



**The journey as Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year is one that will change your life, “or at least the way in which you look at grass”. Every experience on the way to becoming student of the year is a character builder and if not you should at least have learnt something from the experience.**

The realisation that the opportunity of a lifetime and the chance to join only 19 other previous winners hit me as I drove up the avenue towards Aldwark Manor on a sunny September afternoon. The next time I would drive through the gates my life was to change forever.

What happened over the next couple of days is an experience that I will never forget. The hospitality that was given to the finalists by Toro and BIGGA was nothing short of superb and helped to put everyone at ease.

As tough as the road was to becoming Student Greenkeeper of the Year, it would turn out to be nothing, compared to what lies ahead. There was still a visa to sort out, a trip to the American Embassy in London, forms to fill out and the underlying worry of what happens if they don't grant me my visa.

Having not been to America before and having 3,000 miles of ocean between me and the place I call home was something I was looking forward to, yet found very daunting.

I arrived in America on January 5, a day before my birthday, after having no sleep the night before, the five hour wait in a snow covered Detroit airport was just what I needed. The snow was something I was going to have to get used to as temperatures were constantly below zero meant it wasn't going anywhere, anytime soon. The five hour wait for my final flight to Hartford soon passed as I found comfort in California rolls and McDonalds.

The first day of turf school started at 8.30am Monday morning, with free muffins and coffee I had the first glimpse of the classroom and the people I was going to be spend the next seven weeks with. I felt that it was important to establish my position within the group from the very beginning and sitting in the right place, was a start. Too far back and you'd be in the rowdy section, too far forward and you were in the quiet section. I opted for somewhere in the middle.

The first week was somewhat slow, with the teachers allowing everyone to get used to their new surroundings and easing us into the harsh study regime that will follow.

By staying at The Comfort Inn, I was part of a large group that became



the epi-centre of most good nights out. In the first week I had classes such as Turf grass management, Soil science, Entomology, Turf grass mathematics, Turf grass physiology, Irrigation, Trees and guest speakers Bret Johnson and Ron Milenski, from The International, with many more subjects to follow in the coming weeks.

Week two saw the introduction of Weeds, a subject which, at first may sound boring but with a teacher like Randy Probstak it was far from it. A test in every lesson meant time away from the classroom couldn't be wasted.

Everyone had settled down into their own regimes and agendas by the end of week two. Been from England I was nick named "Brit" I had spent the first two weeks trying to convince the Americans that Green isn't great and that they should see a proper golf course like St Andrews during The Open. In true American style they dismissed this ideology and said I was full of "s\*\*t". It was a burden I was prepared to carry on my shoulders, as later on I was to get my revenge.

For the two months I was in America I felt it my duty to change their perception that all English people are like Hugh Grant and on the first night out I had my chance, after a long drinking session on a dark pint called "Two Sisters" (which many Americans fell by the wayside) and three ABC burgers in quick succession, I was the talk of the classroom on the Monday morning. I tried to keep nights out to the weekends as the 6 to 6 regime didn't fit well with hangovers.

Week three we were introduced to Guenwha Jung, a Professor in Turf grass pathology. He had an infectious manner which made him hard to understand and I found myself in stitches when words such as Scrotia, Hypea, Mycellium and Spores were blurted out across the classroom.

Another Professor who had equalled enthusiasm was Pat Vittum, our entomology Professor. She has dedicated 30 years to studying white grubs.

At one point we were subjected to looking at the pattern of hairs on a grub's anus under a microscope to determine which species it was, something I recommend not doing with a hangover.

My first taste of ice hockey was good fun, with my American friends telling me the rules I still had no idea what "the puck" was going on.

With free tickets to basketball, ice hockey and lacrosse, evening entertainment was good.



## “At one point we were subjected to looking at the pattern of hairs on a grub’s anus under a microscope to determine which species it was”

At the beginning of February a trip to the Golf Industry Show in New Orleans, or as they say in America "Nawleans", with fellow Toro winner from Australia, Chris Thompson, it was a nice break from the snow. We had no time to rest, as soon as we walked into the hotel we were met by my College Tutor, Richard Barker, saying that we had no time to check in as we were off to the Toro function. The familiar faces from BIGGA of Sami Collins, John Pemberton and Peter Todd were a nice sight in the "Big Easy". It was nice to meet up with Murray Long, a previous winner of Toro Student of the year and other big names within the industry.

The GIS was suffering from the poor economic climate and the turnout on Saturday was poor. Which was good as you could get round to see everything unhindered. A first glimpse of the new GPS mower stirred mixed emotions among greenkeepers and it was interesting to hear people's opinions about.

The break from the snow was welcomed, but before we knew it we were back to the books. With deadlines approaching for assignments and project work, the social scene took a back seat. With everyone studying The Comfort Inn took on a new, quieter atmosphere. One that was back with vengeance when all deadlines were finished.

For everyone else the experience that was Umass, was over, but for me and my good friend, the Aussie, we still had one week left. A trip to

Toro headquarters in Minneapolis was next on the schedule. I am not scared of flying, but when you can touch either side of the "bean can with wings" that your going to be sitting in for the next three hours, you do start to question aviation designers and where they're going with the whole budget airlines thingy. To see what goes on behind the scene was truly an eye opener. We were fortunate enough to visit the factory at Shakopee, where every Toro part is manufactured. We visited the research department, testing areas and the factory floor. The mind boggles at what goes into making machinery, "I for one, will never whinge at the price of a machine". A final meal with Toro Marketing Manager Barry Beckett marked the end of a truly amazing experience.

My thanks go out to everyone that made the trip to America possible. Christine Wilson at Lely UK was an absolute star. I can't thank Toro enough for the opportunity that they create for Student Greenkeepers, it is an award that I hope runs for many years to come as it truly offers a life changing experience. I would also like to thank everyone from BIGGA who gets involved with the award, as I know it's a hard job interviewing everybody.

I wish this year's candidates the best of luck and look forward to meeting the finalists at Aldwark Manor in September to hand over the reigns. A word of advice for everyone, "You can never do too much".

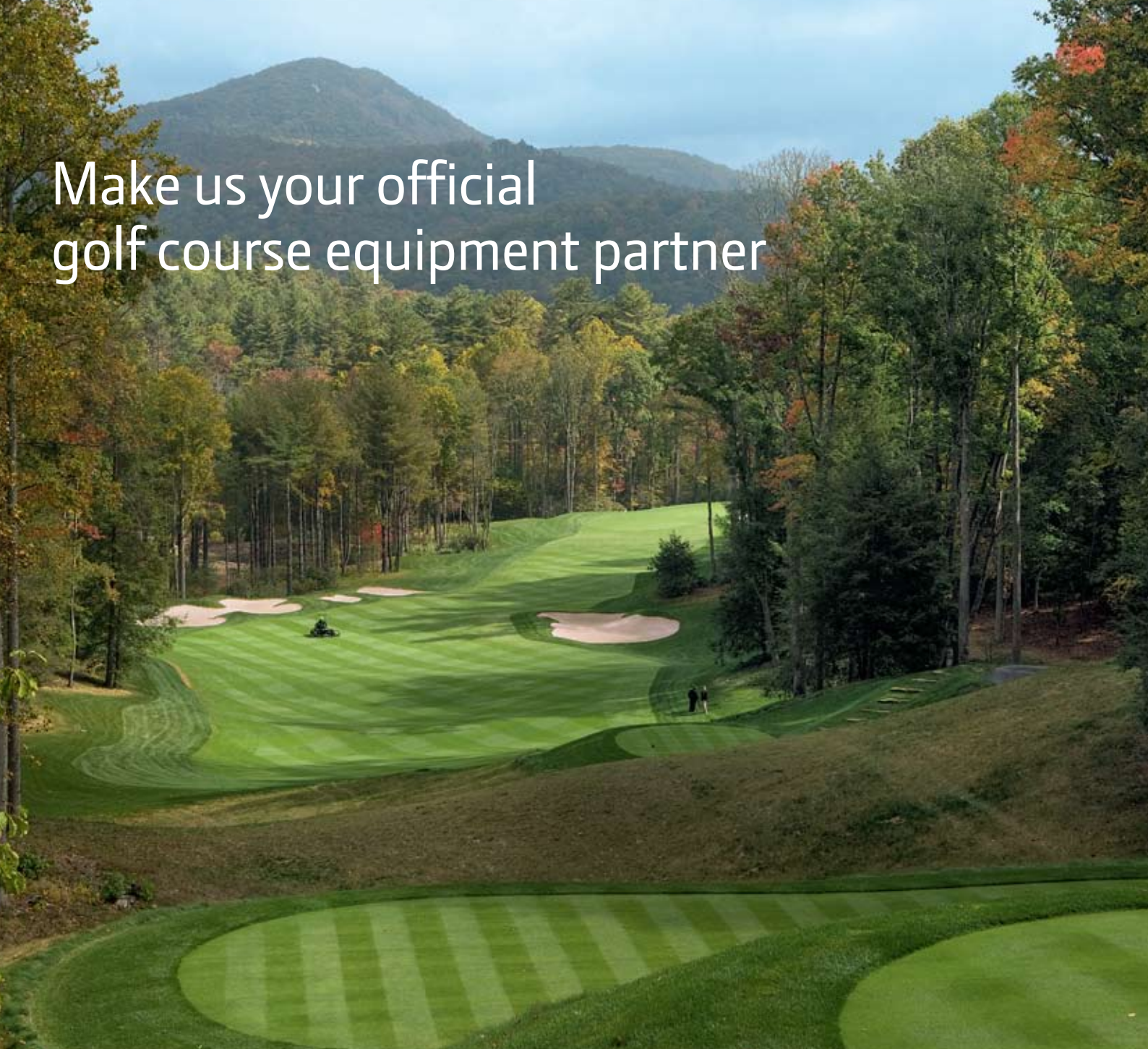


MAIN ABOVE: Matthew with his new friend  
INSET ABOVE: Posing in his uniform  
PREVIOUS PAGE: The University of Massachusetts





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# Only Perfection Will Do

**James de Havilland** writes with his regular insight into current machinery

**There are occasions when there is so much to say that it makes it almost impossible to know where to begin.**

**A visit to The Belfry in North Warwickshire can leave you like that.**

Ask anyone who has played The Brabazon for the first time or seen the superb maturing of the PGA National over the years. They will be forgiven an initial mumble as they try to find a way to let you know what they have experienced.

For the writer, a visit to greenkeeper's workshops at The Belfry was. Situated at the western end of the 17th on The Brabazon, the complex can sometimes be glimpsed

in an extended TV shot down the approaches. For those fortunate enough to be allowed inside, however, it soon becomes extremely clear that the superb appearance of The Belfry has a great deal to do with what is carried out within the unit's boundary fences.

"We look after all the equipment on this site in-house," says Director of Golf Courses and Grounds, Kenny Mackay. "It is our primary task to ensure that Head Greenkeeper, Neil Smith, has all the mowers he needs every morning, prepared and ready to go at 6.00am. And by ready I mean correctly set to the precise cut height he requires as well as being fuelled up and checked."

Kenny adds that the greenkeeping team is not encouraged to check the machines over either, a point that initially seems a bit strange. Many a workshop manager is only too keen to see those that use equipment check the oil and fuel levels before starting up. His argument is that it is the job of the workshop team to ensure any item of kit sent out to do a job is right.

"That is not to say we do not want the greens team to know how to look after equipment," adds Chris Minton, Head Mechanic. "In fact we are starting a series of short courses that explains the mechanical side of the mowers and equipment to those that are using them. Feedback

**MAIN PHOTOGRAPH:** The Brabazon course is maintained to exacting standards, sharp mowers enabling the greens team to deliver a dependable and consistent finish. Tremendous effort goes into keeping all the mowers used at The Belfry in tip top order.





suggests this is really appreciated. What we do not want is anyone adjusting settings that we have done in the workshop. It is our job to get it right and if something does go wrong we are in radio contact to ensure we are on hand to correct it if a problem arises.”

It is perhaps worth putting the work that is carried out by Kenny and his team into perspective; this will explain why they insist it is they, and no one else, the sets up the kit they use. Consider first the 550 acres plus that makes up The Belfry. Next the need to keep three courses and 54 holes in peak condition despite handling between 115,000 to 120,000 rounds a year.

Then consider the number of mowers they look after.

At any one time, up to six fairways, four greens triplex, nine greens pedestrian and five tees mowers will be in action. Then there are three mowers for the roughs and, the list goes on.

In simple terms, Neil Smith will have a team of up to 50 to organise. Kenny and Chris have to ensure each and every one of them has a machine that is set up to deliver the cut Neil demands.

“Besides myself, I have Steve Townsend working with me ‘on the spanners’,” adds Chris. “Part of our job is to ensure the mowers are sharp, all grinding being car-

ried out by us on site. We have a good relationship with Bernhard and Co, our membership of their Premier Club ensures we get a new set of grinders every two years. This guarantees we are always using the latest equipment which helps us keep on top of the job”.

The Toro mowing fleet has helped in the latter respect, the fairway mower cylinders now having a relief cut into the blades from the factory. This saves cutting one in. Chris also checks each and every cylinder prior to allowing it to be used. A pile of green paper test strips is evidence of this as he checks the cylinder across its working width. This is another reason why he does not





## International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association (ICGEMA)

Chris Minton has become a keen supporter of the web based ICGEMA, its forums enabling him to 'talk' with course mechanics around the World.

He suggests greens staff have long had associations and magazines that specifically target their needs, but there are few outlets that are dedicated to those who look after specialist golf maintenance equipment.

"I have found I can tap a query into a forum and get an answer from someone in the US," he says.

"Manufacturer technicians are also members of the ICGEMA, and you can sometimes get a reply from someone who works for Toro or Deere.

"It is a useful tool for me."

**Log on to [www.icgema.org](http://www.icgema.org) to find out more.**

want anyone using a mower to 'fiddle' with it.

The degree of self-sufficiency at The Belfry extends to tackling routine drainage work and even undertaking projects that can include installing sleeper walls and waterfalls to protect and enhance famed water features. A look around the machinery compound highlights just how diverse the equipment fleet is.

"We keep a good stock of fast moving parts here," adds Chris. "We have recently installed a rack system to make it easy to access everything and I keep a running stock check to ensure we always have certain belts, blades and filters on hand.

"Although we order parts direct from our key suppliers, we actually buy through our local dealers, Abbey Mower Supplies for Toro and

Turner Grounds Care for Toro and John Deere respectively."

Chris has a dealer service background, a point that he used to help persuade Kenny that working with local dealers is the way forward. It is an approach that has worked well in the three or so years Chris has been at the belfry.

A key development in 2008 was the decision to purchase, as opposed to lease, a 67 strong golf buggy fleet. Including hotel service vehicles, there are a total of 84 vehicles electric petrol units that now need looking after, specialist Brendan Mason having been brought in to manage them. He has a dedicated service and charging zone near the hotel complex, so this side of the operations is separate from the Greenkeeping complex.

Because the management of the equipment fleet is well structured,

both Kenny and Chris can plan ahead. Certain tasks have to be put on hold during major tournaments to avoid noise being picked up during TV coverage. As an example, all grinding work is carried out ahead of schedule and machine wash-down is restricted to specific times.

"Chris maintains accurate machine service records," adds Kenny. "He will read off the hours on all units to ensure they are serviced in line with the manufactures recommendations. This enables us to adhere to any warranty conditions. It is inevitable that he has to spend a fair part of his time doing 'paperwork' but that is all part of running an efficient workshop. We just have to remember it is our job to provide Neil Smith the kit he needs to do a first class job. It is something we take great pride in doing."

**TOP LEFT:** The workshop parts store carries a range of fast moving parts, a new rack system making it easier to the right components quickly. A parts inventory is kept to ensure restocking is not overlooked.

**TOP RIGHT:** The use of the latest Bernhard grinding equipment helps Chris Minton and Steve Townsend on top of keeping all mowers sharp. Quality of cut is the key workshop priority.

**BELOW LEFT:** Steve Townsend inspects, adjusts and tests the performance of a pedestrian greens mower. Although greens staff are encouraged to know what makes a mower tick they are not 'allowed' to adjust any settings.



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# A QUICK GUIDE TO...

## MULCHING MOWERS

Husqvarna provides ten top tips on the benefits of using mulching over traditional cutting/collecting methods

### 1. Make sure your machine is capable of mulching.

It is essential that you identify the correct machine for your needs. We would recommend a pedestrian mower for smaller grass areas, and a ride on machine for larger lawn sizes of over half an acre. Due to its maneuverability, an outfront rider is ideal in complicated and tight areas.

### 2. Make sure the decks are mulch capable.

There are a variety of decks on the market that offer different cutting methods. Mulch plugs and blanking plates are available as accessories for some decks that come with a collector, although a deck designed primarily for mulching, will most certainly give a better performance. The Husqvarna Combi deck is designed primarily for mulching but also has the benefit of quickly and easily converting to rear discharge making it suitable for a wider variety of areas and conditions.

### 3. Make sure the weather conditions are correct.

Obviously, to ensure best performance and finish avoid mulching during prolonged periods of excessively wet weather. In periods of dry or drought conditions the mulched clippings help to retain moisture within the soil.

### 4. Use your mulching mower to improve poor grass areas.

Regular and correct use of mulching can improve grass growing conditions by helping to create a micro environment that releases up to 50% of required nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

### 5. Choose the optimum time to mulch.

The ideal ground temperature to mulch is between 5-30 degrees, too warm or too cold prevents the micro climate that ensures the breakdown of the clippings. Early morning or late evening mulching, ensures maximum moisture retention during dry periods.

### 6. Clean and maintain your lawnmower.

Regular maintenance and cleaning is key to ensure the longevity of your machine and an optimal cutting performance. A clean deck chamber ensures maximum area to optimise the multiple cutting and reduction of clippings before they are returned to the lawn. A better finish is also achieved through sharp blades. If the cut is clean and sharp the risk of dehydration and disease decreases, compared to the cut being rough or jagged. Dull blades can cause up to 20% higher fuel consumption compared to sharp blades.

### 7. Pay attention to the cutting height.

The decomposition of the grass occurs more rapidly if only one-third of the blade length is cut. No more than half of the length of the grass blade should ever be cut as this would increase the risk of dehydration due to a loss of fluid within the plant. A minimum height of cut should always be maintained to maximize the micro climate; this is approximately 30mm-50mm in the United Kingdom.

### 8. Cut little and often.

To achieve the best result we would recommend that you cut the grass regularly. In the height of the cutting season we would suggest every 4-5 days. Leaving the grass to grow too much will require multiple cutting to return to the normal maintained height and ensure the best finish. Reduced mowing time occurs due to the time recovered by the removal of the need to manage the collected clippings.

### 9. Go green.

Mulching is a more time efficient way to maintain your grass, the lack of clippings means no time is spent on collecting! Since more councils in the UK are refusing to pick up green waste this alleviates any trips to the local recycling centre and equally the managing of large compost heaps.

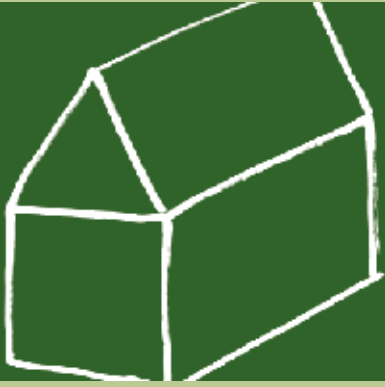
### 10. Reap the benefits.

Although at certain times there is a need to manage weather and grass mowing conditions, improvements in deck technology, along with the additional benefits gained throughout the year of, reduced mowing times in general, the opportunity to improve health, reduction of costs in fertilising and watering together with the environmental arguments have all been influential in seeing a significant increase in the adoption of mulching within the UK over the past 10 years.



**Husqvarna are pleased to offer a product demonstration service should you wish evaluate the benefits yourself, for further information and to locate your nearest dealer please visit [www.husqvarna.co.uk](http://www.husqvarna.co.uk)**

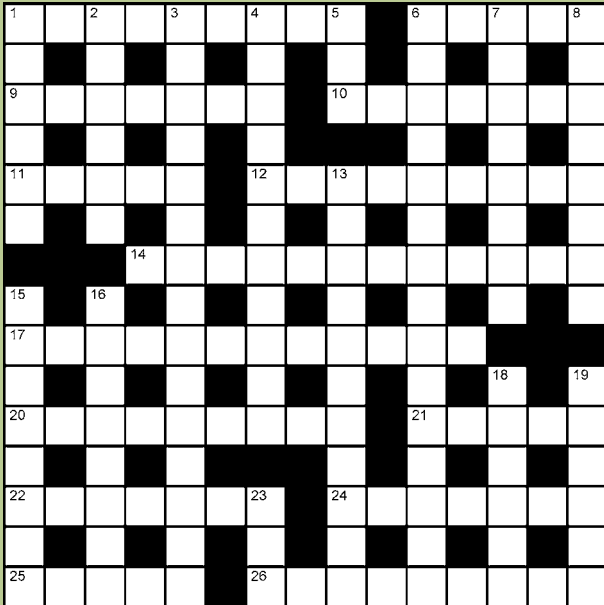




# in the shed

Our monthly puzzle page to keep you entertained when you're forced indoors..

## CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

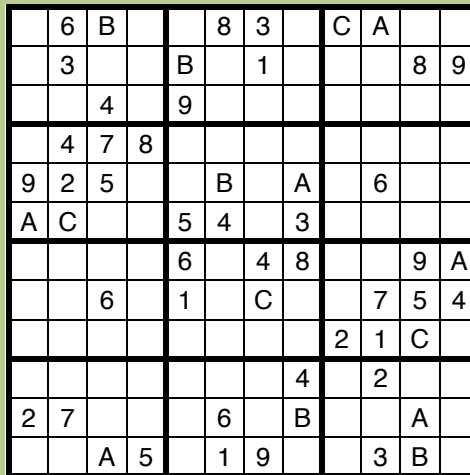
- 1 Belief based on insight into God and the soul (9)
- 6 Payment made to add call time to a mobile phone (3-2)
- 9 Opera house at which Puccini's Turandot was premiered in 1926 (2,5)
- 10 Implement for practical (usually household) use (7)
- 11 Rice cooked in seasoned broth (5)
- 12 A country's withdrawal from international politics (9)
- 14 Pompous, specialist jargon (12)
- 17 One who uses the mind creatively (12)
- 20 Pay back, compensate (9)
- 21 US state, capital Boise (5)
- 22 Former paper size, 48x72 inches (7)
- 24 Shakespeare work whose titular character is married to Desdemona (7)
- 25 Country which borders France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia (5)
- 26 Traditional outdoor stage (9)

### DOWN

- 1 Bulbous plants with single, showy flowers (6)
- 2 Without difficulty (6)
- 3 US monument poetically called "Mother of Exiles" (6,2,7)
- 4 Decide on one's actions ad hoc (4,2,2,3)
- 5 Mail on Sunday magazine (3)
- 6 1938 Hitchcock film set in the fictional country of Bandrika (3,4,8)
- 7 In Greek mythology, god of the sea (8)
- 8 Director of the 1988 Harrison Ford movie Frantic (8)
- 13 Delighted (4,3,4)
- 15 Prime Minister who was preceded and succeeded by Gladstone (8)
- 16 African republic once known as Abyssinia (8)
- 18 Perennial plant, native of Mexico, Columbia and Central America (6)
- 19 Scottish loch, the UK's largest lake (6)
- 23 An obstacle; cause friction (3)

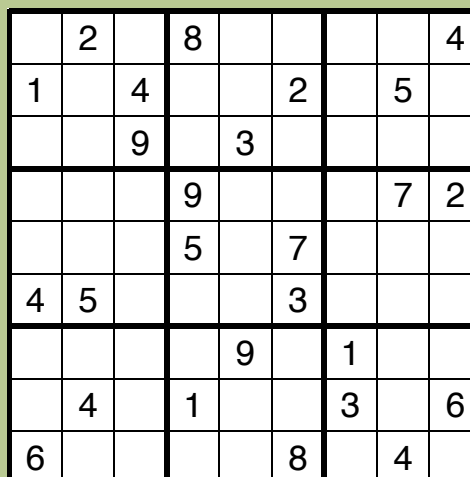
## QUICK 'NINE HOLE' QUIZ

1. How many inner wire rings are there on a dartboard?
2. If you were putting numbers on new changing room lockers to be numbered from 1 to 100, how many times would you use the number 9?
3. Which famous group performed the first ever song on Top Of The Pops in 1964?
4. In the Adrian Mole Diaries, what is the surname of his girlfriend?
5. Charlotte Edwards led England's women to World Cup glory in which sport in March 2009?
6. Which supermodel is seen pole dancing in the White Stripes video for the song I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself?
7. Which band has released albums titled Word Gets Around, Just Enough Education To Perform and Pull The Pin?
8. Who wrote the novel Revolutionary Road, which was made into a successful feature film?
9. In the Star Wars films, which two actors played Obi Wan Kenobi?



## MONSTER SUDOKU

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 4x4 box contains the numbers 0 to 9 and the letters A to E.



## SUDOKU

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 9 box shape contains the numbers 1 to 9.

Puzzle Answers on page 69



## NEW RANGE

Kubota has launched the new B20 Series compact tractors. Superseding the previous best-selling B1410 and B1610 models, the new B20 Series comprises 3 models. The 12hp B1220, the B1620, with a 16hp engine and the 18hp B1820.

Featuring the Kubota E-TVCS (Three Vortex Combustion System) liquid cooled diesel engines, which achieve increased power and torque while emitting fewer pollutants and using less fuel, these exciting new tractors provide rugged performance, versatility and comfort.

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The new Ferrari Cobram is now available in a range of three models with two engine sizes of 49HP and 58HP exclusively from Lamberhurst Engineering.

The new models have been designed to add concrete value to the investment: lower fuel consumption, greater performance and wider usability of the machines. The principle that inspired the project was that of creating tractors that produce the most favourable working conditions and offer their owners more competitive financial management.

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## OIL LEAKS - NIL

New from Echo, the CS-680 Chainsaw is ideal for work around the farm, park or forest. Powered by a 66.8cm<sup>3</sup> two-stroke Echo engine and 50 cm bar, this chainsaw weighs just 6.6kg, providing practical performance and versatility.

In addition, this new model is fitted with an automatic lubrication feature. The lubrication of the chain ceases when the chain is not turning, therefore when the saw is idling, there is no oil being pumped to the bar and chain, resulting in zero oil leaks, and a reduction in oil consumption.

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## SECURITY CONSCIOUS

The new MowerSafe from Dennis has been built with security in mind - it has a bolt down capability, is easy to position and is maintenance free. The MowerSafe fits any machine up to a 61cm (24in) cutting width. Bigger versions are being developed.

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## RANGE EXPANDED

Spaldings has expanded its professional grass machinery range with the introduction of additional Ransomes spares. The spares are to fit the post 2003 Ransomes mowers TG3400/TG4650 (Sport 200/Magna 250 Heads).

The new Ransomes range consists of a comprehensive selection of lift arms for direct replacement of cylinder mower parts.

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