

There are exciting times ahead for London Golf Club as it announced recently, that, together with its joint venture partner, The European Tour, has submitted plans to local authorities for the construction of a new European Tour Performance Institute (ETPI) complete with driving range and an innovative 9-hole Academy course.

Alongside the existing 36-holes of championship golf and 130-bedroom 5-star hotel and spa, for which planning permission has already been granted, these significant developments encapsulate the club's vision of becoming a world-class destination primed for hosting major golfing events.

The state-of-the-art European Tour Performance Institute (ETPI) complete with a fully-covered driving range and inventive short-game facility, will be the first of its kind in the UK and promises to raise the bar in golf coaching and sports science.

Commenting on the significant developments on the horizon, London Golf Club's General Manger, Austen Gravestock said, "I firmly believe the new ETPI, Academy and 9-hole golf course will elevate our status on the International golfing arena."

David MacLaren, Director of Property and Venue Development at The European Tour, added: "I am confident that the

creation of a state of the art practice and learning facility at London Golf Club will be of great benefit to club members, visitors and the wider community."

Designed to complement the club's Heritage and International courses, that have both hosted high-profile professional tournaments and events, including The European Open in 2008 & 2009 and Golf LIVE, the new 9-hole academy golf course will be located alongside the ETPI on the eastern side of South Ash Road.

With the plans now submitted to the local authority for their consideration, Jeremy Slessor, European Golf Design's Managing Director, said: "It's been a

fascinating start to the project - combining the evolutionary approach to performance and training of the ETPI with an Academy facility that will support, without replicating, the two existing courses at The London Club. Trying to marry the requirements of the European Tour with the need to provide a bespoke training course, concentrating on game improvement, has been challenging - but we feel confident that this is what we've achieved. Added to this has been the desire to restore the terrain from an open agricultural field to one with a diverse environment, supporting diverse habitats resulting in a richer ecological landscape."





THE TRU-TURF RS48-11D GREENS ROLLER

Smooth operator.

THE FEATURES

- Patented triple off-set roller system designed to smooth turf by action – rather than weight
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- Superior Eaton 11 transmission to cope with extreme operating conditions
- Spiker roller operates up to 30mm deep to relieve any compaction

THE BENEFITS

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Charterhouse and Kubota return to sponsor the 2012 BIGGA National Championship



We are delighted to announce that once again the 2012 BIGGA National Championship will be sponsored by Charterhouse and Kubota. This year, the event takes place at The Irvine Golf Club, Bogside, Ayrshire, on October 8-9, 2012. Please see page 58 for details on how to apply.

UKGCOA Publish Golf Facility Report

The UK Golf Course Owners Association (UKGCOA) has released its first Golf Facility Benchmarking Report, which shows member clubs have seen a dramatic rise in rounds played throughout 2011.

The report – conducted by Sports Marketing Surveys Inc – shows that UKGCOA members have seen a 20% increase in rounds played compared to the national average of just 8%. To download the report, please visit www.ukgcoa.com

SPORTS MARKETING SURVEYS INC.



UKGCOA GOLF FACILITY BENCHMARKING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT
MARCH 2012



JOHN DEERE
175
 SINCE 1837

175 Years of Progress

From the world's first self-scouring steel plough in 1837 to the world's largest manufacturer of agricultural and forestry equipment, and a leading manufacturer of turf and construction machinery – John Deere the company celebrates 175 years of progress worldwide in 2012.

John Deere, the man, moved from his home in Vermont to set up a small blacksmith shop in Grand Detour, Illinois; his invention revolutionised agriculture and made farming in the tough soil of the US Midwest a productive and profitable venture.

A decade later he moved the enterprise to Moline, where the company that bears his name still has its worldwide headquarters today.

Close by 'The Rusty Palace', as the headquarters is known because of its innovative steel frame design, is TPC Deere Run, an award-winning championship golf course that is open to the public. The John Deere Classic tournament has been held here annually since 2000, the week before our Open Championship.

It made its debut on the PGA Tour as the Quad Cities Open in 1971, since when the event has contributed \$43 million to charity. John Deere is the official golf course equipment, leasing and landscaping supplier to the PGA Tour.

In addition to its 175th anniversary, John Deere can look back upon almost 50 years of history as a supplier of turf equipment. Production of the company's first lawn and garden tractor began at Horicon, Wisconsin in 1963, when John Deere built 1000 units of the 110 model, while John Deere's golf business started in the US just 25 years ago, in 1987.

The company now offers the broadest range of lawn & garden, commercial and golf equipment in the world.



An original 110 lawn tractor, pictured here working in the grounds of the Deere & Company worldwide headquarters at Moline in the early 1960s, can be seen at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC; a fully restored, working example of this pioneering lawn tractor is also on display in the foyer of John Deere's UK headquarters at Langar in Nottinghamshire.



The 'virtual reality' test lab for turf and utility equipment at John Deere's turf care factory in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina



John Deere's 8000 E-Cut hybrid electric fairway mower comes off the production line at Fuquay-Varina

John Deere's five millionth lawn tractor, from the X700 Ultimate diesel range, rolled off the assembly line at Horicon in 2010, when the factory also manufactured its 500,000th Gator utility vehicle, following this popular machine's introduction in 1993.

The same factory produced a line of snowmobiles from 1971 to 1983; these were promoted with the new slogan 'Nothing runs like a Deere', which has lasted a lot longer than that product line!

In 2011, John Deere invested more than US\$1.2 billion in its worldwide research and development programmes, equivalent to nearly \$5 million dollars every working day.

As part of this ongoing new product investment, John Deere pioneered the use of hybrid electric technology on golf course mowers with the introduction of its 2500E greens mower in 2004, and then its fairway mower range in 2009.

A full range of walk-behind and ride-on greens and fairway mowers, including the

industry's broadest single brand range of hybrid machines, are now built at the company's turf care factory at Fuquay-Varina in North Carolina.

This factory also uses a state of the art 'virtual reality' test lab, designed to reduce the high costs of constant prototype building and subsequent field testing.

This advanced electronic tool also uses customer feedback during the 3D digital modelling process, to ensure the design is going to be practical, easily serviceable and user friendly when new machines eventually go into full production.

"John Deere instilled four core values in his company," says Samuel R Allen, chairman and chief executive officer of Deere & Company – only the company's ninth CEO in its 175 year history.

"Today John Deere employees and dealers still deliver on these important values of integrity, quality, commitment and innovation, and we believe these values have been the key to the longevity of our enterprise."

Sowing the seeds



Jayne Leyland recently joined Rigby Taylor as Seed Research and Development Manager. Jim Cook took the opportunity to be the first to throw a few questions her way

What attracted you to Rigby Taylor?

It is a very exciting opportunity to take trialling systems and development of mixtures to another level.

What will the trials involve?

The trials will be sowing out grasses and then treating them with identified management programmes and products to find solutions to whatever the constraints of that site or maintenance regime is. Each trial will be different according to the location.

Where is the first trial you will be involved with since joining Rigby Taylor?

It will be at Furness Golf Club, in Cumbria, and is an environmental stress trial. This is the first sowing of this particular programme.

How are new seeds bred?

Mainly through crossings of existing cultivars with new grasses which are gathered in the wild by the plant breeders. These are then cross-bred to search for the best characteristics.

You start off with maybe 15,000 crossings and going through the process to end up with just one new variety. This process takes between 12 and 15 years. You're always looking forward to improve in terms of characteristics.

What makes a good quality grass seed?

Several things. The characteristics of individual cultivars, the synergy of the mixture, the quality of purity and germination of seed mixture and most importantly choosing the right mixture for the intended purpose. There are some amazing developments now

in grasses and with Rigby Taylor there is the ESP treatment on the seed. What is very important to many greenkeepers is speed of establishment, so you need good quality seed with high viability and fast establishment capability.

What should a greenkeeper think about when buying grass seed?

They should think about individual characteristics that they might require, for example specific disease tolerance or cold weather or drought tolerance.

What is as important as individual cultivar characteristics is actually how the seed mixture has been formulated and put together, so there isn't too much competition between the cultivars in there and one doesn't dominate the other.

So the actual mixture synergy is extremely important.

Is there a correct way to store grass seed?

It should be stored in a cool, dry place and also be in a secure container to avoid attack from vermin.

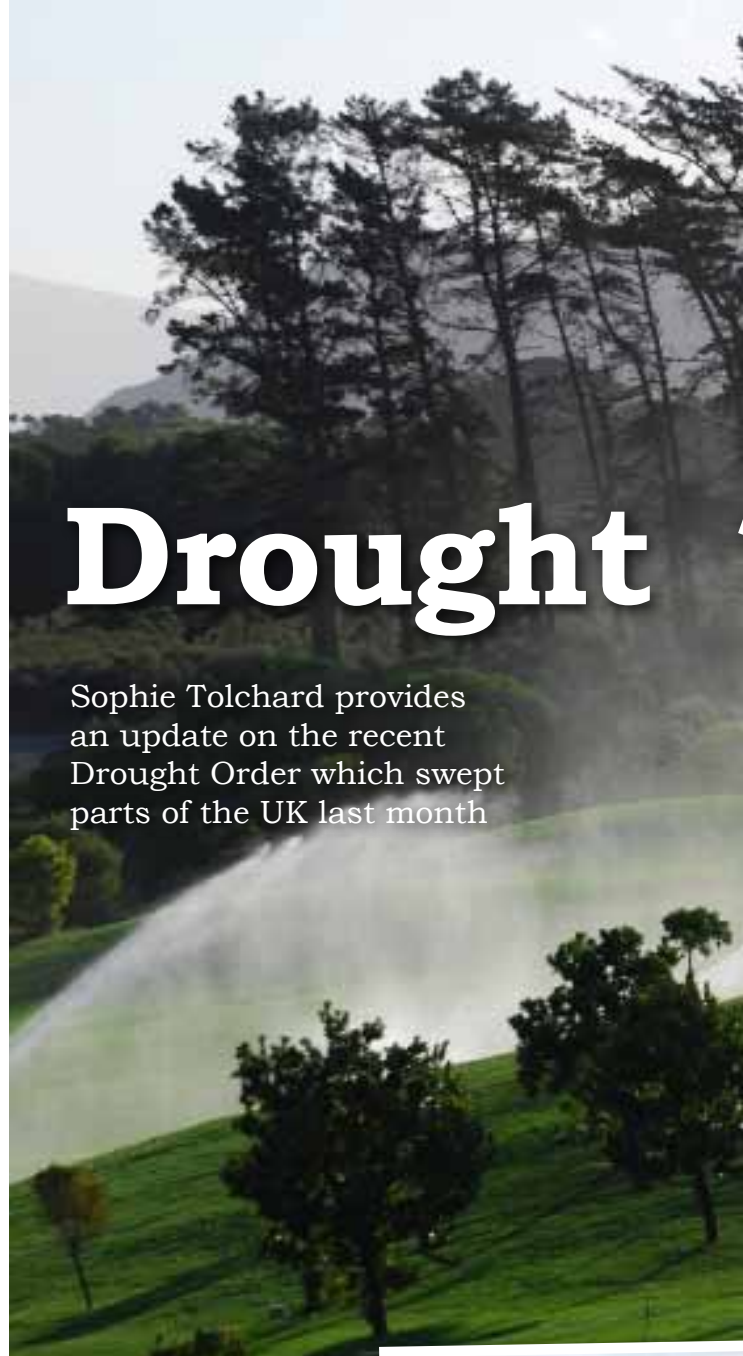
What is the future with regards grass seed?

The future is a combination of new cultivars which are coming through breeding programmes with improved characteristics. New sub-species or species which have got significantly different characteristics from cultivars within that same species.

Also adaptations of species with unique characteristics, for example, temperature tolerance or creeping growth habit. It's a combination of the breeding programmes producing the right material and then the good work of greenkeepers being able to have the product in their armoury to get the maximum out of it.

Drought

Sophie Tolchard provides an update on the recent Drought Order which swept parts of the UK last month



On 5 April a Temporary Use Ban (Hosepipe Ban) came into force in parts of the country covered by seven water companies in the south of England and East Anglia.

When two and a half times the normal amount of rain fell in April and frequent showers continued throughout May, many were left wondering why we are still in a drought.

After the driest two years since records began, groundwater, which feeds the flows of rivers throughout the year and is our most important source of water, remains exceptionally low.

On 29 April, Thames Water announced that it was to exempt golf clubs under its jurisdiction from two major aspects of the hosepipe ban. Golf clubs that have water supplied by Thames Water can now use permanent sprinkler systems underneath their greens.

"The announcement, which is



The initial cost of a reservoir can be recouped over a period of time and they provide an additional protective measure against drought orders
Courtesy of MJ Abbott Limited

The Situation Now

similar to one made recently by Anglian Water... should clear up some of the confusion surrounding conflicting advice given to clubs over the past few weeks," writes Thames Water.

Nonetheless, some clubs were left confused by the conflicting advice that they received from their water board.

"For example, some GCMA members report that their supplier has determined a total ban for the use of sprinkler systems. Others have received less penal reactions when they have approached them, including a scale of allowances for special events and a fixed number of cubic meters to be used per day. And some have been told 'you're a business, so carry on as normal,'" said Keith Lloyd, CEO of the GCMA.

Some relief followed Caroline Spelman's announcement on 11 May that the Environment Agency had decided to move 19 counties out of drought status, including

South Yorkshire, East Yorkshire, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Bristol, parts of Gloucestershire, parts of Hampshire, most of Wiltshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands, Warwickshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

Although this indicates that there's no threat to the public water supply in these areas this summer, clubs are still subject to some environmental pressures and could move back in to drought if there is another prolonged dry period. DEFRA is working closely with the Environment Agency to continuously monitor and review the situation.

There was better news for other users of turf this month when all seven water companies announced a 28-day exemption for the establishment of newly laid turf, when laid by a landscaper or gardening business, from the 21 May 2012.

Landscaping, turf and gardening businesses were made exempt from the 'hosepipe ban' after it was confirmed that record rainfall had reduced the severity of the on-going water shortage.

There are agreed Codes of Practice with the Turfgrass Growers Association (TGA), the Association of Professional Landscapers (APL) and other landscape trade bodies to ensure that the minimum amount of water is used, and as wisely as possible. The TGA's Code of Practice for the watering of newly laid turf is now available on its website at www.turfgrass.co.uk

While gardening businesses are now exempt, the hosepipe ban remains in force in all seven water company areas, those being Thames Water, Anglian Water, South East Water, Southern Water in Kent and Sussex, Veolia Central and South East, which covers much of London and the home-counties, and Sutton and East Surrey Water.

Main image supplied by Revaho UK. Please see Page 63 for more drought news



Some clubs have found the Environment Agency more receptive to borehole applications where an investment is being made in winter storage
Courtesy of MJ Abott Limited



Learning & Development

Sami Collins, Head of Learning & Development,
with an update on education issues

June has arrived and hopefully the sunshine will finally appear after what can only be described as a monsoon May! I know how you greenkeepers like the rain – but even you must have had enough of it by now!

The Open Support Team

Rachael is working hard on the organisation of The Open Support Team. Coordinating a team of 65 greenkeepers and additional support staff is no mean feat, but she's taking it all in her stride as usual.

The BIGGA staff will be on site at Royal Lytham & St Annes from Monday 16 July, with the support team beginning to arrive on Tuesday 17 and Wednesday 18 in preparation for the tournament getting underway on Thursday 19 July.



Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year 2012

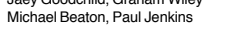
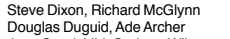
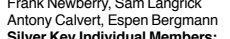
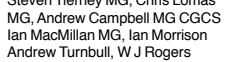
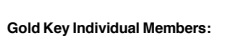
The nominations are in for the 24th Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award with local interviews commencing on Wednesday 27 June in St Albans.

We have 29 candidates for this year's Award and from that we will be selecting six to go forward to the National Final at BIGGA House in September.

BIGGA Seminars at SALTEX

BIGGA have once again been invited by the IOG to present a series of seminar sessions during the SALTEX exhibition being held at Windsor Racecourse from 4 – 6 September. The three seminars will take place on Wednesday 5 September and will feature presentations by Paul Lowe from Symbio and David Cole from Loch Lomond Golf Club (the third session is yet to be confirmed).

If you are heading to SALTEX, be sure to attend these seminars and claim CPD credits for attending. BIGGA representatives will also be



Gold Key Individual Members:
Steven Tierney MG, Chris Lomas MG, Andrew Campbell MG CGCS
Ian MacMillan MG, Ian Morrison
Andrew Turnbull, W J Rogers
Frank Newberry, Sam Langrick
Antony Calvert, Espen Bergmann
Silver Key Individual Members:
Steve Dixon, Richard McGlynn
Douglas Duguid, Ade Archer
Jaey Goodchild, Graham Wiley
Michael Beaton, Paul Jenkins



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www.bigga.org.uk



BIGGA Open Support Team 2011

on hand on Stand E33 to answer any questions you may have. We look forward to seeing you there!



Continue to Learn at Harrogate Week 2013

Planning is almost complete for the Turf Managers' Conference 2013. Part of the Continue to Learn education programme, the Turf Managers' Conference will take place on Monday 21 January 2013 in Harrogate. To date, several speakers have been confirmed including Dr Thomas Nikolai 'The Doctor of Green Speed' from Michigan State University, David Bancroft-Turner from 3D Training and Development, a specialist in organisational politics, Dr Kate Entwistle, Turf Pathologist from the Turf Disease Centre and Lorna Sheldon from CWI International a specialist in communication and presentation skills.

The Continue to Learn at Harrogate Week education programme will feature four packed days of education and will run from Sunday 20 January to Wednesday 23 January 2013. Further details on the Turf Managers' Conference,

workshops and seminars will be available soon – watch this space and the BIGGA website for further information.



BIGGA Higher Education Scholarships

Funding is still available for those BIGGA members who are considering undertaking a higher education qualification. The BIGGA Higher Education Scholarships are supported by Ransomes Jacobsen and offers up to £1000 towards to cost of your studies. For further information, visit the BIGGA website or contact the Learning and Development Department on 01347 833800 (option 3).



Master Greenkeeper Certificate

I am delighted to announce that we have a new Master Greenkeeper. David Langheim from Wimbledon Park Golf Club is the 61st BIGGA member to achieve the Certificate. Congratulations David!



Membership

Tracey Maddison, Head of Membership, provides a departmental update

Membership of BIGGA will provide you with membership at Student, Affiliate, Associate or Member level.

As a BIGGA member you will receive a wide range of benefits. A typical membership package may include:

- Copies of Greenkeeper International and other publications.
- Full access to the BIGGA website.
- Membership of a local section/networking.
- The opportunity to attend events nationwide.
- Access to a variety of advice on greenkeeping issues.
- The opportunity to access a large library of greenkeeping books and journals and extensive online information resources through The Turfgrass Information Center.
- Access to a 24/7 legal helpline.
- A personal accident insurance cover.

Membership packages may vary according to the grade of membership held.

As the largest greenkeeping Association in Europe committed to providing standards of excellence in golf course management throughout the greenkeeping profession, being or becoming a member of BIGGA says something about you: -

1. You're making a statement

about your standards and determination to continue to develop your greenkeeping skills;

2. You're committed to your career and development;

3. Being involved shows you are wanting to keep yourself up to date with industry changes;

Being a Member of BIGGA provides a way in which members can contribute to the success of their Association and communities by working together for the benefit of all.

Your involvement as a Member can be as active as you want it to be – you choose a level of involvement that suits you.

- You might just want to be kept up to date with what's going on, receive a copy of Greenkeeper International, members' emails and take advantage of the vast range of Member benefits.

- You may just wish to attend section golf events and network with fellow members/greenkeepers.

- You can choose to be more involved by volunteering for section committee providing you with the opportunity to attend regular meetings, have your say and vote at section level

- You might want to be involved in helping to develop a package of Member benefits or specific activities or initiatives.

It's your Membership so remember if you want to make a difference then you need to get yourself more involved.

Membership pays for itself many times over, not only in monetary terms but also in the incalculable effect it has in helping you develop into a more skilled greenkeeper or manager capable of making a greater impact within your golf club.

Join today,

renew your membership today or encourage a colleague to do the same.

Contact us in the membership department at membership@bigga.co.uk or by telephone 01347 833800 option 1. →



'more sand Honeyman.... more sand' memoirs of a greenkeeper! In his own words by Walter Woods

Walter Woods BEM is the most recognised greenkeeper in the world and his memoir is an opportunity to recount his reminiscences and thoughts to the profession both young and old. The book touches on Walter's experiences of four Opens and the myriad of other tournaments that he prepared the course for, the book also includes much of his own greenkeeping philosophy and many of his own anecdotes covering the period.

The book is available online via the BIGGA website - Members Price - £2.50 to cover post and packing

(To get your copy at Members Price you must first log in to the Members Area of the BIGGA Website).

- Non-Members Price - £7.50 to include post and packing (For all enquiries outside of the UK please contact the Membership Department directly for costs).

Go to www.bigga.org.uk/events/event729/ for full details, remember to sign to get your copy at members price.

BIGGA Scottish National Tournament

20th June 2012 at Ratho Park Golf Club, Edinburgh

Good luck to all who are taking part. If you would still like to book your place, please contact Rachael Duffy at BIGGA House on 01347 833800.

Entry fee £25/Apprentice fee £12 which includes coffee/tea, filled roll on arrival, plus evening meal, sweep and prizes.



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Greenkeepers Legal Assistance
0800 177 7891
Greenkeepers Support Services
0800 174 319
Debt Counselling Helpline
0800 174319



ASKHAM BRYAN TEAM UP WITH RJ

Ipswich, Suffolk (May 1, 2012) Askham Bryan College, the centre of educational excellence for land-based careers, has signed a rolling 12-month preferred supplier agreement with Ransomes Jacobsen Ltd, the Ipswich-based turf maintenance equipment manufacturer.

Askham Bryan has been at the forefront of training in sports turf maintenance for over thirty years, offering various routes of learning from Level 2 and 3 Apprenticeships

through to Foundation Degree. From September 2012, this will be enhanced with a full time Level 2 course in sports turf maintenance.

Ransomes Jacobsen and their local dealer, Golf and Turf Machinery, have formally signed this agreement to enable the college's full time and work-based sports turf apprentices to have access to modern and innovative turf maintenance equipment.

The agreement will see Ransomes Jacobsen providing

demonstration equipment to the college, through Golf and Turf Machinery, coupled with regular lectures on a range of turf maintenance subjects. The college will also provide Ransomes Jacobsen with lecturers for road shows and demo days.

As part of the agreement the Level 2 and Level 3 Sports Turf Apprenticeship programs will be sponsored by Ransomes Jacobsen; with a trophy awarded to the best apprentice each year.



Costa Fleet

Lumine Golf Club, a Troon Golf-managed resort, has invested in a new fleet of 70 Club Car vehicles to help its members, customers and staff manoeuvre its expansive 45-hole complex that covers 170 acres.

Costa Dorada's newest golf course, which opened in Southern Catalonia in June 2008, undertook careful market analysis of the leading golf car providers before selecting Club Car as its chosen supplier.

Lumine Golf Club anticipates investing in the innovative Visage system later this year and adding further utility vehicles to its new Club Car fleet.

Mega Deal for Aixam Mega, France

Ransomes Jacobsen has also been appointed the sole UK importer for the Mega Professional range of road homologated eco-friendly compact utility vehicles.

The agreement, signed recently between Aixam Mega, based in southern France, and RJ, will see them marketing the new range, which includes the Mega e-Worker electric truck and Multitruck 600 low emission diesel truck.

Mega multi-purpose utility vehicles can be easily adapted for a multitude of applications including green spaces.

The Mega e-Worker is an electric vehicle with a tight turning circle and compact external dimensions, making it highly maneuverable. Robustly constructed with

excellent carrying capacity, an ability to tow and dynamic performance, it meets the needs of the most demanding users. Like all Mega vehicles, the e-Worker is available in several versions and with a large and varied range of equipment.

At the recent signing of the agreement, Rupert Price, sales director at RJ said, "We are delighted to be signing this agreement with Aixam Mega. We have taken on the existing Mega dealer network will be actively looking to establish more touch points across the UK."

Gilles Géry, signatory to the agreement for Aixam Mega added, "RJ has an excellent understanding of the light industrial vehicle sector and extensive knowledge of electric vehicles through



their E-Z-GO and Cushman brands, and latterly with their all-electric ride-on greens mower in the golf sector. I'm convinced they will be the perfect partners for promoting the brand in the UK. Aixam Mega looks forward to a long and mutually beneficial partnership as we increase the level of business, going forward."

Lee Sayers Picks a Terra Spike



Mid Kent GC has chosen a Wiedenmann Terra Spike for the third successive time to carry out all its aeration requirements at the Gravesend course. Course Manager, Lee Sayers, a BIGGA member, said he had no hesitation in choosing a Terra Spike; his only dilemma was which model to select for the club's free draining chalk-based turf.

The team at Mid Kent had to weigh up whether to opt for a slightly faster XD machine that went down to 275 mm or whether they needed the capacity to spike to 400 mm.

"Our Massey Ferguson 3615 tractor has particularly wide rear tyres and in fairness without those, there are some locations where it would be quite restrictive to work. I'm really happy with the Wiedenmann. The fact that we've bought our third machine says more than anything else. If we'd had any concerns or problems then you might have bought a second one but you wouldn't have bought a third one!"

LOWER COST ROTARY MOWER FOR LOWER HORSEPOWER TRACTORS



Manufacturer of precision, flail and rotary turf mowers, Trimax Mowing Systems, has launched a budget-priced rotary mower, suitable for use with compact tractors from 20hp to 60hp.

Fitted with full-width rollers front and rear for an attractive striped finish without scalping, the Trimax Striker rotary mower comes in cutting widths of 1.46m and 1.94m, known as Model 150 and Model 190 respectively.

The Trimax Striker is purpose-

designed for non-contract owner-operators such as schools and colleges, golf courses, smallholdings, estates and residential properties with larger areas of regularly cut grass to maintain by compact tractor. The use of multiple cutting spindles helps ensure a cleaner cut with even grass distribution across the machine's entire width, enhanced by the fitting as standard of Trimax's LazerBladez™ cutting blade system.

What's your number?

Our regular and random profile of an industry figure continues with this month's lucky number...

Name: Craig Nickless

Company: ERS Developments Ltd

Position: Business Development Manager

How long have you been in the industry?

I have been in the industry since 1997



How did you get into it?

Even as a youngster I have always had an interest in wildlife, so it was a natural progression for me to enter into this industry. The Japanese Knotweed treatments came to us through a friend, who is a chemist. He had developed a unique treatment to eradicate Japanese Knotweed, in one growing season, instead of the usual 4-7 year method, and was too good an opportunity to miss.

What other jobs have you done?

I have worked for other pest control and wildlife management companies and also spent a number of years in sales working for a company in Sweden.

What changes have you seen during your time in the industry?

I have seen a number of changes since I began in the industry, from various European directorates, taking away some of our best known products for safety issues or so we are told, to advances in technology which is a major bonus for us.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I help run a youth cafe which takes a lot of my time up and something I have committed to for the next few years. It's essential we communicate with the youth in our areas - we live in a village in Buckinghamshire which has exactly the same issues as any town or city.

Who do you consider to be your best friends in the industry?

Firstly our clients, who quite rightly so demand the best service possible. Secondly, our suppliers - their technical backup make us one of the leading wildlife management and Japanese knotweed eradication companies in the UK.

What do you consider to be your lucky number?

I don't really believe in lucky numbers but since 2009 we have been blessed with some amazing work so I suppose it must be 2009-10-11-12-onwards

Pick a number

12!

Craig has picked Andrew Pickup of Stourton Forestry

The second of our three part feature, offering an insight in to the preparations for the ISPS Handa PGA Seniors Championship at Slaley Hall, continues this month, as

Nathaniel Sylvester of the PGA, meets up with Course Manager, Steve Cram

Part
Two

Preparing Slaley Hall

If Steve Cram ever hits the karaoke machine he could be forgiven for belting out the hit, 'Why Does it Always Rain on me?' by Scottish band Travis.

But the ever-cheerful course manager at De Vere Slaley Hall is not the kind to let the elements cloud his sunny disposition – even if torrential rain, the odd snow flurry and frost have conspired to disrupt preparations for June's ISPS Handa PGA Seniors Championship.

Dealing with the micro-climate that periodically engulfs the Northumberland resort is all part of the job for Cram who has been employed for a total of 22 years at the European Senior Tour venue, with a four year stint at Close House sandwiched in between.

Like most of the UK, heavy rain through April and May has been an unwelcome guest, Cram describes it as simply 'unbelievable' with bouts of snow and frost complicating matters further.

"In April we had 186mm and from May 1 to May 17 we've had 100 mm," says Cram in a rare quiet moment in his hectic schedule.

"The net result is that growth

is slower than usual – the cool rain and temperatures keeps the ground cold, which has slowed the growth down.

"As a result of the rain, the focus is on trying to pick a gap in the weather where feed and fertiliser has time to get under the plant and not get washed away.

"We have had so much rain that it's a case of dodging the showers and trying to get a two or three hour window to get as many fairways done, sprayed and coloured up as possible."

With the 72-hole tournament, which features an array of golfing stalwarts, such as Ryder Cup captains Sam Torrance and Mark James, set to tee off on June 7, Cram and his team begin ramping up operations in May with the verti-cutting of greens followed by the top dressing of greens and sanding twice every two weeks.

"The verti-cutting helps take out the lateral growth and helps the sand bed into the grass sward," explains Cram.

"It is the equivalent of using a scarifier that rakes out the dead grass – only a lighter version."

The logistics of the top sand dressings of the Hunting Course's



18 greens and one practice green sees more than 50 tonnes laid down – 30 tonnes the first time round and 22 tonnes at the next sanding.

Despite the rain, Slaley Hall's greens drain quite well, however it is the cool temperatures that can be an issue for Cram when top dressing is being undertaken.

"It takes a lot of time for the sand to disappear so you can still see it. You also have to be careful that you don't smother the green.

"Last year we were top dressing