

**Roland Taylor looks at modern day course furniture and gives some advice about how it could be put to best use**

# Finishing touches

With all that is involved in turf management on a modern golf course, it is easy to overlook other aspects that are going in to making it one which golfers will want to join or keep returning too. Most courses that have been constructed over the last two decades are commercially based simply due to the investment involved. Attracting members and visitors requires more than paying attention to the playing surface of the course.

## **Image**

Modern marketing has indoctrinated the public and, as a result, has heightened their expectations - none more so than in the field of leisure activities. Public perceptions have become one of the most important elements in any business, and, make no mistake, the majority of golf courses are operating in this league. It is a highly competitive world and so the road to success means standing out from the rest. These days having a corporate identity is very fashionable and this usually includes a logo. These are ideal for including on suitable items of course

furniture such as flags and tee signage. The presentation of each hole is important and money spent on this certainly enhances the image.

Today's work environment is highly stressful so when it comes to leisure, people want to feel relaxed and comfortable. For a majority of golfers the tranquillity and visual aspects of a course are part of the enjoyment of the game. Creating the right image and atmosphere is what it's all about.

For things to run smoothly people need information and instructions, but this should be done discreetly, otherwise it can be irritating and unsightly. Therefore the inclusion of any signage, whether out on the course or around the complex, needs to be carefully thought through so that it blends into the surroundings without being intrusive.

As far as responsibility for course furniture and signage is concerned this will depend on each club. At a new venue it will probably be the architect, but for older, established courses it may fall to the Course Manager or greenkeeper.

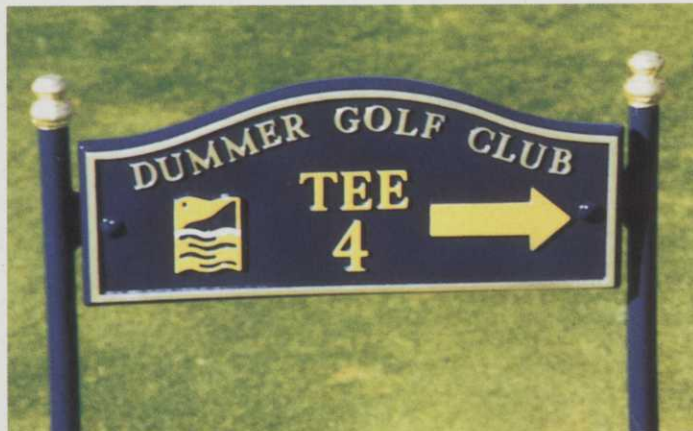
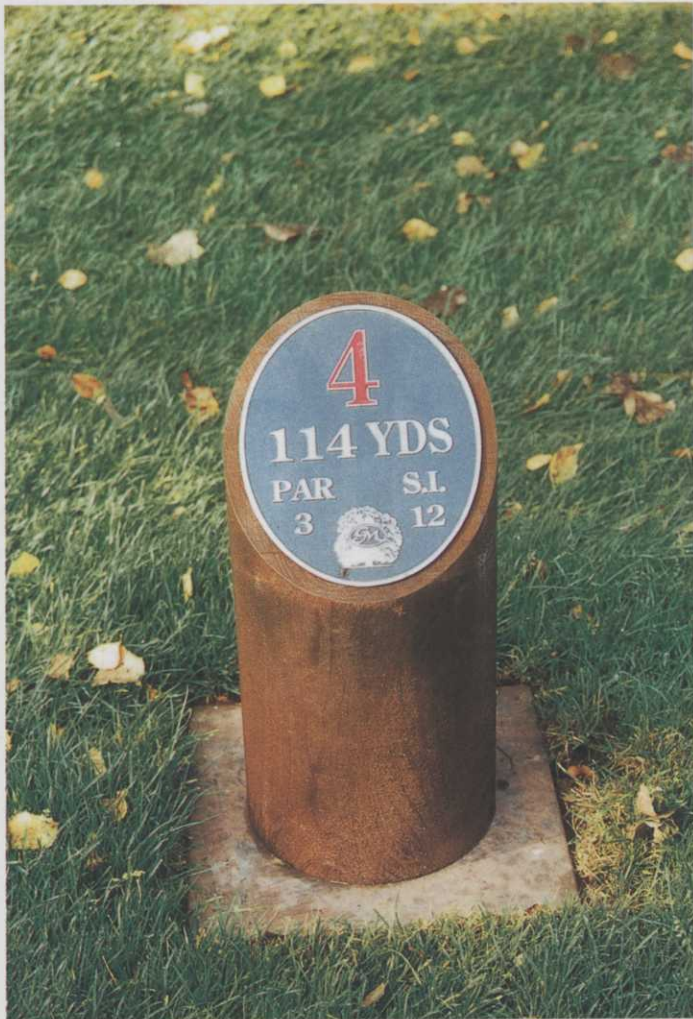
## **Taking stock**

Golf is now playable virtually 365 days of the year, although spring and summer are naturally the busiest periods. Now is an ideal time to take stock and look to improve the present situation. As most courses are relatively exposed, winter gales and the accompanying rain or snow can play havoc with course accessories, especially signage. Some renovation work will very likely have to be carried out and, quite possibly, replacements are going to be required. In this situation you will need to take a look at what is available and to check out the latest technology.

## **Latest technology**

In recent years, modern technology has introduced processes that produce some very adaptable compounds. Manufacturers have turned these into highly durable accessories that can take most of what nature throws at them for years to come. The selections on offer can be blended with the environment where they are going to be located. For instance, a course, which is situated in a specific geological area,

# Finishing touches



can have artificial boulders that match the natural rock found in that location. This means that man made additions can be naturally blended into the landscape to enhance an area where they are sited. Likewise logs can be used in a woodland setting. If this material is being used ensure it is of the highest quality hardwood and treated for longevity.

Whichever base product is used plates or plaques of either zinc, slate or cast bronze can be attached to provide information. Using a photographic process, a logo, and diagrams of the hole - in fact virtually anything can be etched onto these plates. The surfaces are then coated in epoxy resins and polyurethane. This protects them from sunlight and the ravages of weather as well as keeping them looking good for many years, with only a minimum of maintenance.

## Siting

When siting any new signage it is

important to take into account how it will be kept free of the grass that will grow around it. If no provision is made to deal with this problem then it may result in much time consuming grass cutting. Small items can be lifted out of the way, but large boulders and posts cannot be moved. One solution is to dig out an area around the object and line it with weed depressant material such as butyl or polythene. This is then covered this with a layer of stones, pea grit or wood chippings to a level just below the surface of the surrounding turf. You can then mow easily to the edge.

## Routes

There is another exercise worth carrying out at this time of the year. Most readers will know their course like the back of their hand, as will the members. But what about visitors? Have you ever followed the directions on a signpost for a particular village or town only to find at the next junction the

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name is not on the board or there is no signpost? Are there any areas on your course where this could happen? Try walking the course imagining you are a visitor and check all the pathways (especially in wooded areas) - you may be surprised.

Generally, signage on a course imparts information whilst around the clubhouse or complex it is more likely to be instructive such as where to park (and where not to!) or directions to facilities. However, the type of signage can be all of the same design so that a corporate image runs throughout.

### Minimal usage

Whatever the policy of the club there is one important factor that should be at the forefront of any decision about signage - minimal usage. This has proved to be more effective than when it is overdone.

When looking to purchase new signage it is worth consulting specialist

firms since they have the experience and can advise on design and the best and most effective positioning.

### Summary

Those clubs with a membership waiting list are fortunate, but there are plenty of others who need to attract new members and visitors. The initial impression of a club and the overall images perceived are all-important. It is not just the greens, tees and fairways upon which potential new members will judge a course. There are a host of other factors that add significantly to the total picture. Course accessories, including signage, are just one of the facets. These should not be taken for granted as they could contribute to the reason why someone fails to join or return. If it is done right it makes life easier for the players, they notice the care, attention to detail and investment, plus you are increasing the chances of them returning for another round.



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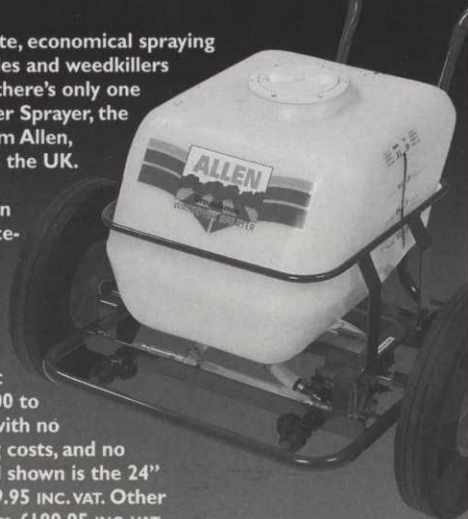
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**Jason Taylor, Deputy Course Manager at the London Club, spent a week at Valderrama assisting in the preparations for the American Express World Championship events. He reports back on how he got on...**

# Valderrama adventure



My adventure starts in the Superintendent's office at the London Golf Club back in the spring '99. I'd decided that I would like to be involved in the set up for a major tournament. After checking the European Tour dates, I had a list of a few possibilities, but one European venue stood out above all the others - Valderrama. This was a golf course which I had heard many times being described as Europe's best.

After sending a letter to Jaime Ortiz Patino, the Club President and proprietor of Valderrama, I received an e-mail back requesting a meeting at his London office in Bond Street.

At this meeting I discussed what I would like to do and why, with Jaime Ortiz Patino and he said he would be happy for me to visit during the week of the American Express Championships on the 1st to the 7th November.

He also said that his assistant would be able to help me find accommodation for the week. All that was left was for me to arrange flights and time off.

In the week before I left for Spain I contacted Jaime Olano, the Superintendent at Valderrama, to finalise the arrangements on my arrival.

At the airport and on the coach to Valderrama, I kept seeing large bill-

# Valderrama adventure



boards with Tiger Woods on, with the words, "Meet me at Valderrama." When I arrived at my hotel it was quite late so I had a meal in the restaurant and booked a Taxi for 4:30 the following morning so as to be at the course for 5am.

After pulling up at the very grand main entrance I was given directions to the maintenance compound. As the taxi pulled up I met Jaime Olano

who was also just arriving. He took me into the maintenance compound and gave me a brief tour of the yard and the various buildings around it. The first thing I noticed was that every piece of equipment was red and he explained that the club had a policy of only buying Toro equipment as they felt that this was the best, and delivered the highest standards of after sales service.

After this tour Jaime introduced me to a number of his colleagues. The majority of the staff were sat around a large table in the mess room tucking into coffee and bread rolls. This happened every morning and was a very pleasant way to start the day. The guys were all very friendly and interested in why I was there. The only problem was that none of them spoke much English and I spoke no Spanish.

One of the guys whom I was very happy to meet a little later was Ken Woods, an ex-Myerscough student, who had moved over to Spain to work full time at Valderrama. He spoke fairly good Spanish and this helped me to communicate with the other staff.

There was a large plan on the mess room door which listed everybody who was working during the event and exactly what they were going to

be doing in the morning and afternoon of each day. I was down to join one of the three crews raking bunkers in the morning shift which was from 5am to 10.30am. There were two other members of my crew, Juan, who spoke no English, and Pedro, who spoke a few words. We did however manage to communicate through a mixture of Spanish, English and sign language.

While getting ready to travel out onto the course I was wondering how we were going to see the bunkers to rake them, but on leaving the yard the first thing I saw was Jaime Ortiz Patino, whom I immediately recognised from our London meeting, dewing off a floodlit green. All the greens were lit by floodlights either mounted up in the branches of the cork oaks which surrounded most of the greens or by temporary lights mounted on stands which were removed during the day.

The bunkers, rather than being raked, were actually swept, using soft yard type brushes, with a 12 inch band rough raked around the outside. Instead of using sand in the bunkers crushed marble was used. This made for a brilliant white colour with a coarser texture than sand. When you were in the bunker with the sun





reflecting off of the marble it looked more like snow than sand.

As the sun started to rise I was able to see the true beauty of the course. The first thing that you notice is the majestic cork oaks, which frame all the holes at Valderrama. Most of these are at least 200 years old.

The golf course was originally designed by Robert Trent Jones. When Jaime Ortiz Patino acquired it in 1985 Robert Trent Jones was asked to come back and redesign it, with hosting a major championship in mind.

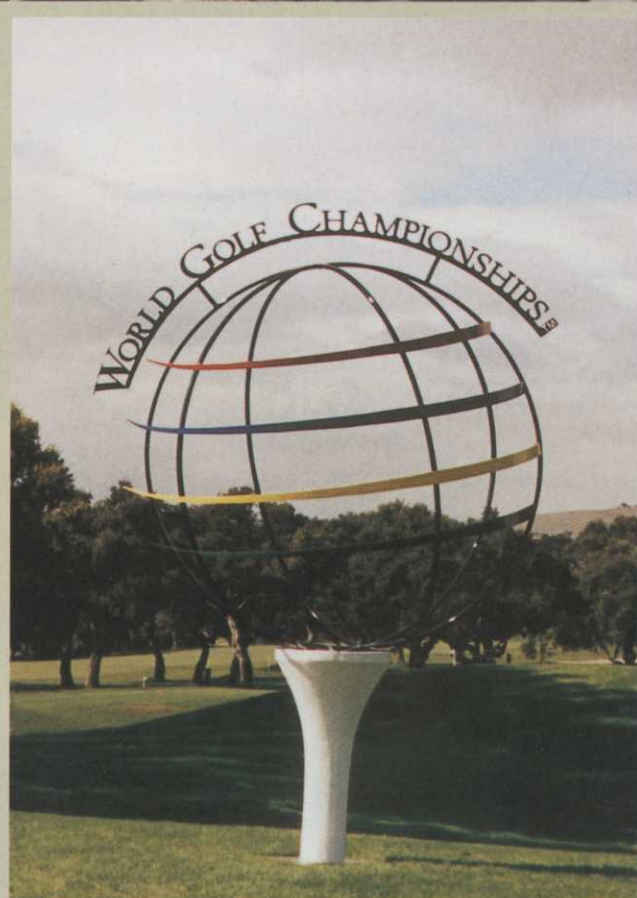
The final hole to be redesigned and constructed was the 17th and Trent Jones suggested that Seve Ballesteros design this. This he agreed to do and created a hole which is a long par-5 with the green guarded at the front by a lake. The green actually slopes forward towards the lake and many players found this to their peril. The most memorable of these was Tiger Woods on the final day. This made him take eight shots on the hole. He did, nevertheless, go on to win the event.

While we were raking the bunkers, the greens which consisted of Pencross creeping bentgrass were being cut using Toro GM1000 hand mowers which had spotlights fitted

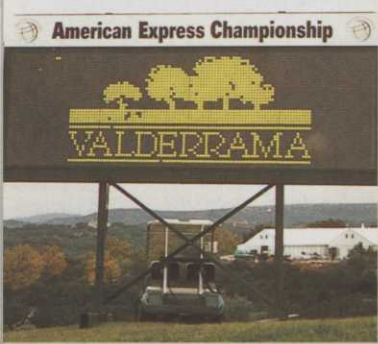
to them, and were powered by an alternator which was run off of the engine via a fan belt. The greens were double cut in the morning to a height of 3.17mm and then single cut in the afternoon after play had finished for the day. In the mornings the greens were all stimped to check that they were not only fast enough but that they were all of a uniform speed. If the overall speed needed increasing on all or just selected greens this was done by extra mowing or rolling. The speed of the greens for the tournament ranged from 11.5 to 12.5 feet. The roller that was being used had only just arrived at the club from America and was being operated by Charlie, an American who had come over to roll for the event and to instruct the staff on the rollers operation. It was a hydraulically powered machine which was much bigger and heavier than any roller that I have previously seen being used on greens in this country.

The Pencross tees and approaches were also cut in the dark again using Toro Pedestrian machines with spotlights mounted on them. The tees were cut at 11mm during the tournament and the approaches at 8mm.

The Bermuda grass fairways were again cut in the dark every morning



# Valderrama adventure



at a height of 9mm using Toro GM3200 Triple mowers. The only way in which these differed from those which are widely used on greens is that they had slightly grooved tyres, a rollbar and lights fitted. There were eight guys mowing fairways and these would stripe fairways in pairs, one working in an 8-2 direction and the

other at 10-4. The fairways at Valderrama really did look superb and when I asked Jaime Olano how he achieved this he replied that they were basically scarified and fed. He said he wished that the rest of the surfaces were as easy to look after.

When our shift finished at 10:30 we were free to do what we wanted,

be it watching the golf or going home for a siesta. The afternoon shift started at 4:30 and finished at 7pm. During the afternoon I carried out a number of different tasks which included hand watering, clearing leaves and the large cork oak acorns from the green surrounds.

Valderrama has to be one of the most beautiful golf courses anywhere in the world. I think the longest lasting impression on me will be the sun setting and casting shadows through the cork oaks. At this time the whole course has an almost magical feel about it.

The golf course at Valderrama is kept green using a Toro Network 8000 irrigation system that utilises almost 3000 sprinklers. Jaime told me that the system was very user friendly and that he was more than happy with it.

One thing that I was very surprised about was how relaxed all the staff were considering that it was such a major event. When I mentioned this to Jaime Olano he simply said that the staff at Valderrama dealt with these type of events on a regular basis and to them it was not really anything out of the ordinary. He said that he trusted his staff and knew that they were more than capable of carrying out their specific tasks to the high standards required.

All too soon it was time for me to leave Valderrama and return to the UK. I had had a very enjoyable week and had learned a great deal. Visiting a course during a major event is something that I would definitely advise others to do if the opportunity arises.

Finally, I would like to give my thanks Mr Ortiz Patino for giving me this opportunity and Jaime Olano and all his staff for helping me and making my visit such an enjoyable one.

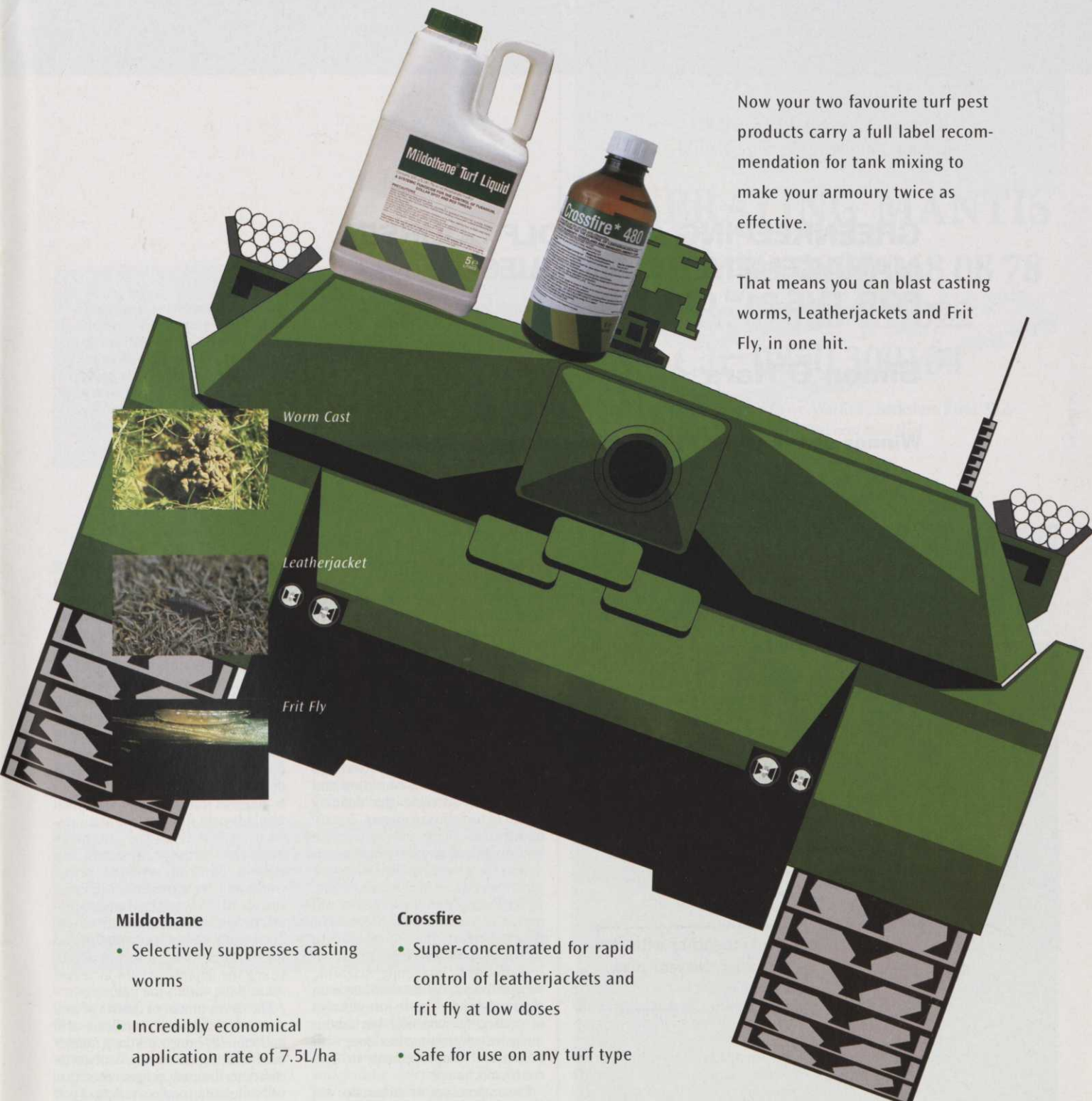




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**Simon O'Hara was the Over 25 winner of the BIGGA 1999 Essay Competition. Here is his winning entry.**



# **BIGGA ESSAY COMPETITION**

## **GREENKEEPING AND GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**Simon O'Hara**

**Winner of the Over 25's Section of the BIGGA Essay Competition**

The Millennium is fast approaching, bringing with it a baffling array of predictions from a wide range of pundits. Will the Year 2000 bug really cause our computer controlled irrigation systems to unleash a flood of biblical proportions, or will a plague of locusts infest the world's golf courses after developing a taste for fine turf grasses. Such cataclysmic outlooks, for the start of the 21st century are obviously somewhat fatalistic. Perhaps a more prudent view would be to regard the new millennium as an opportunity to implement a series of resolutions

**Golf course management is undoubtedly going to face numerous challenges in the next century. The ever increasing popularity of the sport will continue to tax the industry.**

which could take turf grass management to new levels of excellence. We must adapt to the challenges of the 21st century by adopting management practises that will satisfy increasingly restrictive regulations. To this end we must continue to invest time and money in education and research. The potential developments that are listed below will form the foundations for devising strategies and techniques that may be applied in the forthcoming century.

The likelihood of any monumental changes that will irreversibly change the way we manage turf grasses is perhaps insignificant. It is more likely that we may employ the concept of evolution in the context of future developments in the greenkeeping profession. The 21st century should witness an extension of current turf management trends which thereby should place a great emphasis on education, for just as 'Location' is the catchword in the real estate world, so then will 'education, education and re-education' become the defining motto of turf grass managers. A commitment to share and accumulate knowledge will pay dividends in our desires for a better understanding of turf management techniques. Along with education it is likely that we will see an extension of all the current trends in turf grass management, such as a continued emphasis in conservationism, increasing scientific breakthroughs, tighter restrictions on chemical usage, the re-introduction of previously successful but labour intensive cultural practises along with a constant improvement in golf course machinery.

The importance of education will be, as it always has been, recognised as one of the defining goals of greenkeeping in the 21st century. The successful establishment of a large number of existing colleges that offer

turf grass management courses is to be welcomed. The future of such centres is assured as we strive to better understand our turf grass environment. Research and Development has become accepted as one of the most important investment opportunities in all current business ventures. It is likely that this trend will be continued and extended in terms of turf grass management. It must be hoped that these colleges will further develop as centres of excellence and develop in conjunction with scientific research centres, both of which would benefit from each others presence, facilitating the mutually beneficial exchange of ideas and information. To this end the various world-wide greenkeeper associations, such as BIGGA, will continue to provide a vital communication service between the research institutions and the turf grass manager, as well as providing the opportunity for increased networking within the industry.

The development of centres of academic and scientific excellence will undoubtedly bring with them numerous benefits. Such centres will devise computer training programmes that will simulate an endless variety of golf course environments that will facilitate both tried and tested turf grass management techniques as well as offering the potential to employ new experimental ideas without the dan-