

New velvet bentgrass cultivars could be a cure for cool-season areas

By DR. R. SKOGLEY

Velvet bentgrass (*Agrostis canina*, subsp. *canina*) could be the grass of the present and the future for golf greens in temperate regions.

Large sums of money are spent annually attempting to find ways to reduce management inputs on golf turf. It has been generally agreed that it would be desirable to reduce the amounts of fertilizer, fungicide and water currently used to maintain greens.

One obvious, but neglected, method to achieve this goal is to utilize a grass that has reduced growth requirements. Velvet bentgrass is such a grass.

Velvet bentgrass was a common component on greens on many older golf courses into the 1960s. In most cases it arrived as a component of "South German Mixed Bent," the seed widely used on our earliest courses. "South German" was a naturally occurring blend of creeping bentgrass (*A. stolonifera* L.), colonial, (*A. tenuis* Sibth.), and velvet.

For many years, velvet was the only bentgrass available as seed. Until the advent of Seaside and Penncross varieties in the 1940s or 1950s, greens were established with "South German" seed or were vegetatively establishment from stolons.

Under the low level of maintenance provided through the first half of this century, velvet bent would generally predominate over creeping bent.

Many of our fine old courses, particularly in the high rainfall Northeast, where soils are acidic and fertility inherently low, velvet bentgrass usually prevailed and provided fine greens.

With the advent of increased inorganic fertilizer and water usage, velvet began to suffer and developed a poor reputation among superintendents. As velvet bentgrass was weakened by excessive management, *Poa annua* became a prime replacement.

As the following generations of superintendents came into the decision-making positions, few were familiar with velvet bentgrass management, and fewer still made the effort to learn.

Agronomists recognize that each species of grass has specific growth requirements for optimum performance.

Bentgrasses, in general, perform under lower fertility conditions better than do bluegrasses or ryegrasses. Within a genus such as *Agrostis* (bentgrasses), there is also a range of differences among species.

Velvet and colonial will make good growth under lower fertility

and drier soil conditions than will the creepers. Colonials will tolerate drier soil conditions than will the velvets, but will not tolerate the close cut required on greens.

During 1994, seed of a new generation velvet bentgrass, SR 7200, was released to the public. While exhibiting all of the good characteristics of a velvet bentgrass it is inherent color is significantly darker green. It retains this color even under the low level fertility conditions upon

At the end of the summer, when creeping bent and Poa are looking very worn and tired, the velvet still sparkles.

which it thrives.

Although the light textured, infertile and acidic soils of New England may favor the

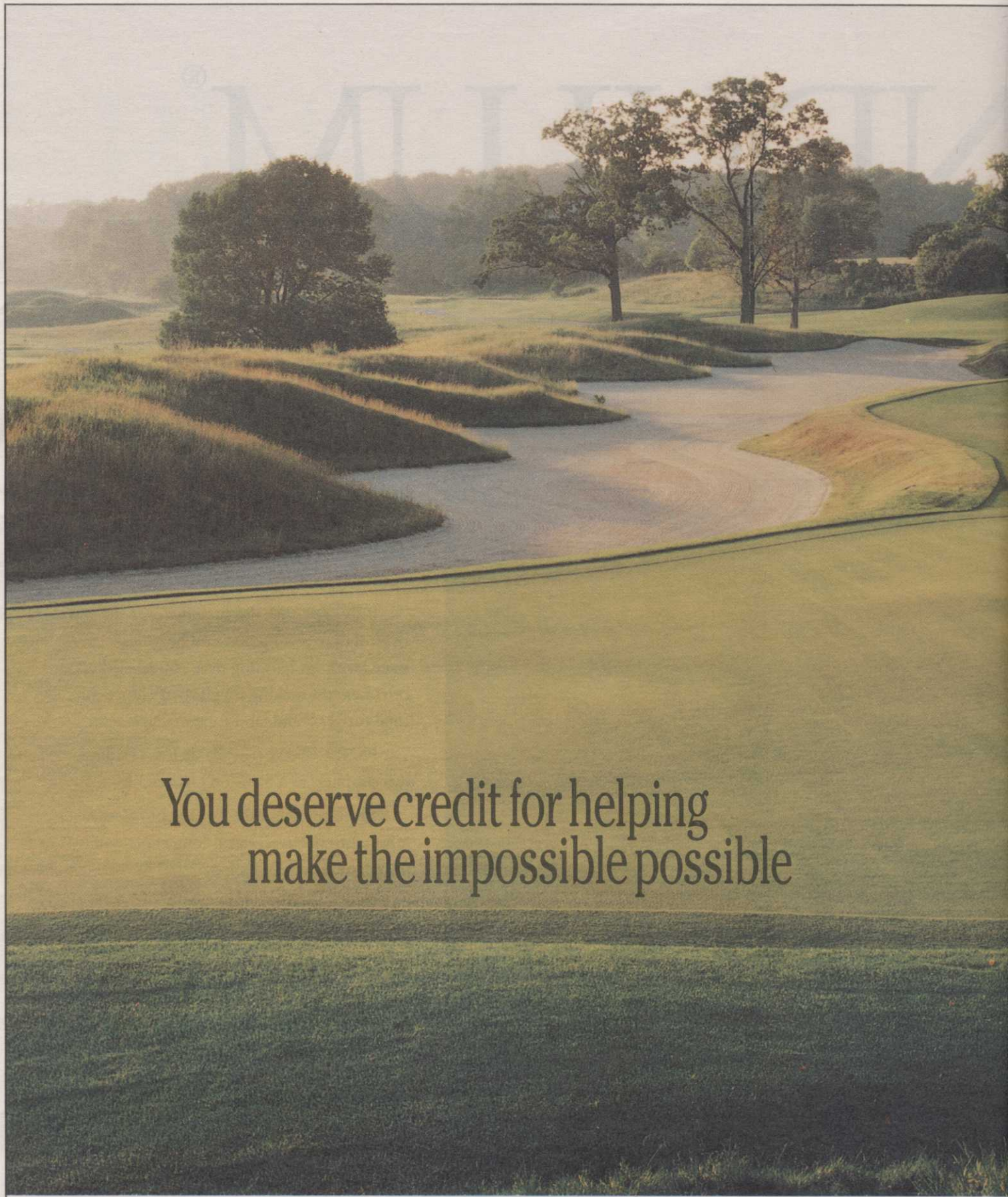
management of velvet bentgrass, it has performed well when managed properly, in many regions of the United States. In turf trials, velvet should not be compared with creeping bentgrasses under similar management.

It is a distinct species with different requirements for optimum growth, just as is colonial bentgrass.

There are many fine golf courses through the New England

region of the United States that have beautiful velvet greens. In fact, some of the older courses still have remnants of "South German velvet." At the end of the summer, when creeping bent and *Poa* are looking very worn and tired, the velvet still sparkles. During 1994, I visited several of these courses and discussed management protocol with the superintendents.

All of the courses visited had soil-modified greens-not sand.



You deserve credit for helping
make the impossible possible

Creating and maintaining the perfect golf environment is a difficult task. Sometimes it seems almost impossible. Especially when you consider the tools, both physical and financial, needed to keep a course manicured.

At John Deere Credit, we understand the obstacles you face every day. That's why we offer a variety of equipment-related finance plans with terms to match your needs. Whether you need a lease for that new

Dr. Richard Skogley is a retired University of Rhode Island professor and researcher.