

Onward and upward to the year 2000

John Deere and Co are the latest company to sign up as BIGGA Golden Key Sponsors and as Scott MacCallum discovered the greenkeeping industry can only benefit from the company's increasing involvement.



My wife is becoming worried about me. Ever since joining BIGGA 18 months ago I have become a machinery anorak.

Whenever we travel anywhere I scour the landscape for tractors, triples, even combine harvesters and, ever keen to display my new found knowledge, I inform her of

the name of the manufacturer and, if I'm really on form, the model. A name she is becoming more and more conversant with, admittedly with a degree of reluctance, is John Deere.

It is my aim that she will, in



Alec McKee abroad one of his machines with Ivan Miller, Graham Williams and Nick Ashman looking on.

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time, become so familiar with the distinctive green and yellow livery that she can point out machines I miss. My chances of success are good as the number of John Deere machines both in the fields and on the golf courses is going to increase significantly over the next four years.

That's not just my opinion, it's the stated aim of UK Managing Director, Alec McKee, who said at the recent dinner to commemorate 30 years of trading in Britain and ten years in the grounds care business, that the company ambition was to be number one in the UK by the year 2000.

It is a statement which should send shivers down the backs of competitors because John Deere and Co is a massive company with a history of patient and successful progression. The statement of intent also came just weeks after the company had signed up as the latest BIGGA Golden Key sponsor.

Speaking a week later at the company's Langar base, near Nottingham, Alec put some flesh on the bones of the statement and explained how they would go about achieving such a goal.

"When we started in Britain 10 years ago we only had four grounds care products, now we have a portfolio of 61 including the recently launched aeration equipment," explained Alec. The company is also the market leader when it comes to children's model tractors having sold 1700 last year, each boasting the same livery as the grown up versions.

"We strive constantly to improve service and keep ahead of expectations. There is no mystery to how we achieve our success. It's down to hard work and a desire to meet customers' needs."

With that he answered a ringing telephone on a nearby desk and took a message. It took all of a minute but it demonstrated how the man at the head of the team can, by flexibility and a willingness to deal with any task, lead from the front when it comes to the smooth running of a company.

So who was John Deere, the man who inspired this mammoth multi national company to such great heights and who gave the industry one of its most famous names?

John Deere was born in Vermont, US, in 1808 and became a highly regarded blacksmith thanks to the quality of his workmanship. He developed a plough using steel made in Great Britain and in 1846 the first slab of cast plough steel ever rolled in the United States was made for John Deere and shipped from Pittsburgh to Moline. Ten years later he was producing 1,000 ploughs a year. "I will never put my name on a

plough that does not have in it the best that is in me," was his vow and that has been carried forward by his company to this day.

To be exposed to the computerisation of the John Deere company is to be given an insight into just what can be achieved when the implementation of computers is planned at the very beginning and there is no well meaning, but ill conceived decision to change course or computer system.

Run from a mainframe in the United States every John Deere plant in the world is tied into the same system and everyone has access to the same information – even the John Deere dealers.

"All product information is put on our computer – the Service Communications System – to provide an encyclopaedia of information on every product produced by the company over the last 30 years," explained Product Specialist, Ivan Miller.

"If a fault is reported or some-

son's knowledge. It is all shared," said Ivan.

Other benefits from the system are that information can be relayed to dealers instantly by the "News Flash" service.

That came into its own recently when a Gator was stolen from a dealership. Information of the theft was instantly sent to all other dealers and the culprit was caught when he turned up at another dealer to enquire about the value of a Gator.

The parts department is equally high tech with the self proclaimed aims of providing market leadership in parts support, minimising customer down time and promoting sales.

"Our role is as an emergency parts department with the main European department in Bruchsal in Germany," explained Distribution Manager, Antony Scott.

"We hold 34,000 different parts in Langar and around £5 million work of stock at any one time. In

"Parts are held in stock for machines which go out of production for a minimum of 15 years but if there is still a demand we will continue to produce the parts."

With what averages at \$1 million a day invested in research and development John Deere prides itself on the quality of its product and spares no effort in ensuring its excellence.

The company hosts an annual Feed Back Fortnight at its US Headquarters in Moline, Illinois, where recently six greenkeepers from Britain met with colleagues from around the world to pass opinion on John Deere designed prototypes so that their views could be gathered and incorporated into the production models.

British customers and potential customers also are encouraged to visit Langar to see round the plant and become more acquainted with product.



Richard Charleton, Scotland and the North Sales Manager, with his trailer

one discovers something about a machine of particular interest it is logged on the computer using predetermined code words, to enable it to be filed accurately, and an answer is sent out from a service manager which is also logged permanently on the computer. Then, if anyone else discovers the same fault, they can check on the computer and they will find all the information they could possibly want to solve it," said Ivan.

By way of emphasising the point he logs on to a particular machine and one element of it and every fault ever reported, no matter how insignificant, was displayed on the screen together with what should be done to rectify it.

The added benefit of such a system is that trends can quickly be identified and action taken and that no one person has a monopoly of information as it is available to everyone.

"If we're out in the field we can have access to all this information just by a laptop and a modem and diagnose faults immediately and you are not reliant on one per-

total there are 150,000 different parts to fit all products but 90% of sales comes from 5% of the parts – that amounts to about 7,500.

"Approximately 99% of all orders can be dealt with here and in Germany and even if it has to come from the States this takes under 72 hours."

A dedicated delivery service of 12 vehicles – six leaving from Langar feeding into the others in other parts of the country – ensures next day delivery with a cut off point of 6pm the night before.

"In reality because of overnight delivery many orders arrive by late the same evening and all make it by 9am.

"If an order comes in a dealer knows the availability immediately and the delivery time and if there are nine items available from the UK and one from Germany, this will be dispatched separately so there is no time lost."

Even that system is not quick enough for some customers, some of whom have been known to fly in by helicopter, landing at the neighbouring air field.

"The UK operation has a total staff of 96 and the Commercial and Consumer Equipment division has nine – agriculture still takes 88% of the total business," explained Graham Williams, Divisional Manager Commercial and Consumer Equipment.

"We have four territory Sales Managers Richard Charleton in Scotland and the North; James Morley, West and Ireland; Richard Johnson, East and Philip Tong, South.

"Howard Storey is the new Golf and Turf Product Specialist in Europe having previously been in the West and Ireland.

"Ivan Miller is the Product Specialist who works with Nick Ashman, the Area Service Manager while Tony Smith takes the orders," said Graham.

It is a tightly knit team, each dedicated to the success of the company and it would be a safe bet that every effort will be made to reaching the Year 2000 goal and John Deere will become even more firmly established as one of our car journey conversation topics.

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Wentworth is probably the busiest club in the country, but Chris Kennedy and his team relish every action-packed day, as Scott MacCallum found out when he visited shortly before the Volvo PGA Championship. Course pictures by Brian Morgan

For many Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers the arrival of the pros for a tournament, whether it be a small pro-am or a major Tour event, is the highlight of a season, or in some cases, a career.

The pressures are greater, the demands on staff much more intense, praise is shouted louder but the criticism cuts deeper. The courses must live up to the high expectations of the professional players for the short time around the championships. Wentworth Members, however, quite rightly, expect the best all year round.

Even at the biggest golf clubs such occasions are at most annual and the preparations can be put in place months in advance.

At Wentworth Club, though, it's different. There are two major tournaments every year – the Volvo PGA Championship in May and the Toyota World Match Play Championship in October... plus innumerable smaller pro-ams, society and company days and product launches. It means that there is always something coming up to keep Chris Kennedy and his team from letting the grass grow under their feet.

"No-one else to our knowledge has got two tournaments every year", explained Chris, who works closely with the West Course's Head Greenkeeper, Graham Matheson.

The winter programme work is carried out during January and February – the only real rest time that the West is allowed.

"It's a bit of a disadvantage because most clubs can put greens away for the winter and have five or six months recovery period whereas we're talking just three months before another major tournament."

"Here we are in April and there's not a leaf on the trees and we've got five weeks to the PGA. After the tournament it takes three to four weeks to break down the tented Village which takes us to the end of June, providing a mere six to eight week fallow period before it starts to build up again for the Match Play."

The nutrition programme at the PGA has therefore to be looked at carefully. "You've got to push the green on as it is early season but you want the grass to be on the



The **BUZZ** never stops at **WENTWORTH**

wane rather than the rise and you want it not to be thinning out but healthy and vigorous and at the same time not growing too quickly when the tournament is on. We get the fertiliser programme set in April and use a lot of top dressing, a minimal amount of fertiliser and a lot of aeration which has to be done because of the length of the tournament day."

Although "peaking" twice a year, Wentworth Club has to be at its best primarily for its members, and the considerable number of pro-ams, celeb-ams, charity and company days held at all times of the year, every year. For many, playing at Wentworth is the highlight of the season. Anything less than perfect would be a great and lasting disappointment.

Chris came to Wentworth in 1989 having been Course Manager at Haggis Castle, where he was in charge of five European Tour Championships and two

Scottish PGA Championships, but there the similarities between that job and this one end.

"Since coming down from Scotland, I've had to rethink my greenkeeping strategies and management processes. If you're dealing with what is simply a private members' club you can make decisions designed to safeguard the golf course, whereas here you've got to think about a broader customer base and manage those customer relations accordingly. You can't say 'it's wet or it's too frosty today, we'll close the golf course.' At times you've got to open the course even though it's against your better judgement. Then you've got to think quickly can we recover from the damage which has been caused. Luckily we have the resources to make the recovery happen," explained Chris.

By the end of the year Chris' team will have coped with a deafening 23 shotgun starts; admit-

tedly a heavy workload, but this is compensated for by the fact that a third of them are charity days. This is the Club's way of supporting their fund-raising efforts.

"Whoever's big day it is, it is essential that their participants and guests leave with happy memories. We tailor the day to make it special. I sit on the planning meetings for these days and feed down the line to Graham and his crew."

Meanwhile, there are two other top quality golf courses, a par 3 course, a driving range, two practice facilities, plus 14 tennis courts to maintain.

The two major events of the year provide differing problems for the greenkeeping team. One, the Volvo PGA Championship takes in the final Bank Holiday in May and has a field of 154 players while the other, the Toyota World Match Play has just 12 players playing 36 holes with

spectators following at most four matches during the first two days and just two on the other two days. One bonus is that the tented hospitality Village is in the same place but on the downside it is laid out completely differently.

"We've asked if certain aspects could be the same, but the organisers have different marketing strategies", explained Chris. "The PGA Championship is the 'Ascot Week' of golf with a village green party atmosphere while the Match Play is a more commercial week where people visit, look at the sponsor's product, have lunch, be ferried out to watch some golf, come back and have afternoon tea", said Chris, who has close relationships with the European Tour whose headquarters are at Wentworth, and IMG.

As well as the PGA Championship itself, the entire week is filled with events which require the attention of the greenkeeping team. This year that started on the Sunday, a full five days before the serious competition began



Graham Matheson, left and Chris Kennedy

with an Andersen Consulting event with all their VIPs. On the Wednesday there was a Canon Shoot out with ten of the top players playing over nine holes of the West for charity, while on Thursday there was the Corporate Cup - there is no Pro-am at the PGA Championship.

But there must have been time to relax after the Championship and Costantino Rocca had been acclaimed champion. Nope.

On Tuesday there was a Volvo

Pro-Captains' competition run by the PGA over the West course and on the Wednesday there was a Members' and Guests' Day with the course set up exactly as for the final day of the Championship.

"Whereas normal golf tournaments have a four day programme plus a pro-am, typically, we have nine or ten days of competition," said Chris, in a matter-of-fact tone.

At both the PGA and the Match

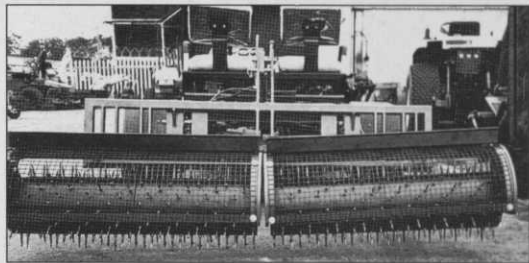
Play the greenkeeping staff start and finish work in the dark as the first tee time in the PGA is 7am and the practice ground, putting green and pitching facilities have got to be prepared and ready for use one hour before players begin.

"So we need upwards of 22 guys setting up course at 5am and the course has still got to be playing to tournament conditions at 8.15 in the evening."

There is a running crew of 24 for the PGA Championship and the preparation work cutting tees, surroundings, greens, fairways and semi rough, is all done before play every morning and then done again in the evening in case there is bad weather and it can't be done in the morning.

"People say 'why can't you get the greens lightening fast like Augusta?' Well, if you've prepared them at 5am and they are still being played at 8 in the evening, you're looking at a long growing period. The Masters has a smaller field of around 95 players.

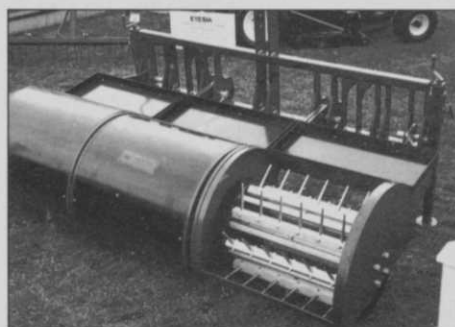
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There are similar problems in the Match Play to overcome.

"You can get frost and freezing fog. Last year the first ball struck in earnest was at 11 am and then they played two rounds".

Chris, Graham and Bernard Gallacher OBE, resident Club Professional and the successful 1995 European Ryder Cup captain, are always looking at ways of changing and improving the course.

Chris elaborated, "The new bunkers at 18 were re-designed again in the winter of 1995-96 to make them much deeper. It was done with the Tour's blessing and although we thought there would be great resentment from the players the view has been that it should have been done years ago. We are limited, because we can't add to the length of the Harry Colt design so what we can do is tighten up with new tees, bunkers and a reshaping of fairways."

One of the examples of this is the mini forest which has been planted on the right side of the 8th so anyone who blocks his shot



out will not have an easy path in to the green.

"The layout is a very good test of golf whether it's windy or not, but the players all agree it plays even tougher if the wind is blowing."

The course plays similarly for the PGA and Match Play. The world's best players participate in both championships, and they know Wentworth well. There are subtle changes in the shapes of

the fairways and pin placements because they are tougher for match play. We tend to use variations on tees more in the Match Play than we do in the PGA. Green speed, height of cut for fairways, semi rough and rough is primarily all set up the same. We aim for both tournaments to have green speeds of something like 10.5 to 11.5. Between 10 and 11 for the PGA because it's a longer tournament with more

feet going over the greens and between 10.7 and 11.5 is what we aim for at the Match Play and so far we've been quite lucky with the weather and we've been able to produce the goods. We can't stress how much the weather comes into it. We can put all the ingredients into the pot but if it goes cold on us there is not a lot we can do about it."

The Match Play offers up some

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'Some people say there shouldn't be any trees on a heathland golf course but I disagree'

difficult logistical problems to overcome.

"You can have 10-15,000 people watching just two matches and all hitting the tented village and clubhouse at the same time.

"We have a very good irrigation scheme and can now virtually control the bounce of the ball from the tee. Graham now has the facility to wet down the fairways, so provided the players hit the fairway, the ball reacts in the desired fashion. For example, making it spring forward to stop it in the landing area, particularly on a hole like the 17th with the big left to right slope. Seven years ago you couldn't have stopped a wedge on the 17th fairway."

A new irrigation system was recently completed on the Edinburgh, installation took place during the 1995-96 winter, while a new scheme is also planned for the East. The aim is that all three 18 hole courses should be brought up to the same standard as the West. Other areas of development include the re-design of

the driving range. Re landscaping will encompass total irrigation, while more bays will be added and the teaching facilities improved.

Over the years, nature has played its part in the re-design of the course.

"Some people say there shouldn't be any trees on a heathland golf course but I disagree. I think when Mother Nature does something you should try and work with her instead of having a constant tree felling programme. If you go out onto the Chobam Common end of the course - holes 8, 9 and 10 - there wasn't a single tree 40 years ago. Those that are there now weren't planted, they just appeared of their own accord. I think the course looks better for it.

Despite the vast experience of Chris and Graham like every other greenkeeper they are well aware that they never stop learning.

Chris said, "We're very lucky that we're part of a friendly industry and we can go and see

how other people tackle problems, how they present the golf course and people will pass on pieces of information. I've been going to The Open since I was 14 years of age and I've always asked questions of greenkeepers. At the open Championship every year, BIGGA greenkeepers get a chance to see the examination paper in the front line by doing bunker raking, divoting and any other task which they are asked to do. Guys who have never been involved in a golf tournament in their life are now in the front line and see exactly how things happen. Then they go away and use what they have seen at the Open championship on their own golf course. That can only be good for their members. This is an education process which happens annually and I'm very pleased to say that along with Walter Woods, I was one of the people who started that off many years ago. It's great to see it going from strength to strength on an annual basis and presentation at small 18

hole courses is now better than it's ever been because they see how it's done at golf tournaments."

"The last six years at the Club have been very interesting and with more plans on the drawing board, the future is going to be every bit as exciting."

Things just never stop at Wentworth.

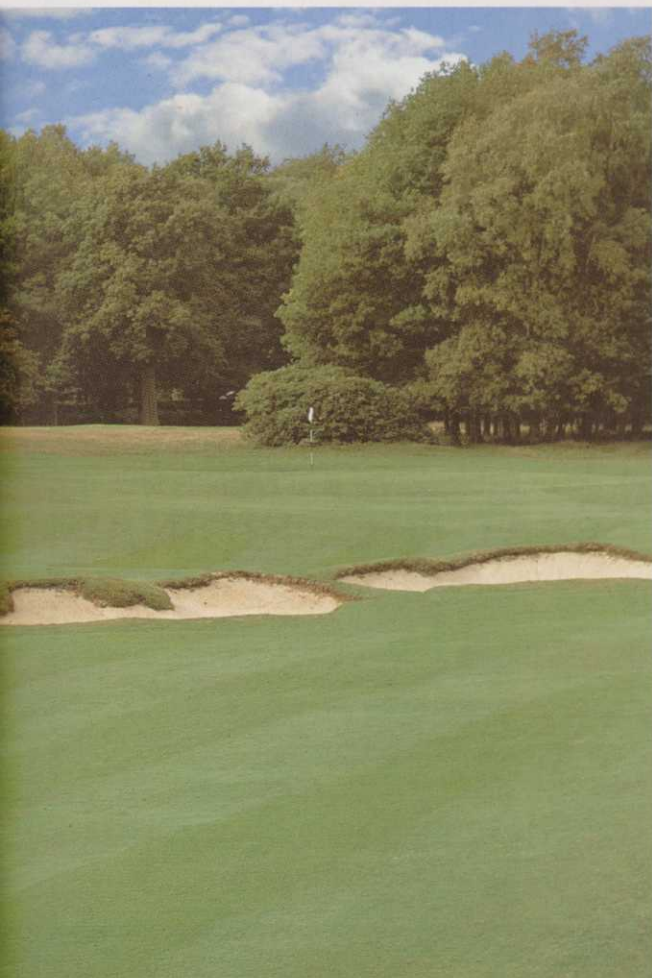
WHEN I'M NOT AT WORK I LIKE TO:



"Play in the Hayter Challenge Final and avoid a 9 on my card." (Robert missed winning by two shots after a 9 at the 15th).

Robert Washbrook, Porters Park GC

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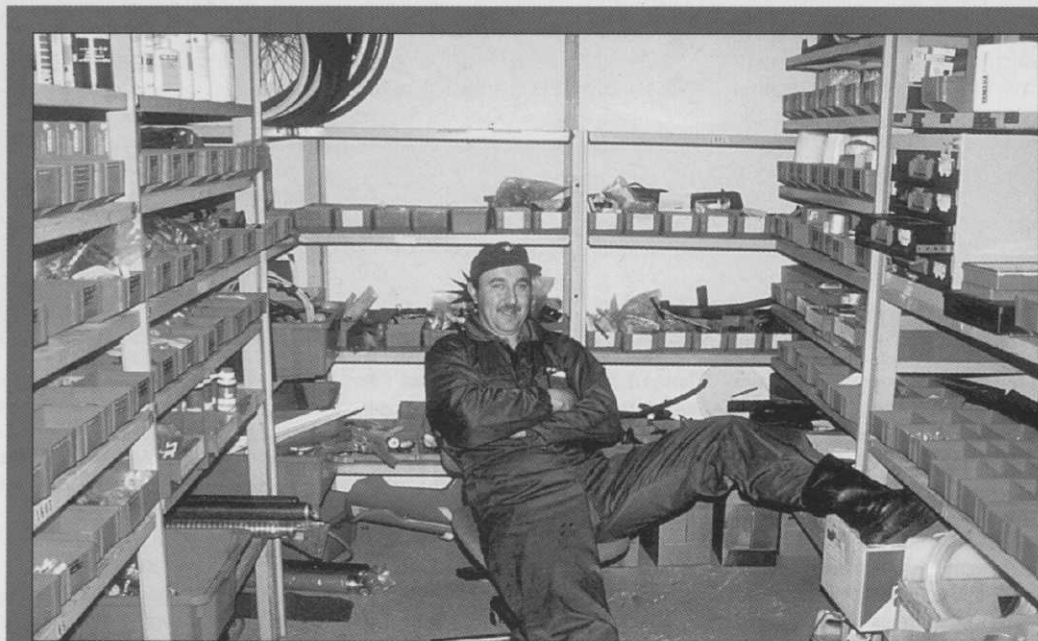


Being virtually unique in terms of golf course conditions Finland offers many problems for its greenkeepers.

To find the best way of tackling those difficulties the Finnish Greenkeepers Association together with the Finnish Golf Union undertook extensive research in a bid to discover solutions to those problems.

Over a five year period beginning in 1989 with a visit to the STRI in Bingley to learn how to go about such a project greenkeepers from the length and breadth of the country administered to 15,000 test plots, on 16 golf courses, and the results show just how extreme are the conditions in which golf courses are expected to be maintained and the solutions which have derived from them.

All the work was done voluntarily with greenkeepers giving up their spare time to count shoots



More and more golf clubs in the United Kingdom are now employing full time mechanics but with the obvious benefit of having someone on site to service and repair machinery comes the need to provide him or her with a workshop.

This can range from a couple of spanners and a workbench to a fully equipped affair the equal of any dealer.

However, one workshop recently visited in Finland would be the envy of even the best equipped here at home.

taking two to three weeks over four consecutive winters. The samples were actually kept in a freezer so they could be counted



Mechanic Matti Niskanen at Katinkulta, the excellent course which is a major draw at Scandinavia's largest tourist resort, has everything he could possibly want from a workshop including,

would you believe, a "dish-washer" for machine parts.

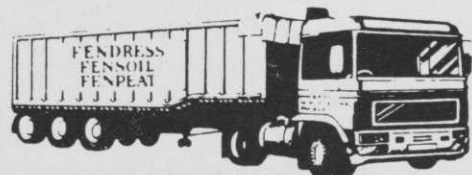
Everything is designed with cleanliness in mind. There is a cold shower outside the front door so any chemicals can be washed off overalls - as you can imagine it is also the ideal initiation instrument for new members of staff. Oil is piped into the workshop and then drained into a tank in the floor while the Finnish made machine parts washer is ideal for cleaning mowing units and many other pieces of equipment.

when the golf courses were not so busy.

"The tests were useful because in some cases they showed just

how little time there was to repair everything, ready for the new season. It can be days instead of weeks and this can come as a

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shock to any non-Finnish greenkeepers who come to work in the country," explained Elise Jarvinen, the Chairman of FGA, and someone heavily involved in the research work.

"There has also been environmental benefits because it showed that better results were often obtained with reduced fertiliser or without any 'unnatural measures'," she explained.

● Fig 1. Shows the difference in fine fescue shoot density in a course in the north of the country, Brahestad, and another about 300 miles south, Bjorneborg. The northern course enjoys significantly greater shoot density but for a shorter period. This is particularly important as it allows the greenkeeper to know how much time he has to work on the course.

● Fig 2. When Finnish courses come out of winter they require a stimulant to encourage them to grow again.

This shows that the best results were obtained merely by brushing the greens, although the diagram clearly shows that verticutting, brushing and aerating all perform better than merely



And you thought you had it bad: checking for ice in Finland, a task carried out three or four times a year

allowing nature to take her course.

● Fig 3. Shows a list of varieties and how they performed in the Finnish conditions. The testing

areas were one metre square and each variety had three plots. Cutting height was 12 millimetres and the plots were maintained as tees. The golf course where the

tests were carried out is 300 miles from the Arctic circle.

● Published with kind permission of the Finnish Greenkeepers Association.

Fig. 1: Festuca Rubra Commutata. The development of shoot densities on greens in Raahel and Pori

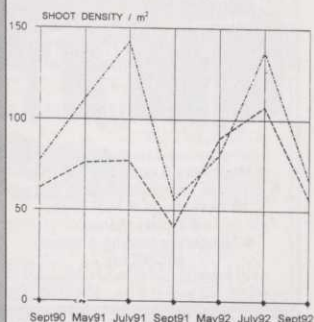


Fig. 2: Festuca Rubra Commutata

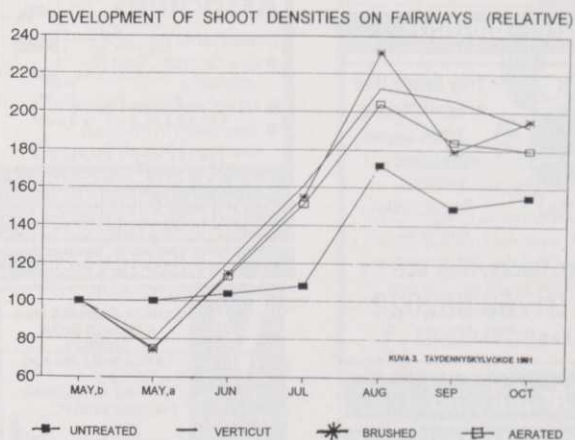
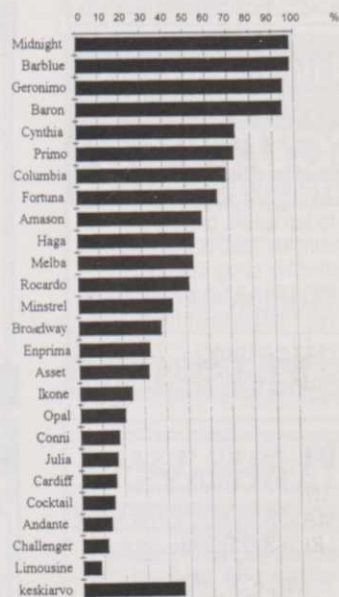


Fig. 3: Poa Pratensis - winter damages 1992-94



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