

"We put together presentation for annual Forums and thanks to the techy expert on our team, Kris Shale-Martin, we produced computer models of how the course would look minus the trees we proposed to take out. The first year we showed them what we would do and the second year we were able to show them what we'd done and the benefits that could be seen in the depth of roots.

"We do these in the last week of the financial year in September then a week later the diggers go in and we start the projects we've told them about so they can see where their membership money is going."

It also means the main work is done by the end of November and the remainder of the winter programme can be carried out before the start of the next season.

One of Muswell Hill's real problems is drainage with several holes regularly out of play each year because of waterlogging.

"The course had no outlets so we went back to the basics, mole ploughed and put in trench drains as well as reinstating a burn on the 12th hole which has helped to dry out the golf course.

Listening to Matt and Kevin the amount of work they have got through in the last two and a half years is mind boggling, but the enthusiasm that ouses from them, and the rest of the team, is genuine and you believe Matt when he says that he often has to tell the guys to go home at the end of the day.

"It is great that we all started around the same time and I was keen to get the right team. None of us are hung up by how things have been done here in the past and we are free to put our own practices in place. The best thing is that I've got greenkeepers who think and that is a huge plus.

"I want to make Muswell Hill an academy for greenkeeper and will be thrilled when they leave to become Course Managers in their own right move on to climb the career ladder. We are well looked after here, we eat in the clubhouse every day and we have a great relationship with the Club Manager, Adrian Hobbs, and the rest of the staff," said Matt, who has also taken on the role of BIGGA's London Section Secretary.

While much of the work to reinstate the course has now been completed – and he general feeling

is that the new putting green and altered holes have improved rather than merely altered the course Matt is clear that there is still much work to do.

"There is still a lot to be done to take this club to the level I want to take it.

"We need to build our own reservoir as water, particularly in London, is going to become a real issue, while the bunker renovation programme is going to be massive.

"There is plenty of things to get our teeth into."

Those members who decided to remain with the club will be patting themselves on their back.

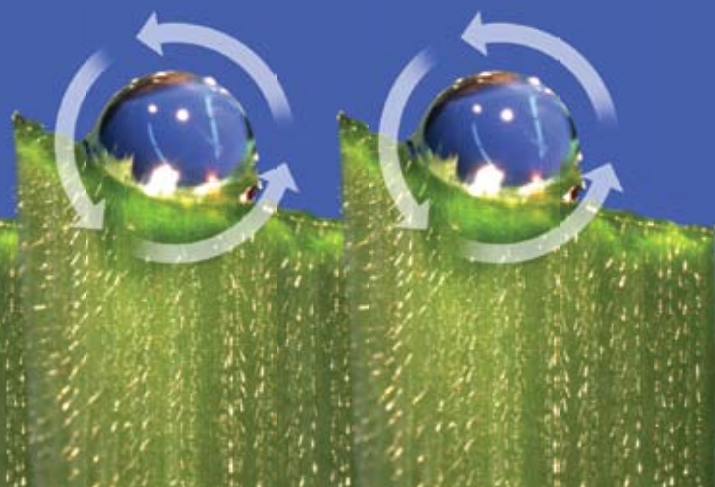
Not only them, however, as the club has added 100 to its membership within the last 12 months and seen record green fee and society takings.

It may be, although it didn't feel so at the time, that the great fire of 2007 was a wonderful opportunity for Matt and Muswell Hill Golf Club to move forward at a much faster rate than would have been possible had a new job and new wife been the extent of activity in the June of that month!



INSET ABOVE: More damage caused by the fire.

stays cut...
after cut... after cut...



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The second of a new series in which James de Havilland takes a closer look at the intricacies of current machinery

The anatomy of... a Top Dresser

New livery, new owner but same trusted design...



Back in October 2009, Toro acquired the golf and turf business operated by the Canadian TY-CROP company. Here we take a look at the first Toro top dresser produced since the acquisition, the utility mounted ProPass 200. This will be available through Toro dealers early this year.

Step-by-step Analysis...

Toro ProPass 200

The Toro ProPass 200 may not be different from its TY-CROP predecessor but that is no bad thing. The ProPass top dresser is well proven, rugged and not known for problems.

Why change a proven formula?



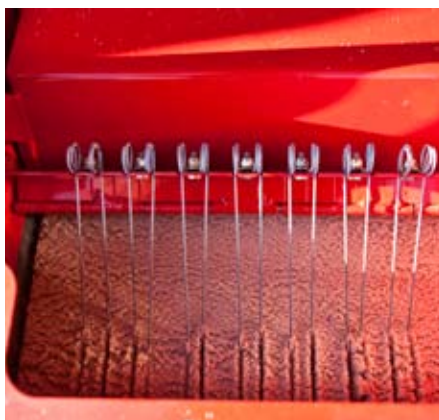
The rate of discharge from the hopper to the conveyor is controlled via an adjustable flap. Base application rate settings are provided by Toro, ease of set-up remaining a ProPass plus.



Twin carry handles make it easier to remove the spreading discs either for service or the fitting of a cross conveyor.



With the optional Wireless Controller, it is possible to fine tune the application rate as the unit is working. This can be useful when the top dressing material moisture levels have changed from when the machine was first set up.



Sprung steel fingers run over material exiting the hopper. They will help to break up any clods which can cause fluctuations in the application rates.



The hopper conveyor tension adjusters are easy to get at and are securely mounted. Note grease point and heavy-duty bearing. HSE regulations mean some of the lube points can only be accessed once a bolted on cover has been removed.

TY-CROP top dressers are a well established brand in the UK. Initially imported by Stafford based Turfmech, the TY-CROP top dresser series was more recently taken on by The Grass Group.

Toro now owns all the manufacturing right to the TY-CROP top dressers, but at least for the moment current Toro ProPass models are pretty much the same as their TY-CROP predecessors.

Introduced by TY-CROP in 2008, the mounted ProPass 200 we look at here is a development of the now discontinued TY-CROP ProPass 180.

The latter was listed as offering the same rated capacity of the current 200 model at 289kg. In fact the two top dressers are pretty much the same, the ProPass 200 having revised hopper extensions designed to ease loading.

The key change between a TY-CROP 200 and a new Toro version is pretty much down to branding.

So, Toro have just left the ProPass design as is? In a word yes. There was little wrong with the TY-CROP ProPass 200. The fact the 200 is a development of the established ProPass 180 model is also clear.

Apart from the hopper extension changes, there were a few other features incorporated into the 200 before its manufacture passed to Toro. Among these is the option of a Wireless Controller.

All ProPass models continue to be designed to allow a wide range of application rates, based around seven base settings. These essentially allow the selection of a light dusting through to a much heavier application rate; with the latter selected, the hopper will be emptied from full in around a minute.

With the Wireless Controller, application settings can be stored



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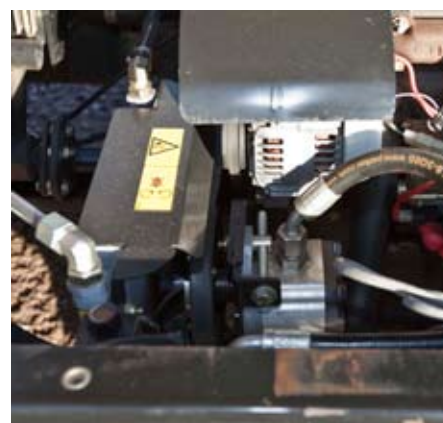
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The rear disc carrier adjusts to allow the drop position to be adjusted according to the dressing being applied and the desired spread width. In position 1, this 'Sliding Drop Zone' provides the widest spread width of 9.1m, setting 4 the narrowest at 3.0m.



The hopper has smooth sides to help ensure the body empties fully. Existing ProPass users often fit a mesh grid over the hopper body to help break up any clumps as the unit is loaded.



The ProPass 200 needs an oil flow of 21 litres/min. This should not be a problem for more recent utility vehicles, but check if fitting a top dresser to an old machine.



An electronic control box is standard, and makes setting the conveyor and spinner speeds straightforward. The Wireless Controller does the same job, but can be operated remotely.



The TY-CROP ProPass 180 forms the template for the latest Toro ProPass 200. Existing TY-CROP users will have Toro parts support for earlier machines.

in a handset. When it comes to applying material, these settings can then be sent to the spreader, the settings adjusting to suit. If this seems something of a gimmick, stop and think how you apply materials.

Typically, you will take a look at how the dressing spreads out of the back of the machine, making sure the spread is what you want.

With the Wireless Control, it is easier to fine tune some key settings as the machine is working. So if the dressing is a bit damp, you can alter the conveyor or discs speeds to get the spread pattern you are after without having to stop the machine, changing a setting, and looking to see what happens. You can also store the settings you want to keep. The Controller has a claimed range of over 130m.

Basic machine

In broad outline, the ProPass 200 follows established top dresser design practice. The 0.54m³ hopper

(0.71m³ with a heaped load) has a hydraulically driven conveyor floor. This feeds dressing via an adjustable outlet to a pair of contra rotating spreading discs.

Spread width is dependent upon the speed of the discs, the settings of the vanes and the material being spread.

In the case of the utility mounted machine, the unit is supplied with a fitting kit to suit a broad range of vehicles. These allow the unit to slide on without the need for fitting tools.

An optional 11hp hydraulic power pack is available for use with vehicles that do not have a separate hydraulic outlet.

Other options include a 180 degree Cross Conveyor. This allows the hopper to be used as a bulk transport to fill smaller top dressers or to carry sand out to bunkers or for other work.

As an aside, the ProPass 200 is offered in a trailed version with a capacity of just over 905kg. This runs on a four wheel walking beam

axle that runs across the 1.7m width of the machine.

Existing TY-CROP ProPass 180 users will note a few other detail changes that came in with the 200 when it was introduced.

These include better colour coding for the setting decals and a revised wash out grid that is claimed to make the unit easier to clean out.

"We're delighted to add Toro ProPass material-handlers to our existing line of turf cultivation and application equipment" says Jeff Anguige, Lely UK's Toro UK sales manager.

"The products were previously branded TY-CROP and have a proven track record in global markets for many years.

"The range is the perfect complement to products such as the Topdresser 2500 and our ProCore aerators.

"We are now even better placed to provide a comprehensive offering to meet customers' turf maintenance needs."

Golf clubs and in particular, the golf course maintenance, is a varied and complicated place, while greenkeeping is a complex occupation, and many of the operations can be unpopular and misunderstood. In the first of a new series, Paul Lowe helps to bridge the gap between member and greenkeeper...



New Beginning: Communication and Managing Difficult Members

The golfing member will always have high expectations, placing ever-increasing pressure on the greenkeeper and committee member. During the year we conduct certain operations. Aeration, sand dressing, and removing trees, are just some of the contentious issues we do. So why do we do it?

Over a series of articles we will explain the 'Whys and Wherefores' of our operations. We will explain

the benefits and hopefully a greater understanding and appreciation of our work will arise.

So it's early in the New Year, many of us are trying to lose those extra pounds that we have gained during the festivities. We make New Year resolutions and a new beginning is ahead. Many of our golf club members are voting on new Committee Members, the New Captain is announced and the committee are looking forward to the new challenge with trepidation.

It's true to say that today's committee member requires skin like a rhinoceros. You need the communication skills and the diplomacy of the very best mediator.

We are all prone to the odd adverse comment or difficult request. Whether that's the usual 'Cut the greens lower', 'Cut the rough lower', 'Stop putting holes in our lovely greens' and, even, 'Why can't we look like Augusta?'

Greenkeeping is complex and to expect members to comprehend the complexities of greenkeeping

is unfair. They have gardens and watch The Masters at home. This creates, the osmo-greenkeeper, everyone's an expert. Expectations are unrealistic and demands are ever increasing.

So how do we handle the difficult member, the member who is irrational and unreasonable, the member who is vocal about his grievance and will share his opinion to all and sundry?

We can communicate as much as possible, but what if this person does not want to listen? As we all know, for communication to work our message must be heard.

Do we just ignore them? Well, the problem with this is that negativity breeds negativity!

It's no coincidence that groups of difficult members form. They tend to play together and have a few pints in the clubhouse together expressing their views together. I call this the 'Pull up a chair mentality'.

The Human is a pack animal; we prefer groups and we crave acceptance in that group.

One of the easiest ways to become accepted is to agree with the negative views of others. Thus group mindsets forms.

In any business there is the 80/20 rule, this also applies to customer satisfaction. 80% of our customers are normally happy and content, but 20% are not. This 20% are, on average, misinformed or have a lack of understanding.

With good communication techniques we should be able eradicate most complaints and concerns... However there is a hidden 5%.

This 5% are never happy; in fact, they are only happy when they are complaining. It doesn't matter what you say or do they will find something to complain about. It's not personal its just the way they are.

Why should we make them unhappy by giving them nothing to complain about?

Pleasing this minority is impossible and trying to please the unappeasable will ultimately have a detrimental affect on the course and the work your greenkeeper needs to do in order to maintain the course.

The skill is determining who is a compulsive moaner and who has a genuine complaint.

If we get this wrong then you could be wasting your time - time that ought to be best spent on more important matters.

Don't let them get to you - Stay out of it emotionally and concentrate on listening non-defensively and actively.

A person may make disparaging or irrational comments- don't rise to the bait. If necessary stop the conversation. Your happiness and health is more important than your point of view.

Or simply remind them that they are a member of a golf club and as such should act accordingly. You welcome constructive comments but will not tolerate projected insults.

Listen - listen - listen! Look and sound like you're listening. The member cares about the course; he wants to know that you care and that you're interested in their problem. Even if you're not!

If you are genuinely interested use empathy but only if it is genu-

“If they have a complaint and it's genuine, then continue empathizing and tell the members what you'll do about the situation.”

ine. “I can understand that your saying” or “I see what you mean”. Again, these responses need to be genuine.

Build rapport - Sometimes it's useful to add another phrase to the empathy response, including yourself in the picture. - “I can understand how you feel, I don't like it either but we are on a long road of improvements, or we are on the case”.

This has the effect of getting on the members side and builds rapport. It shows that you and your greenkeeping team care, you're aware of the problem and a solution is underway.

If they have a complaint and it's genuine, then continue empathizing and tell the members what you'll do about the situation. Thank them for bringing this to your attention and make sure the situation is fixed as soon as possible.

Stupid people & comments- the fact is you can't argue with stupidity, more importantly you should never argue.

Angry People

Angry people are usually power struggling, or they may be intimidators/ bullies, people who use anger to throw others off guard. Angry people are usually rewarded for their behaviour by people who'd do anything to avoid confrontation.

You probably can't deflate their anger but you can stop taking it

personally. And remember that angry people generally have self-esteem issues that underlie their hostility.

When faced with anger, simply stop the conversation and tell them to get in touch when they have calmed down. When calm, we can then have a rational & hopefully constructive conversation.

Compulsive Complainers

Complainers that will never be happy, unless of course they are complaining. Again these people have self-esteem issues.

Stop letting complainers get away with it. In the case of a complaining member, you can turn the com-

plaint around by saying, “What do you think the answer is?” then ask them a question to their solution before you know it, complainers will be solving their own problems and agreeing with you.

Committee role- It's simply wrong for members of a golf club to approach employees and pass negative comments or judgment to the staff, no matter how frivolous.

This sort of conduct is non productive - it not only encourages communication breakdown, lowers morale and poor relations with the members, it is also stopping the staff from working.

Ultimately the members pay the wages, but no more so than any shareholder of any organisation. Like any business, channelled communication procedures need to be in place to eradicate this sort of culture.

In some cases this is tantamount to bullying. All clubs have a responsibility to protect the staff and have a duty of care. Bullying problems is the responsibility of the employer not the employee.

To summarise, difficult people are a fact of golf course life.

Communicate with openness, produce clear facts, policies and procedures.

Make decisions as a team and the integral part of the team must be the experts you employ.

Protect those employees and never ever make someone a scapegoat.



ABOVE: Paul Lowe is Course Manager at Bromborough Golf Club, in Cheshire

Growing-in

New, Winter Sports Pitches

Steve Gingell, STRI Southern Area Manager,
on the growing-in of newly constructed pitches

Introduction

We frequently advise local authorities, schools and clubs on the growing-in of newly constructed pitches. In many cases, the maintenance requirements are not understood or have not been specified to a high enough level. This article examines the problems commonly found and discusses a number of solutions. However, it is important to seek specific advice as each site will be different.

Sward health

Invariably new pitches are fertilised at seeding and then left. This can result in weak grasses, poor density and a significant risk of developing weed species.

The soils on new pitches can sometimes be poorly structured and young grass can often tend to be surface rooted if the soils do not allow roots to develop fully. Until the roots fully establish from the adventitious to fibrous stage and to a suitable depth, the volume of soil from which nutrients are taken up is limited. There is therefore often a need to increase the nutrients to a level that gives good growth but not so excessively to generate organic matter or only stimulate

surface rooting. The nutrient level will naturally differ from soil type to soil type but typically is around 90-180 kg/ha nitrogen per annum, although more may be needed in very sandy free draining constructions. The aim is to promote good levels of growth without creating a soft, weak sward. Dark green may be too much!

The effect of fertiliser is often seen where rabbit urine creates a flush of growth. Whilst such a localised level is probably much too high, its effect clearly demonstrates the need to slightly increase fertiliser needs.

The benefit of appropriate levels of fertiliser is to speed up establishment though good health and tillering. This will hopefully allow the sown grasses to out-compete



annual meadow-grass, clover and other weed invasion. Of course, if there are any particularly weak or bare area, overseeding with the originally sown mixture should take place.

Sometimes newly turfed pitches can be very thatchy and so there is a need to undertake scarification. Too much thatch can result in the surface being slow and divot badly.

Drainage potential

Newly moved and replaced soils typically have little structure and this takes time to return. A combination of root exploration, worm activity and physical processes gradually create fissures and pore space. The net result is that drainage gradually improves as long as there is no significant compaction present. However, playing too soon and in wet conditions will often liquefy the top 50 mm of the soil profile and this can result in high wear and loss of grass cover. Ultimately, a pitch rich in annual meadow-grass often results.

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH ABOVE:
A weak sward with areas of
fertilisation from rabbits



The solution to the above is to firstly allow sufficient time for a pitch to establish. This should be at least a year but some light play can sometimes be allowed, particularly during the summer months when the soils are dry.

The next most important activity is aeration. I often recommend some form of aeration on a monthly basis. On heavily compacted sites, Verti-Draining could occur 2 - 3 times in the first year, with solid tining in the remaining months. Sometimes the use of a linear aerator can be of benefit, with or without sand injection. Care must be taken with this form of aeration – undertaking the operation at the right soil moisture content to prevent cracking. Use in some wet, heavy soils should be avoided. Slit tining could also be carried out

Sand dressing, either locally or over a whole pitch, is particularly important on heavier soils. The sand (in combination with aeration) helps promote surface drainage if sufficient is applied. The sand type is critical – it must be a medium-fine sand with little or no fines and, ideally, sub-angular in shape.

Drains

Many drainage installations will settle as part of the maturing of the construction. It should be expected and could occur annually for the first several years dependent on soil type, the weather conditions, irrigation availability, not to say anything about the standard of drainage installation. With clay soils prone to shrinkage, the process involved with settlement results from the drain line acting as a plane of weakness along which the clays crack. This allows some aggregate to fall into the widened crack and hence settlement at the surface. The remedy is to top up the drains as

settlement occurs with the same material as the backfill or the same sand as above. An item to top dress sunken drain lines in the first year should be included in the construction specification

When sand banding or sand slitting is installed there is an absolute requirement for sand dressing to be applied to help prevent the slit capping over in usage. I have seen systems capped over within a couple of years and become ineffective. The sand dressing helps to dilute any native soil and assists in retaining the integrity of the slit.

Stone

Unfortunately, it is common to find a newly developed pitch with a significant stone content visible in the surface. This could come from the parent soil or careless use of drainage aggregate.. Such stone is unacceptable in today's health and safety society (not to say anything about litigious aspects).

It is a misheld belief that stone moves up in a profile. The normal occurrence is that fines wash off stone in the surface or the surface is eroded through play. In either event, the possibility of injury is high.

In heavier soils, stone can settle into the profile over time, particularly if the soils become waterlogged. The process is possibly similar to the effect of puddling concrete to bring liquid to the surface. However, this can take a few years.

The most common remedy is to cover the stone with either sand or top dressing. Ideally, a layer of around 40 mm should be built up over time but this is costly and has distinct risks of erosion, particularly in goalmouths. Turfing with deep turf can help as long as the soil can be matched.

Larger stone should be hand

picked off as soon as germination occurs and this includes any sharp materials. The development of a dense sward can create a good cushion but could be worn away to re-expose the problem.

However, the specification of work should include items to prevent a stone problem, e.g soil screening or good working practices when introducing aggregate.

Height of cut

The height of cut should be carefully managed. Allowing the sward to grow to 100 mm and then cut to 25 mm, as sometimes happens, will weaken new grass and open up the sward to weed invasion. My preference is to allow growth to around 60 mm and then cut to 45 mm and then maintain no more than 15 mm of growth between cuts. This encourages tillering and prevents significant stress.

There may be a need initially to carefully roll to smooth the surface for the first cut. Any significant level discrepancies should be addressed although this may be covered by a defects item in the Contract works.

Leaving masses of clippings on the surface should be avoided at all costs as this can easily smother new grass, leaving patches and organic debris. If this occurs then reseeding may be required, after harrowing or scarifying.

Conclusions

The majority of the problems mentioned above can be resolved through a good specification of works for the construction and an understanding of the need to intensively maintain a new pitch.

It is vitally important to consider the early maintenance cost in the overall project as rarely is there sufficient budget if not included.

ABOVE RIGHT: A pitch surface with excess stone in surface
ABOVE LEFT: A heavy soil profile with poor surface structure



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