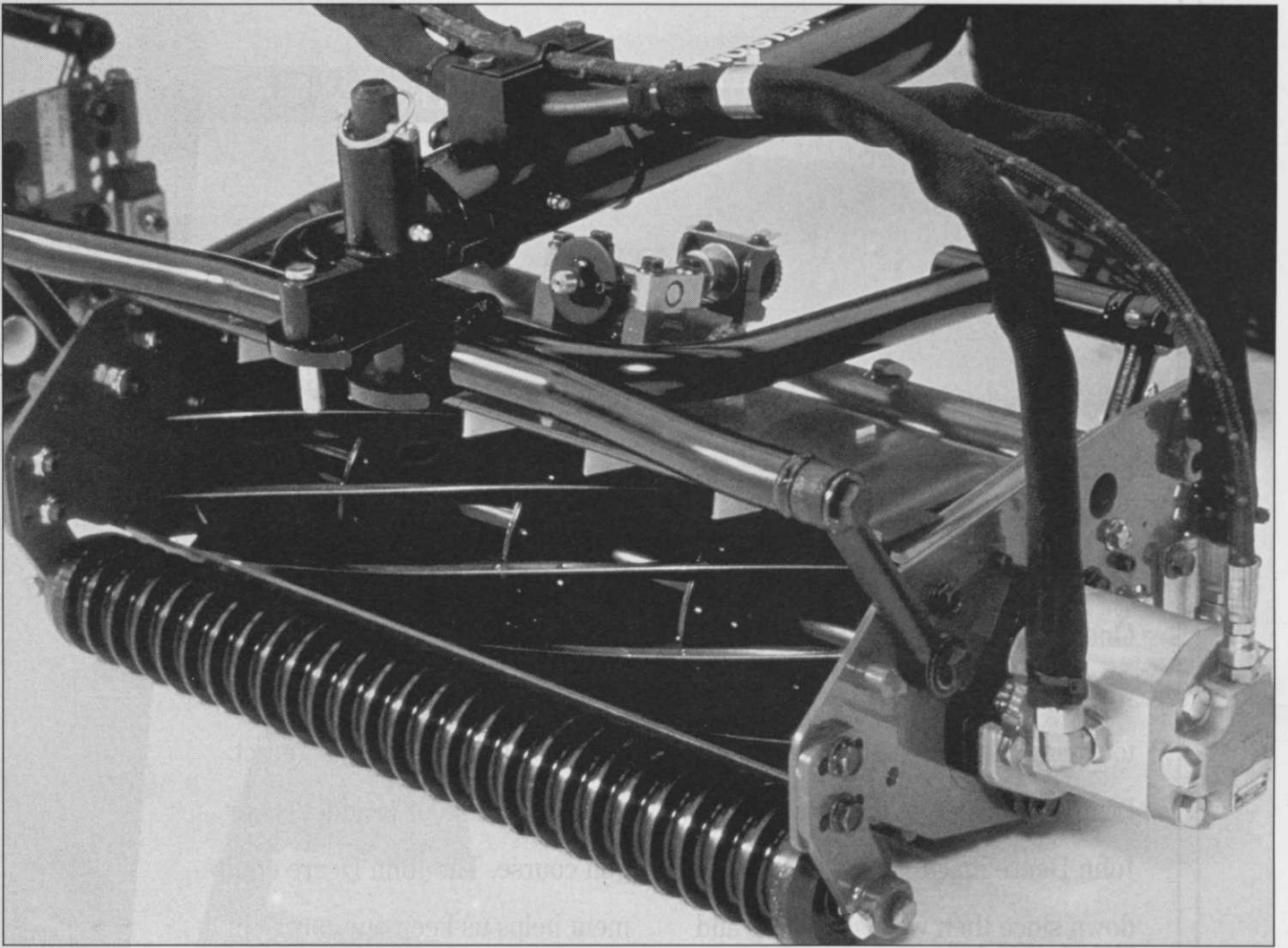
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Roland Taylor takes a look at developments in grass cutting equipment.

The increasing popularity of golf over the last decade has brought with it many changes, especially in the way courses are now

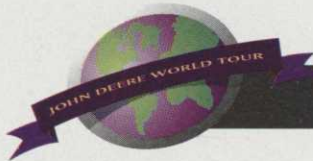
maintained. The higher the profile any sport receives, the greater the demand for improved facilities.

The UK golfer who watches televised matches from the USA now expects his home course to look as good the one his counterpart plays on across

the pond. For the local club, the nett result is a demand for manicured fairways and neatly trimmed rough.

This metamorphosis has brought about a fast-moving development in grass cutting equipment. While Budding's original principle has changed

very little, a technological revolution has taken place in the design of engines, drives and components. The grass machinery market is highly competitive and today's manufacturers have had to invest in computer-aided-design and control systems throughout



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