

J. S. (Sam) Clapper is shown at the wheel of a new golf car during 1932 Minneapolis Rotary Club tournament. One of Sam's many inventions, it was first vehicle in which player, caddy and bag could ride together.



Giving golfers what they need

Today's game owes much to inventiveness of pioneer 'Sam' Clapper.

By HERB GRAFFIS

Golf has been very lucky in having course seed, equipment and supply distributors develop it from a sport on pastures and wastelands into a huge business on turf that set the top standard for ornamental and play grass.

In the pioneering days of U. S. golf, Carter's Tested Seeds and Stumpp & Walter worked with the few who were specializing in golf architecture, and with the many pros who were taking 36 sticks and staking out 18 greens, then going back to 18 locations and marking tee sites.

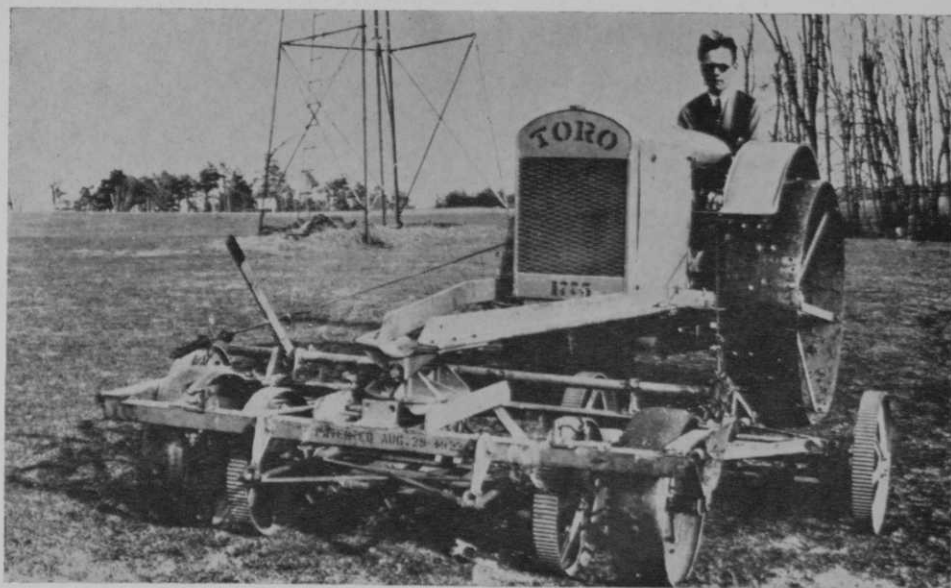
The suppliers of seed and mowers got farmhands and gardeners operating as course construction superintendents. Fertilizer was cow and poultry manure—abundantly and conveniently available. Rich clubs bought rollers to flatten the lumpy fairways. Nobody ever mentioned

soil compaction, although in a primer of course architecture and construction Bill Langford stated that clay packed tight prevented drainage, and without drainage there wasn't satisfactory turf for golf.

Fairway watering was by the "Nature System." Once in a while there was a deluxe course with watered greens. Horse-drawn mowers accounted for a rules problem of improving your lie. A good healthy well-fed American horse with mower produced a different shot-making situation from that of nibbling Scottish sheep.

Then Sam Clapper Came In

About this time there came into golf J. S. (Sam) Clapper, who set up a pattern of market development through golf course equipment and supply dealers in strategic areas. Clapper had a combination of mechanics and merchan-



There were only a few university and prep school golf courses in 1923 when Orville Clapper sold this Toro push-type tractor and mower to St. Mark's School at Southboro, Massachusetts.

dising in his mind which would be called genius today. Right after World War I it was regarded as something required to make a good living.

Those who know Sam's son, Orville, and Orville's son, Sam, who own and operate the Clapper Co. at West Newton, Mass., see reflections of the balanced market development and service thinking of "Sam the First."

Clapper starred as a salesman with the International Harvester Co. in Iowa around 1900, selling and training horse-shoers and blacksmiths in the servicing of horse-drawn harvesting machines.

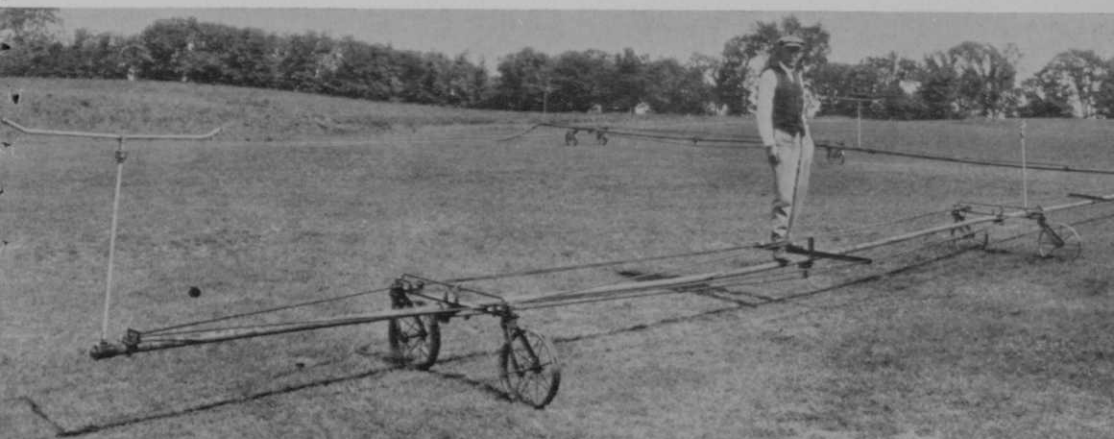
Then he went to Gas Traction Co. of St. Paul, builder of a four-cylinder farm tractor that won many awards in tough tractor-testing competitions. Toro Manufacturing Corp. of Minneapolis was the outgrowth of that company.

Sam Clapper was born with a research and development temperament. He started in business as clerk in a hardware store in Paris, Mo., where he was born. He sold windmills and installed in his home in Centralia, Mo., the first running water and sink in that area.

Eventually, Sam wound up in Minneapolis as sales manager for a large

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This Toro "Sea Serpent" fairway watering device using Buckner heads appeared in early 20's.



The Toro Park Special is shown pulling the first known spiker to be pulled by power for golf greens.

It was designed in the late 20's by Charles Erickson of Minnehaha Country Club, Minneapolis, Minnesota.



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buggy and surrey dealer. On one of his sales trips he met a minister who had a gasoline farm tractor idea. Together they worked out the Bull tractor, which not only figured in enlarging farm operations, but was a life-saver for the French by hauling heavy guns in World War I.

Getting into Golf

After the war, Sam Clapper felt that the budding golf market needed mowing equipment to replace horses and mules that were in short supply as a result of the conflict. He sent out three men in 1920-21 to see if there was a market in golf for a Toro outfit with cutters ahead of the powered rear wheels of a tractor. The scouts reported that there was a certain and warm welcome awaiting the proposed Toro equipment, for even in those days the demands of the

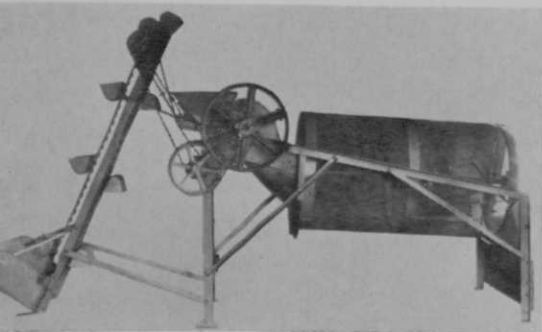
golfers were getting ahead of the equipment greenkeepers had to do their jobs.

One of the market investigators, George Fletcher Bishop, was so enthusiastic he wanted the entire West Coast as his Toro territory. He had found that the Pacific Slope clubs were willing to spend money for new equipment. The California Toro territory soon became so productive it had to be split. Bishop settled in San Francisco and John T. Clapper, a cousin of Sam's, left his farm equipment sales company in Minneapolis to establish a Toro Los Angeles branch.

Eastern Pennsylvania also was a highly promising area, and T. L. Gustin of the Toro field sales and service staff was assigned to that part of the country. Gus was a tremendous worker and a smart one, too. He eventually took over the Toro business in the Philadelphia area as his own company, which he built into a big outfit.

M. R. (Scotty) McLaren was the other member of the original Toro field staff. Scotty had been with the forerunner of the Toro company and worked in Ireland handling Bull tractors ordered by the French army. Scotty supervised attaching Irish-made wheels to the trac-

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This Toro Compost Shredder and Screener, the first machine of its kind for course superintendents, first appeared about 1926.

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tors and sending them on their way to France. As the Toro organization started to grow in golf after the war, Scotty was the field man who trained the golf course men in Toro equipment operation.

The majority of golf course maintenance jobs then were pro-greenkeeper posts. When there was a greenkeeper at the course, Scotty's training task wasn't tough. But, as was often the case, when the man in working charge of the course was a displaced farmhand, McLaren's assignment for Toro meant not only training in Toro equipment use and care but in the elements of golf course maintenance. Scotty was the original tester of new Toro equipment, and he was a tough one, putting each new item through rigorous trial.

Young Man of All Work

Sam Clapper's youngest son, Orville, was a versatile and energetic lad, who worked the full route of training in the Toro factory and offices. As Toro's first advertising manager, he got the company well connected in the growing golf field. Orville shared his father's optimistic vision of what the golf course business was going to be, and what a strong influence it would be in developing the turf equipment and material market.

When the distribution plan was completed, Orville took the New England area. There he became one of the very active factors in the promotion of golf courses and other turfed areas. Today, he operates from his office, warehouse and shop in Suburban Boston.

When the depression of the '30s came along, Toro and its dealers were just getting started. Toro's farm machinery dealers went broke. Farmers' notes, endorsed by the dealers, often weren't any good. Toro and its early sales outlets to the golf market also nearly went broke, as the golf clubs weren't sure pay. Fortunately, Sam Clapper had an excellent credit background and was a star salesman in selling bankers on the future of golf. He managed to raise enough money to finance the new and inexperienced dealers, who in turn were doing much of the financing of many young golf clubs.

A tall lean World War I Navy vet named Kenneth E. Goit got fed up bounding in his Ford over Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma roads introducing Toro mowing equipment, so he responded eagerly when Clapper offered him the chance to come to Minneapolis to be Toro's sales manager. Goit had a gift of organizing, merchandising and advertising. He tied the experience of the other Toro pioneers together so that Sam Clapper's modern idea of golf course equipment and supply distributors' service became a reality. This had a great deal to do with the boom that gave golf its foundation as the leading outdoor participation sport in the U. S.

Distribution Setup Grows

Toro's first distributor had been a New York organization which intended to do a nationwide job but didn't make it. In 1922 Toro had five distributors in Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York. In 1925, distributors were added in suburban Detroit, Des Moines and Denver. Goit's push made the list grow to 12 in the

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late 20s, 41 in the 30s and 43 at the time World War II began.

Following that war Toro's distributor roster grew to more than 70 then stabilized with a few more than 60, plus many dealers who handled its home power-mowing equipment.

Sam Clapper's idea of nationwide golf course mower distribution was extensively broadened as the course managers (whatever their titles happened to be) consulted regional Toro distributors about supply and service of other equipment and materials. These inquiries were passed along to Goit at Minneapolis headquarters. Goit began recommending sources of supply to the distributors and helped to arrange deals. Thus, in effect, Toro distributors developed into a sort of a voluntary chain store organization for golf clubs. Shipping arrangements, warehousing, distributing and service in parts and repairs and in users' instructions were worked out on a basis that has saved millions of dollars in course improvement and maintenance costs. This was done not only through the Toro distributors, but through other major distributors as the basic plan became the highly satisfactory general pattern in the golf business.

Sales Volume Fertilized

O. J. Noer, a personable young salesman two years away from a professorial post at the University of Wisconsin, came to Goit with a suggestion that Toro distributors handle the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission's fertilizer, Milorganite. Noer and his Sewerage Commission boss, Victor Hugo Kadish, also a former University of Wisconsin professor, got together with the Toro outfit on a deal that cut fertilizer selling costs. Inasmuch as Toro distributors were calling on the golf course buyers and had warehousing and local distributing facilities, they took on selling Milorganite as well. Noer became the top soft-sell salesman in golf and an advisor and teacher of inestimable value. Often he didn't urge the purchase of Milorganite but other fertilizers and special treatment needed at the time and under prevailing

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GOLFDOM

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conditons. Noer worked with the regional distributors' salesmen, with superintendents and their officials, with sectional and national superintendents' associations, the Green Section and with the scientists of state agricultural colleges. He probably has been on more golf courses than any other man in the world. He introduced and made popular color photography for recording and studying golf turf situations. In his honor the Milorganite distributors established the O.J. Noer Turf Foundation and assess themselves to finance grants for turf research. After Noer's retirement from the Milorganite organization he became a consultant on turf for Robert Trent Jones

and accounted for successful turf developments on Jones' courses in Hawaii, Spain and the Phillipines, as well as in the United States.

With fertilizer development came the addition of service and sales in the golf course chemical field. Special equipment for saving time and labor costs in attaining perfect conditions accounted for another extension of the distributors' market and responsibilities. Latest example is complete irrigation installation. This brings to smaller clubs watering installations that are, for their specific conditions, comparable to those which specializing experts design and install for larger, richer clubs.

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brought financial aid which helped many golf clubs through emergencies. Young Orville Clapper in Boston had been in the automobile agency business and adapted automobile dealers' resourceful and effective methods of financing to fit golf conditions.

Orville Clapper has a capacity for appraising values of material and service factors that he discovered and developed when he was one of the first purchasing agents for Toro. He relates how he was instructed to buy material for 500 tractors and cultivator units, then told to cancel the orders. However, he wasn't able to countermand the purchase of long angle-iron, cut and punched to specifications, that was to make the frame of the cultivator. But desperate ingenuity found the answer and that material became the side arms used in the push-type tractor and gang frames in the 1922 through 1929 models.

Sam Clapper's teammate, H. G. McCartney, was the ideal manufacturing executive for Sam to work with. When Clapper died in 1944, although he'd been retired for several years, the job of changing from war work back to golf course and other equipment put a heavy load on McCartney, then in his 70s, and on the overworked Goit. At this time, two brilliant young men, David Lilly and Robert Gibson, bought Toro and began another chapter in its growth.

Sam Clapper staked many young men to college careers, and took many chances with money in helping other inventors. Among his ventures was helping to finance Earl Barrow's nursery in Minneapolis, where Northlands Bent was first raised.

Old Sam didn't overlook many good bets. He was a good golfer himself, and insisted that all Toro executives play at least 18 holes a week. If anyone missed, he challenged them to a Sunday game, teeing off at 6:30 a.m. with breakfast after the first nine. The loser paid for breakfast; JSC paid for lunch.

Sam Clapper made many contributions to golf, and his ideas of distribution are still being carried out and enlarged by his grandson, Sam, in New England. These ideas, and the Toro Company are his monuments. ●



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