

Overland Park (Kan.) Golf Club was one of the first courses to use Trimec.

PBI/Gordon
celebrates 40
years of the
broadleaf
herbicide Trimec

By John Walsh

RELIABLE

For most people, their 40th birthday was, or will be, a big deal because it's a significant milestone in life. A 40th birthday for a broadleaf herbicide is a much bigger deal, though, considering the many pesticide product improvements made throughout the years. PBI/Gordon Corp. is celebrating such a milestone this year with Trimec.

"Trimec defies most product lifecycles," says Doug Obermann, professional turf and ornamental products manager for Kansas City-based PBI/Gordon. "I attribute its longevity to a lot of hard work and a little luck. It's a household name in the industry."

The herbicide has treated about 97.8 million acres through the years — and counting.

Obermann, who worked with Trimec for 21 years, says there are 12 versions of Trimec products on the professional side of the market, some of which are sold through formulators with liquids and fertilizers. The ratio of active ingredients — 2,4-D, MCPP and dicamba — varies to fit the niche of weed markets in the North and South, as well as price points (high, medium and low). Trimec Plus, which came to market 22 years ago, includes a fourth ingredient, MSMA.

"We have a synergistic effect with the three active ingredients," says Everett Mealman, PBI/Gordon's chairman of the board.

"Trimec technology is based on two secrets — the way the active ingredients are reacted and the special inerts in the formulation," Obermann says.

A history lesson

In the late 1960s, Skip Skaptason, who worked for Sherwin Williams Cos. of Canada (Green Cross Products), was approached by the people who invented Trimec. They told Skaptason they wanted to introduce Trimec in the United States. Additionally, Skaptason was on a local civic committee with Mealman, who was PBI/Gordon's executive vice president at the time and mayor of a Kansas City suburb.

"Skip obtained the rights to the patent, and depended on PBI/Gordon

PHOTOS COURTESY: PBI/GORDON



Trimec. A few years later, PBI/Gordon's ad agency told the company to change the name to what everyone was calling it — Trimec.

The company's original goal was to target the golf course market only, but it soon branched into other markets, such as lawn and garden, in the mid-1970s. The first ad for Trimec appeared in *Golfdom* magazine in 1970 (see picture to the left). "We established ourselves in the market with ads in three magazines with a total ad budget of \$7,704," Mealman says.

At the time, in the early 1970s, ag products were being used on golf courses. Trimec was part of the chemical company's switch to specialty products.

"Our big break came when the herbicide Silvex was discontinued by the Environmental Protection Agency for the lawn and garden market," Mealman says. "The whole Trimec thing changed our company. The ag market was all commodity products, and we saw needs in the specialty market that weren't being met."

PBI/Gordon controlled a synergy patent for the three active ingredients in the herbicide. The patent, which was filed and accepted in 1966, lasted for 17 years. After the patent expired, several post-patent products came to market.

"But it's still the No. 1 brand despite being off-patent," Obermann says, citing industry surveys.

"We established ourselves in the market, and it was hard to dislodge us," Mealman says. "We had an aggressive ad campaign and conducted a lot of field work."

"We wanted to keep earning the No. 1 position in the marketplace and not take it for granted," adds Obermann.

Obermann says Skaptason was a master at herbicide formulations. He developed many

of them on paper and they were tested. He tweaked new formulations when he became a full-time employee of PBI/Gordon in 1970. The company eventually introduced other Trimec products, such as Trimec Southern, Trimec Encore, Trimec Plus and Trimec 992 (for the lawn-care market). The original Trimec broadleaf herbicide was eventually renamed Trimec Classic because Mealman didn't want to lose brand power with it.

A trip down memory lane

Jim Harris, superintendent of the Links at Cottonwood in Tunica, Miss., worked on a golf course with his superintendent father when he graduated from college in 1971. They tried to mix the three active ingredients in Trimec on their own to save money. Their concoctions weren't eradicating weeds effectively, so they gave up mixing and used Trimec.

"I've been using it since," says Harris, who uses it for routine maintenance. "I've tried a couple of three-ways that didn't work as well. I know Trimec works."

Sandy Queen, manager of golf course operations for the city of Overland Park, Kan., began working for the city at the St. Andrews Golf Course in 1974 and became superintendent there in 1977.

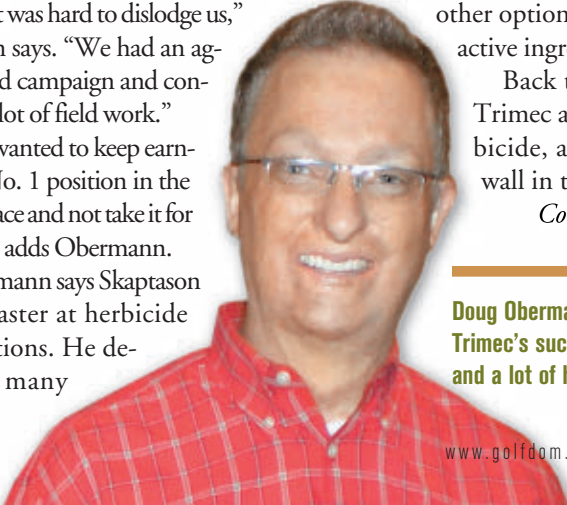
"When I first became the superintendent, I was looking at broadleaf control from a cost standpoint," Queen says. "I made applications for broadleaf-weed control without Trimec, and they didn't control the clover. That's when I learned the importance of dicamba. I became a big fan of Trimec. There were no other options for that blend of active ingredients."

Back then, Queen used Trimec as a preventive herbicide, applying it wall to wall in the fall and spring.

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to bring it to market," says Mealman, who became PBI/Gordon's president in 1973. "Skip sublicensed Trimec to us in the spring of 1969. That year we sold the first gallon to Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Okla."

When Trimec first came out on the market, it was called Fairway, but the metal can also said "Contains Trimec." The Fairway name didn't stick because golf course superintendents kept calling it



Doug Obermann attributes Trimec's success to a little luck and a lot of hard work.

Old Reliable



Everett Mealman says an aggressive ad campaign and plenty of field work helped Trimec's cause.

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Eventually though, post-patent products started replacing Trimec.

"Many superintendents, including me, started using other products after the Trimec patent expired," Queen says. "But I've always questioned whether those other products were better than Trimec. The control was darn near 100 percent."

Keith Pegg, now superintendent of the Zama Golf Club in Japan, used Trimec for the first time in 1970 when he was employed by SunRiver properties in Oregon as an assistant superintendent.

"We saved so much work in weed removal," he says. "I had never seen anything like it and was impressed. We used it every year I was at SunRiver."

In 1974, Pegg left for a superintendent position at Fircrest Golf Club in Washington, where he remained for the next 20 years and used Trimec. Today, Pegg uses Trimec products less now because of their lack of availability in Asia.

Bob Belfield, superintendent at Kettle Hills Golf Course in Richfield, Wis., has been in the business for 42 years, 23 of those at Kettle Hills. He was 15 when he started applying herbicides. Belfield used Trimec and Trimec Bentgrass Formula for about six years at the golf course where he worked before Kettle Hills.

"I remember when it first came out — I was thrilled not to have to handle all those products that now came as one," he says. "It worked well."

Mark Claburn, golf course superintendent at Tierra Verde Golf Club in Arlington, Texas, first used Trimec in the early 1990s while on staff at Barton Creek. He was spot-spraying weeds. "Trimec always provided good control, and the knock down was quick," he says.

Despite its age, Trimec isn't done evolving. PBI/Gordon, an employee-owned company founded in 1947, is developing more variations on Trimec to fill a market need. Those new products will debut during the next two years. Incidentally, Trimec's three active ingredients are also used in newer combination products, such as SpeedZone (carfentrazone-ethyl), PowerZone (carfentrazone-ethyl) and SpeedZone Southern (carfentrazone-ethyl), as well as Surge (sulfentrazone) and Q4 (sulfentrazone).

Not many herbicides have lasted as long as Trimec, Queen says. "Many other turf products have come and gone," he adds. "It's a pretty special formulation." ■



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