

Feedback event helps to maintain standards

A party of 11 Course Managers from some of the UK's top golf courses took part in this year's Toro Turf Professionals Club visit to the United States as guests of The Toro Company and distributor Lely UK.

The visit was designed to provide a forum for a two-way exchange of ideas and opinions about existing and future Toro professional turf products covering both equipment and irrigation systems.

On the first part of its eight-day tour, the party visited The Toro Company's corporate headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the Course Managers met and heard from senior management including Toro group Vice President Chuck Lounsbury, as well as other members of the team from engineering, manufacturing and product testing. They then toured the engineering and test facilities and were shown Toro's new state-of-the-art training centre.

This was followed by a round table forum led by Vana Lonn, Toro's Manager of Advanced Engineering who, with his team, is responsible for developing many of the new concepts in technology and design for future Toro products.

The next day the party visited Toro's main commercial products manufacturing facility in Tomah, Wisconsin, where there was an opportunity to discuss product related issues with senior production management and to tour the factory to see products being assembled as well as Toro's impressive component-testing facilities.

Toro's Worldwide Marketing Manager in Minneapolis, Barry Beckett, who was responsible for the visit and hosted this first stage of the programme, said: "Toro is a great believer in listening to what our customers have to say about how our products perform in the field, in their own conditions, and how in the future



Keeping Toro in the picture: Barry Beckett, front left, Toro's Worldwide Marketing Manager, in Minneapolis with UK Course Managers and others

we can help them meet the challenges they face in their everyday working lives with innovative new developments.

"These UK Course Managers are responsible for some of the world's best-known or up-and-coming golf courses. The heavy demand that places on them to achieve excellence in what they do makes their opinions and ideas invaluable to us in maintaining Toro as a world-leading maker of turfcare products."

On the second stage of its visit the party flew on to Riverside, California, the home of Toro's headquarters for the design and manufacture of its irrigation systems. Here again the visitors met senior management and went on a conducted tour of the irrigation manufacturing facility where they saw products being assembled as well as the extensive test facilities. This was followed by a round table forum to discuss and hear about current and future golf course irrigation products and issues.

Speaking about the importance of such feedback, Toro's European Sales Manager Bob Buckingham said: "Toro is committed to looking at customer requirements on a world-wide basis, not just from a US standpoint. This

visit provided an ideal forum for listening to what our UK customers had to say about our products and the key turfcare issues that affect them in their daily work, so that Toro can ensure that it meets all their current and future needs."

The UK course managers who attended the Toro Turf Professionals Club Visit were: Walter Woods; George Brown, Turnberry; Chris Kennedy, Wentworth; John Philp, Carnoustie; Alan Purdie, Crail; Jim McKenzie, Celtic Manor; Rob Brewer, St. Mellion; Phil Chiverton, Buckinghamshire; Brian Turner, Sunningdale; Steve Jones, The London; Jim Cassidy, Ashridge.

Course first for college

Myerscough College has launched Europe's first degree course in Turfgrass Science, commencing in September 1997. This unique four-year programme will take turfgrass education to a new level in Britain. The course is specially designed for students who wish to gain a thorough technical understanding of turfgrass growth and development, the ecology of turfgrass environments and construction systems.

Myerscough College runs the programme in conjunction with the University of Central Lancashire, to provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of turfgrass management, rootzone technology, golf course and sports ground drainage, irrigation design and installation, and research methodology.

Formal links with American Universities will enable students to take a 12 month work placement in the United States and gain practical experience on some of the world's finest golf courses.

"It has taken five years of extensive discussions with a range of industry representatives to develop this unique learning experience," said Martyn Jones, Head of Turfgrass Science.

Distributor appointed

Avoncrop Amenity Products has been appointed as a main distributor for Green Releaf Biotech Inc, to cover the South of England and South Wales. Green Releaf, based at Jacksonville, Florida, is the

leading US manufacturer of soil management and plant nutrient products.

The company specialises in microbial soil inoculants developed to enhance turfgrass quality.

(mis)adventures of Gordon the Greenkeeper



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From mangles and tights to laptops and bytes...

RiteFeed has come a long way since its early days but BIGGA's latest Golden Key Sponsor is still progressing at great pace.

It would perhaps go down as one of the more unusual conversation topics for a dinner party but when John Walker and Richard Lawrence got onto the subject of cow slurry during one such memorable occasion 11 years ago it resulted in the birth of a company which has not looked back since.

Eight years after the launch of RiteFeed Richard, a man with 22 year's experience of the industry as Marketing Director for Rigby Taylor and National Accounts Manager for Rhône Poulenc, was persuaded by John to join the company. Between then and now RiteFeed has grown to 15 times the 1994 size.

"I would hope that we at least double the size of the company next year and continue to double it year on year," revealed Richard.

"That means that next year the company won't be 15 times the size it was when I started but 30 times the size."

To help make that possible RiteFeed has been recruiting its sales force covering the country - Robert Bruce in Scotland; Brian Mainwaring in the North West; Alan Cordingley in the North East and John McCully in London.

The company may never have been launched at all if it hadn't been for that dinner party back in 1986.

Richard explained the background to the bizarre tale.

"John's family rent out some farms which they own and over dinner at my house one night I told him that we were selling cow slurry. When I told him the price he just couldn't believe it - it was more expensive than petrol but they had been just tipping the stuff away."

The beginnings of the company are a typical example of the heroic "Heath Robinson" methodology which has been at the root of many a successful British innovation.



The Rite stuff: John Walter, Brian Mainwaring and Richard Lawrence



"John started off with a mangle and a pair of lady's tights," revealed Richard.

"He filled the tights with cow slurry and put them through the mangle to force out the liquid. Unfortunately the tights exploded and John got covered.

"Things have changed a lot since then and now we offer what I believe is the most technically advanced product on the market."

It is through this insight into the early days of RiteFeed that you realise why John says, "I just can't believe the success that the company has enjoyed since we launched. There is a tremendous difference now to when we started."

Much of the success of the company is down to an ability to listen to the customer and cater for what he wants.

"Everything we do is led by the customer. I think the trade has been wrong for a number of years in going into golf courses and saying, 'This is what we offer'. We have changed that totally by going into golf courses and saying, 'What do you need?' There is a massive difference between these statements," said Richard. "The majority of the good new products we've launched have come from ideas from greenkeepers and Course Managers. They come to us, for example, and say they've got a problem and that they believe it to be sulphur. So then we work on that and end up with a product."

RiteFeed has a product list of 12 but the vast proportion of the business is specially formulated for each golf course. From a production base in Preston, Lancashire, the company have the capacity to produce enough product to service 10% of the market with the scope to double produc-

tion if required.

"It is a very efficient process which John has developed," said Richard.

The sophistication now employed is a league away from merely grading the product through a range of 7 to 40 denier tights.

"We have developed a way of putting nitrogen, phosphate and potash into the product. It's a secret method and we're very proud of it.

"We also give a choice of source or nitrogen so customers can have fast or slow release of ammonium nitrate, very slow release with methidine urea or anything in the middle," explained Richard, who added that they have also found a way of keeping the microbes in the product live through to the application stage.

"If the Course Manager says he wants an 8-0-6 with iron we make him an 8-0-6 with iron. We make whatever they want whether it is on our catalogue or not."

Together with Gleneagles, RiteFeed has also developed a computer programme into which they

'We can do a full year's programme for a greenkeeper in about 25 minutes'

can feed a golf courses soil analysis and it will give the ideal fertiliser for every hole on the course.

"We can do a full year's programme for a greenkeeper in about 25 minutes," explained Richard, who added that he reckoned RiteFeed do more soil analysis through the STRI than any other company.

"A number of Course Managers have asked me to take the computer and show the Greens Chairman - we'll never speak to anyone without the Course Manager's approval. Often a committee will have no idea how complex it is to run a golf course and the problems which face the Course Manager every day. The computer shows the situation in a very graphic way and highlights why problems exist and, importantly, what is being done to solve them.

"Course Managers are often criticised for things that are frequently beyond their control and that annoys me."

The delicate balances that are required can be illustrated by one of RiteFeed's clients.

"We actually have one course which has 18 different mixes for

18 different greens. That's rare but you might find a need for three different mixes and do six greens with each mix.

"What golfers look for is consistency and if it takes a range of tailored formulas to achieve it that is what should happen," said Richard.

It is in answer to the question "Why do you think liquids are still a smaller proportion of the market than granules?", that Richard drops the baton in the Modesty Olympics.

"Because I haven't been to every golf club yet!" To be fair to him he did follow it up with a laugh.

He does, however, extol the virtues of liquid with all the zeal of a prophet.

"If you've paid £100 for a round of golf you don't want to putt over granules, you want the course to be magnificent but you want them to feed it some other day. But at most courses there is play every day of the year. With a liquid you can spray the course and play on it half an hour later and no-one would even know. It's also much faster to apply."

Warming to his theme he continues.

"If you think about it a granule is ineffective anyway. No grass plant has teeth so it can't chew a granule and eat it. The only way a grass plant can take up a granule is if it turns it to liquid first.

"I'm firmly convinced that the days of the granule are finished. If you apply an 8-0-0 granule you are putting on 8% nitrogen and the other 92% is filler," said Richard who claims a 90% conversion rate when he visits golf courses.

"The only limitation was until recently I was effectively the only salesman."

RiteFeed took the unusual decision not to use a distributor network to promote its products.

"Our product is highly technical and highly complex and it doesn't fit into a distributors normal catalogue. They were unable to stock it in large quantities because they didn't know what the customer was going to want. We have to be very flexible and unfortunately the distributor system doesn't allow for that," explained Richard.

"So we took the decision to go direct and instead host golf days which we organise including

some at Gleneagles and The Belfry.

"I've heard people in the trade say 'How can RiteFeed afford these things?' The simple answer is that we use the money we would have paid the distributors to pay for these events. We find that every efficient."

Becoming a Golden Key sponsor and contributing to BIGGA's Education and Development Fund is just part of RiteFeed's overall involvement with the Association.

"Between John and myself we have a number of year's experience in the trade and in that time we have known and appreciated how influential BIGGA is. It is important that greenkeepers speak with a unified voice and BIGGA has enabled this to happen and done a massive amount to benefit greenkeepers and we want to be involved," explained Richard who added that John is currently President of the North West Section.





"Greenkeepers and Course Managers are our livelihood and without them we would have no business. We will continue to support them and their association," he added.

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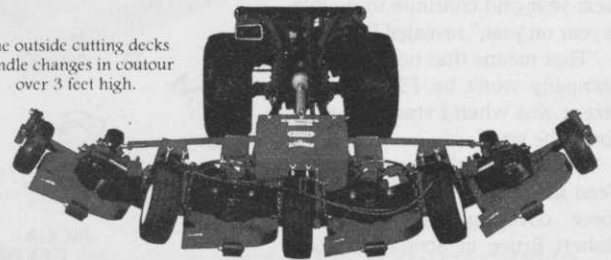
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ACCIDENT

by **Tony Rees MIOSH, Health & Safety Consultant and Senior Instructor with ATB-Landbase Training Services**

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995

These Regulations (RIDDOR) require persons (eg the employer) to notify the enforcing authority of any accident which results in, or which could have resulted in, death, injury or disease.

RIDDOR 1995 replaces the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR 1985), the Railways (Notice of Accidents) Order 1986 and certain provision of the offshore Installations (Inspectors and Casualties) Regulations 1973 and the Submarine Pipelines (Inspectors etc) Regulations 1977. Certain provisions of the Regulation of Railways Act 1871 and the Transport and Works Act 1992 are also repealed or amended.

RIDDOR specifies:

- a) the person responsible for making the report
- b) types of injury which must be reported immediately
- c) types of injury which must be reported within ten days
- d) types of occupational related diseases which must be reported
- e) types of incident with the potential for causing injury (Dangerous Occurrences) which must be reported immediately
- f) requirements for keeping specified records

In addition RIDDOR specifies further additional provisions relating to mines and quarries. The Regulations also identify different reporting procedures applying to incidents covered by the Road Traffic Act 1972, the Explosives Act 1975, the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 and certain other enactments.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is given the power to require further information relating to any accident or case of disease and a defence is provided for persons charged with an offence under the Regulations. This defence provides for the accused to demonstrate that he was unaware of an event requir-

ing notification and that all reasonable steps had been taken to have all such events brought to his attention ie that there was a well defined internal reporting procedure.

The following notes give brief guidance.

1. The Person Responsible for Reporting

Generally the person who should report the accident or disease is the injured person's employer (the training provider in the case of work trainee) or the person in control of the premises in the case of a dangerous occurrence or injury to a person on the premises who is not an employee.

2. Reporting an Accident

Accidents arising out of or in connection with work or which are attributable to the undertaking, the plant, substances or premises must be reported to the Enforcing Authority if they result in death, specified injury or condition, injury resulting in more than three days off work or are classed as a Dangerous Occurrence.

The Enforcing Authority is either the HSE (factories etc) or the Environmental Health Department of the Local Authority (offices, shops etc) though if in doubt report to the HSE who will pass on your report if necessary.

2.1. Immediate Reporting

The following must be reported immediately, by telephone if possible:

- a) any accident resulting in

death or specified injury to an employee

b) any accident resulting in death or specified injury to any person who is on premises under your control. Where the person concerned is employed by some other Employer then his Employer will normally make the report.

c) any dangerous occurrence which happens on premises under your control.

A specified Major Injury or condition is defined as follows:

Major Injuries

- 1. Any fracture, other than to the fingers, thumbs or toes
- 2. Any amputation
- 3. Dislocation of the shoulder, hip, knee or spine
- 4. Loss of sight (whether temporary or permanent)
- 5. A chemical or hot metal burn to the eye or any penetrating injury to the eye.
- 6. Any injury resulting from an electric shock or electrical burn (inc any electrical burn caused by arcing or arcing products) leading to unconsciousness or requiring resuscitation or admittance to

hospital for more than 24 hours

- 7. Any other injury:

- a) leading to hypothermia, heat-induced illness or to unconsciousness
- b) requiring resuscitation

c) requiring admittance to hospital for more than 24 hours

8. Loss of consciousness caused by asphyxia or by exposure to a harmful substance or biological agent

9. Either of the following conditions which result from the absorption of any substance by inhalation, ingestion or through the skin:-

- a) acute illness requiring medical treatment, or
- b) loss of consciousness

10. Acute illness which requires medical treatment where there is reason to believe that this resulted from exposure to a biological agent or its toxins or infected material

Explaining some of the main terms used:

a) fracture includes a break, crack or chip

b) amputation means either traumatic amputation at the time of the accident or surgical amputation following the accident

c) requiring admittance to hospital for more than 24 hrs includes situations where, had the injured person not already been in hospital, the injury would have resulted in admission for more than 24 hours

d) acute illness means illness which:-

- i) progresses rapidly to a crisis after the onset of symptoms, and
- ii) has severe symptoms

e) medical treatment covers hospital treatment, treatment by a GP or treatment by a firm's medical staff

f) loss of consciousness means the injured person enters into a state, for however short a period, where there is a lack of response, either vocal or physical, to people trying to communicate with them

g) biological agent is defined in the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regs 1994 as meaning 'any micro-organism, cell culture or human endoparasite including any which have been genetically modified which may cause any infection, allergy, toxicity or otherwise create a risk to human health'. In the context of the infection hazards relevant to RIDDOR



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REPORTING AN ACCIDENT

1995 this will in practice cover bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites.

The kind of accidents which can lead to the reportable health conditions included in the list of major injuries:

a) loss of consciousness resulting from asphyxia (lack of oxygen)

i) entry of a person into a confined space with oxygen deficient atmosphere

ii) failure of air or oxygen supply in breathing apparatus

b) acute illness (absorption of any substance)

i) overturning, collapse or bursting or something containing a toxic substance, causing a spillage which contaminates the working environment

ii) handling of surfaces of plant, containers etc onto which a skin absorbable toxic substance had leaked without the knowledge of the person affected

iii) use or handling of material containing a toxic substance, the presence of which was not known, in a way which led to an episode of high exposure to that substance

iv) an unexpected reaction between chemical compounds giving off a toxic gas or vapour which contaminates the working environment

v) inadvertent or unknowing entry of a person into a confined space containing a toxic gas or vapour

c) acute illness (exposure to a biological agent or its toxins or infected material)

i) escape or release of a biological agent or its toxins or infected material into a working environment by, for example, the failure of a fermenter or a centrifuge, breakage of a flask, a spillage, filter failure;

ii) exposure to a biological agent or its toxins or infected material through, for example, accidental self-inoculation (eg by the needle or a syringe or other contaminated sharp item), animal bite or laceration.

Following your immediate report by telephone a written report must be sent to the Enforcing Authority within ten days on form F2508.

Details of the accident must be entered into a register.

2.2 Reporting Within Ten Days

Other injuries which result in that person's incapacity for work for more than three consecutive days must also be reported to the Enforcing Authority. The report

must be sent within ten days of the accident on form F2508.

Details of the accident must be entered into a register.

Note: Incapacity for work means off work or not able to perform work which the person may reasonably be expected to do; Three consecutive days includes every day of the week except the day of the accident.

2.3 Death Within Ten Days

In addition to the reporting procedures above, if an employee dies, as a result of injuries sustained in an accident at work, within one year of the accident then this must be reported to the Enforcing Authority when it becomes known.

3. Reporting a Disease

The Regulations list 72 types of diseases associated within certain occupations and, when it is confirmed by a registered Medical Practitioner that an employee is suffering from one of these diseases it must be reported immediately to the Enforcing Authority on form F2508A.

Self employed persons must also make arrangements for such reporting when suffering from a confirmed prescribed disease.

Again, records of such reports must be kept.

4. Records

Records of all reportable information must be entered into a register. The register must be kept at the place of work concerned, unless not reasonably practicable, and must be kept for three years.

Copies of the form F2508 will be sufficient for this purpose.

Details to be entered into the register must include the following information:

i) date and time of accident or dangerous occurrence

ii) details of the person affected including full name, occupation and nature of injury or condition

iii) the place where it happened

iv) a brief description of the circumstances.

Where the report is of a gas incident or condition then a record of the information sent to the HSE must be kept.

A list of Dangerous Occurrences and Reportable Diseases can be found on the new F2508 RIDDOR Report Form Pads.

Further information on training courses and consultancy contact ATB Landbase Training Services (Jean John on 01282 617466 or Tony Rees on 01686 622799).

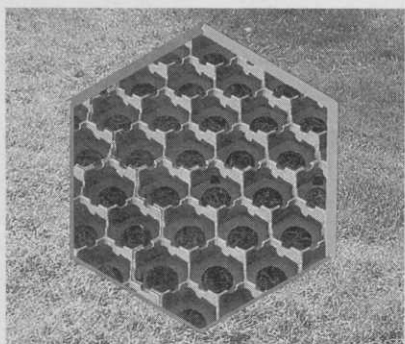
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REAL WORLD TEST GREENS MOWERS GREENKEEPER INTERNATIONAL

Hugh Tilley investigates the pros and cons of the two styles of greens mower - ride-ons and 'triples'.

The ride-on triple greens mower is possibly the most used piece of equipment on the golf course. While most greenkeepers and Course Managers may prefer to use pedestrian or hand mowers, practical constraints of time and money, (lack of either or both), usually mean that most inevitably use a ride-on for the bulk of their greens mowing. July's feature suggested that it is also the ride-on which is often equipped with verti-cutters, but often older machines, thus saving the need to change units, although modern triples have quick detach cutting units although some are more "quick" than others.

Although there are about seven makes of greens triple only about five are currently readily available or supported in this country.

Most of these triple mowers can also be fitted with alternative reels, cylinders and/or bottom knives allowing them to be used for rougher areas including tees, collars and approaches. Roller brushes, groomers or combs and verti-cutters are other options usually available which may or may not be specified. In fact many clubs will have several triples and down grade older machines for these uses.

Each manufacturer is likely to offer several options, not just of cutting unit but also of engine and drive. However, while the diesel has become king in UK, there is still often a choice between two or all wheel drive. For power transmission hydrostatic units are virtually universal for both for traction and reel drive, and no one reported any lack of

power from these and the only comment was the worry of oil leaks and seals wearing.

Jacobsen Greens King V at High Post Golf Club - Salisbury

Now into its second season, High Post's Greens King V has converted Head Greenkeeper, Lauchlan Millar, to this make, mainly because the groomers are so good. The club expects to buy new about every five years and to down grade the previous main greens machine to aprons and other less critical areas.

Lauchlan stated that the new machine, which has now done 371 hours, is a very significant improvement on previous machines, and that the groomers are "brilliant". In particular, he singled out the self steering cutters and the way the units stay on cut. He believed that the maker had listened to greenkeepers and produced what they want. All greens staff at High Post use the Greens King and all like it.

The Mark V has no clutter on the driver's platform and a walk through design, so that he can easily get on or off either side, furthermore operation is simple. Also cited was the fact that lift/lower is now a single switch



Lauchlan Millar and the Greens King V

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operation and that fuses have been replaced by relays which are instantly re-settable, (not that they have ever come out).

The new design also has quick release attachment cutting units, and although the club does not interchange with verti-cutters – these still fit and are used on an older triple, it does remove the units for back-lapping.

Re-grinding and bottom blade replacement is carried out (off site) once a year, with back-lapping undertaken as necessary. This operation is undertaken on the bench using an independent electric back-lapper, but it was admitted that the units are heavy to hoist onto the bench. Lauchlan uses a blade of grass to check blade set, rather than the traditional piece of paper, believing that it gives a more accurate indication. The 11 blade reels give a cut which Lauchlan believes is actually superior to hand cutting.



Alresford Golf Club's Huxley Greenstar

A standard bottom blade is used and cutting is down to about 1/8 inch (3mm). However, because of the excellent effect of the groomers cut appears to be shorter and the greens faster. Groomers are kept just 1/16 in. higher than the reel and are used for every cut. The self-steering design of the cutting unit has eliminated scuffing even on the perimeter cut.

Another important point was made about the box, these are easy to lift off and replace, particularly the middle unit as this has an extended location pin – Lauchlan suggested this was typical of the thought which had gone into the design. Boxes fill completely

and cleanly. There was some damage to the boxes, which had occurred when the tether (lift check) wires broke – Jacobsen has now provided new, stronger and improved wires.

The machine has a short wheel-base and is very manoeuvrable, the rear wheel turning inside the track of the front wheels – ensuring it does not go over edge when turning close to bunkers or banks. The machine is front wheel drive only. The handbrake is effective, but must be set before the driver leaves the seat or the engine cuts out.

Another standard modification, made by BS Mowers of Bristol who supplied and support the machine, was to put a small bleed hole on the bearing housing of the reel spindle, this has ensured that any over greasing will leak away outside the frame and not onto the reel where it is spun out onto the grass.

The club has been extremely pleased with the service provided by BS who Lauchlan has found quicker to react and respond than most other would-be dealers.

On price, Lauchlan admitted that this was higher than some others, but he added, "you only get what you pay for," and he is happy that High Post have excellent value for money.

Huxley's Greenstar at Alresford Golf Club

New as Head Greenkeeper at the club, Darren Thatcher prefaced his remarks by saying that he was not responsible for purchasing the Greenstar, and admitted that he was not yet committed to all aspects of the machine. However, with Huxley's within walking distance from the club and enjoying an excellent relationship with it, the club would have difficulty making any other decision although they did look at other machines.

Darren admitted that Huxleys respond well and were an exceptional fount of knowledge. The club also have other Huxley

mowers including a 358 greens triple which is now used for less critical areas.

Darren said that the new Greenstar shows the many improvements made as a result of experience and dialogue with greenkeepers. The machine at Alresford is now just over a year old and was the development model so the club played an important part in its design. Since then it has been brought up to current specification.

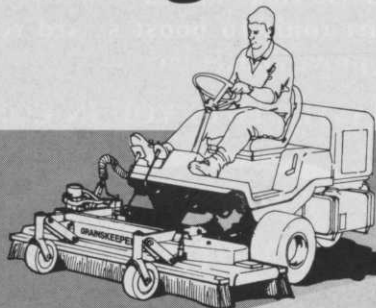
Darren was critical about the look of the machine with its pipework exposed to view, however, there have been no major problems, and only one leak, a coupling not being tightened up. Biodegradable oil is now used. Some greenkeepers like this exposed pipework as it allows leaks to be seen almost instantly. Darren said an advantage was that Huxley's did know the machine intimately which meant that even the smallest problem was sorted quickly and effectively. For instance, when a problem of grass build up on rear rollers in damp conditions was reported, wire scrapers were fitted to effect an instant cure.

The machine has all wheel drive and this does mean that it will go anywhere, no matter how steep. It is also very manoeuvrable which is ideal for a tight course, and in fact perhaps too manoeuvrable because this can induce wear at the edges of the green – noticeable in winter. Alresford's greenkeepers, knowing this, have learnt to drive with consideration. This is probably no different from other similar machines, nevertheless Darren is planning to hand mow the greens next winter.

Power is provided by a Perkins 3 cylinder engine, which operates at about two thirds of its peak output, ie in the range of maximum torque, and this makes it not just economical, but also very quiet. Darren commented that neither ear defenders nor plugs are needed and that this quietness was a bonus which would be useful for courses close to built-up areas or around hotels.

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Nick Tyley on the Ransomes Greensplex 160D at Bristol's Stockwood Vale

groomer is used at all times. Cut quality and setting is examined regularly with back lapping only carried out as required.

It is easy to remove and empty the boxes, however, Darren did not consider that the cylinders threw the grass in far enough if wet, thus boxes have to be emptied regularly.

Criticism was made about the hand brake and although there was a light to show when it is set, it was still possible to drive away with it on. Nevertheless the machine has not run away without a driver.

The expectation is that the machine will be replaced in about three years time when it will be down graded. Vert-cutting is not carried out however greens are scarified to clear thatch.

Ransomes Greensplex 160D at Stockwood Vale - Bristol

Stockwood Vale is an 18 hole membership plus public pay and play course with a driving range just outside Bristol. Nine of the holes are recent additions and the GP160D was bought in May to add to the course's other mowers of which a Ransomes GT remains the main greens machine. In making the decision Head Greenkeeper Nick Tyley explained that the swinging factor was the fact that Ransomes' local dealer, TH White, is not far away, is a known factor and has been extremely effective and supportive in the past. Nick added that the facility had another Ransomes mower - a rotary - which had proved less than reliable and in supporting this both Whites and Ransomes had been "first rate". Nick said that "of course the proof of their ability to support the Ransomes machines will be in three or four years time - when the machine gets into the wear stage". But it obvious he has no qualms over this.

Nick said that the GP160D had proved itself totally reliable and while it has a few failings, these

were few, and perhaps the most serious, from a user's point of view is that the seat could be improved, and like most other ride-ons - not just Ransomes - there was very little storage space and a very small toolbox. Certainly there was no place to store waterproofs, or the sundry other items which the greenkeeper needs and likes to carry. Nor was there storage for rake or switch.

The Stockwood Vale machine was supplied without groomers or verti-cut units, verti-cutting being carried out with pedestrian machines - usually monthly. Nick said that the original budget did not allow for more than bare essentials.

Adjustment of cut height is quick and easy, this is a bonus because two cut heights are used on the two different halves of the course. Setting the cylinder is more difficult, and compares badly against the GT as it is set on four studs. Fortunately adjustment is an infrequent requirement. Back-lapping is carried out as required, normally less than weekly unless greens have been topdressed. Back-lapping is carried out by reversing the units' drive motors. Cylinder sharpening and bottom blade replacement is not expected to be needed more than annually.

The foot controls were exemplary. Nick said he couldn't knock the cut quality the machine produces either. Boxes were easy to attach and filled completely without any problem, and they were equally easy to remove to empty, with a single hand hole so he gave this aspect "top marks".

Another plus for the machine was its ability to steer straight, a fact which was mentioned more than once - it was suggested this was because the steering had a lower gearing ratio.

Yet another plus factor was the built-in lights which Nick considers will prove invaluable for going out in early mornings in autumn, certainly he feels that

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