20th ANNIVERSARY

Early Toro tractor *with front-mounted reels, circa 1929.*

GOLF COURSES GOOD TO LOFTS AND TORO

The first time a machine bearing the Toro name rambled down a golf course fairway, it was strictly an experimental run. The experiment—to try using a Toro Bull Tractor with gang mowers attached for fairway mowing—had been suggested by the superintendent of the Minikahda golf course.

The year was 1922 and the move to mechanization—and away from the horse-drawn mowers—was on. The superintendent thought that the local Toro Motor Company, maker of Toro Bull Tractors, might adapt equipment for fairway mowing.

The rest is history. Toro, of course, took the man's suggestion—and though its first design was somewhat crude with its wooden frame and rope steering mechanism, it firmly launched the Toro Company into the mowing machine business.

Looking back, it seems only right that Toro's first venture in mower design happened on a golf course. Since 1922, equipment for grooming golf courses has represented a key element in Toro's overall success—and has provided the basis for equipment designs for other turf management including parks, cemeteries, school grounds and

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athletic fields.

The surge in golf course growth in the 1960's—and the challenges that grew out of that expansion—led to some of The Toro Co.'s most important developments in turf maintenance tools in the past 20 years.

Since the 1960's, turf facility managers have confronted challenges that they found could be met through the use of increasingly sophisticated machinery. Throughout the period, Toro kept an ear attuned to golf course superintendents—and, in many cases, took its design cue from them.

Dr. Jim Watson, Toro vice president of customer relations and agronomist who has been with the company since 1952, remembers the 1960's as history's most dramatic period of golf course construction. "In the early part of decade, 350 to 400 new courses were being built each year," he said.

As the '60's passed, two needs began to emerge, Watson pointed out. For one, it had become apparent to everyone in the turf management business that labor costs represented the largest segment of the budget, and therefore, the greatest opportunity for improved efficiency. "People began to see that for the wages they were paying, they needed to groom more acres per man hour," explained Watson.

At the same time, he said, the trend in golf course maintenance was toward a more manicured, tightly-clipped appearance.

Both of these needs presented equipment manufacturers with an interesting pair of challenges: build more labor efficient equipment that did a better job of grooming than earlier models.

When Toro introduced its Greensmaster 3 triplex greensmower in 1970, the company introduced labor saving hydraulics on its first reel mower. The Greensmaster 3 allowed one man operating one unit to do the cutting that it had previously required three or

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LOFTS

It all started with Selmer Loft, who in 1923, was the sole proprietor of a local seed company marketing for a Danish concern. In the late 50's a move from Manhattan, NY to larger quarters was dictated by an expanding business, changing the address to Jersey City, NJ.

From these rather humble beginnings, Lofts Seed has grown—as any viable seed should—to a nationwide marketing organization, with many varieties now being sold worldwide.

In the early 60's, another move, this time to Bound Brook, New Jersey—its current headquarters—was required to obtain the additional facilities now demanded by Lofts' growth. By this time, Lofts had become a major domestic and international enterprise, responsible for a large percentage of the proprietary turf market in this country.

During the past two decades, Lofts developed divisions throughout the country to keep production and marketing facilities in line with its broadened market coverage. Today Lofts employs 97 persons at six locations.

In 1963, Great Western Seed Company in Oregon was started to broaden the western market and oversee Loft's complete seed production located primarily in the Willamette Valley. Today much of Lofts' international sales are handled there as well. This operation is directed by Steve Tubbs.

The purchase of the Kellogg Seed Company in 1973 was a major step to broaden the company's Midwestern markets. It was through the Lofts/Kellogg operation that the company became involved in some diversified product marketing. Only recently however, a decision was made to sell off this portion of the Loft organization in order to better concentrate on the turf industry.

Servicing the many retail outlets in the New England area with Lofts' consumer line of seed and turf care products is Lofts/New England at Arlington, MA, which also functions as a distribution point for the entire Northeastern area. Jerry Zuccala is branch manager for this division.

Ray Bentley and son, Lance, at the Lofts/New York location handle all Lofts' mail-order lines, including all packing and shipping of Pinto Wildflower Mixes and Lofts' extensive packet seed line of flowers, herbs and vegetables.

Lofts/Maryland at Beltsville, managed by Strick Newsom, provides the turf-related business of the Washington/Virginia area with needed service. Among the better

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Lofts brothers, *Jon (left) and Peter manage the Bound Brook, NJ-based firm.*

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four men to do.

The introduction of the Sand Pro further reduced the labor needed on golf courses and other large turf areas. In the mid seventies, Toro's Turf Pro 84, a hydraulically driven reel mower equipped with grass catchers, was introduced for the specialized tasks of maintaining tees, approaches and collars, along with other formal and semi-formal landscaped areas.

During the '70's, Toro engineers strived to design the ultimate in large tractor operated fairway mowing equipment. And in 1978, the company unveiled its largest, most highly engineered piece of turf equipment—the HTM-175. Using hydraulics in a design that was completely new to the Toro product line, the HTM-175 combined the attributes of a premier mowing machine with the ultimate in labor-saving equipment.

Also in the 1970's, Toro developed the first in its line of highly mobile, out-front rotaries, the Groundsmaster-72. Powered by a water-cooled engine, the GM-72 proved to be a highly maneuverable, rapid transport, piece of equipment that worked particularly well on golf course roughs and other similar grounds.

No review of Toro's involvement in the turf management industry for the past 20 years would be complete without reference to the company's contributions in automatic turf irrigation. The company entered the commercial and golf course irrigation business in 1962 with the acquisition of Riverside, CA-based Moist O'Matic. Moist O'Matic was headed by Ed Hunter, an inventor who is today credited with first successfully using high grade plastics in irrigation equipment. With the earliest installations of Hunter's (and Toro's) plastic sprinkler heads, it became apparent that selected plastics offered a number of advantages over traditional brass heads. Plastic heads were not subject to rust or corrosion and, in Toro's case, because of their gear-driven design, they provided a more uniform, more precise water cover thereby conserving water. In addition, they were

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less expensive and easier to repair than brass heads.

Toro's superiority in irrigation equipment over other brands is now proven out by the sheer number of top golf courses throughout the United States and the world that use it. Today, Toro irrigates 62 of the top-ranked 100 U.S. courses.

The large expansion of golf courses was reduced dramatically during the late 1970's with the oil embargo and subsequently rising energy prices, according to Watson.

Since that time, the challenge of energy conservation has been on the minds of turf managers as well as equipment manufacturers, he said. Toro's diesel GM-72 and its new GM-62, in addition to its diesel power Parkmaster and HTM-175, are aimed at helping improve fuel efficiency. Toro irrigation systems, because of their flexibility, are also helping meet the energy challenge.

And, Toro has already begun studying what could emerge as the biggest challenge to date: water conservation. A fresh water shortage, which could be crucial to hundreds of turf managers, could result in dramatic changes in the way turf is managed. Toro, as it has in the past will continue listening to the needs of turf managers—and take their research and design cues from what they hear. **WTT**

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Selmer Loft (left) and Dr. C. Reed Funk, turfgrass breeder for the New Jersey Agriculture Research Station.

and sensitivities. Promising varieties are then subjected to yield evaluations. These trials, conducted at research facilities on the West Coast, are required to determine a variety's ability to produce seed in sufficient quantities to warrant commerical release.

As a result of extensive research programs the turf industry has realized temendous growth, particularly in the introduction of improved, proprietary varieties. For instance, during the mid 60's, Manhattan was the household word when it came to ryegrasses. Since that time Lofts alone has introduced Yorktown, Yorktown II and Diplomat fine-leafed perennial ryegrasses. Soon two "new generation" perennial ryegrasses will be introduced—Palmer and Prelude.

In the area of tall fescues, only recently have the new fine-leafed varieties become available with the introduction of Rebel and Clemfine.

Lofts market can be broken into two distinct segments:

1. the retail market such as mass merchandisers, garden centers, hardware stores where they sell not only seed, but a complete line of turf care products to the homeowner.
2. the professional or trade market which includes the landscape architect, nurseryman, grounds maintenance person, automated lawn care specialist, sod producer and golf course superintendent.

Golf courses alone represent a large portion of Lofts business and the company principals boast of the use of Lofts varieties on many prestigious courses where major tournaments are played, such as Pinehurst Country Club, Augusta National, and two of Arnold Palmer's courses—Bay Hill in Florida and LaTrobe in Pennsylvania.

Despite the growth and change in the turf industry which has taken place over the last 20 years, Lofts continues to be one of the few remaining family-owned and operated enterprises. A visit to Lofts' Bound Brook location would find employees who have been with the company over 30 years. And, a customer can call and speak directly to either of the principals, Peter or Jon. In these complex days of multinationals, conglomerates, wholly-owned subsidiaries and the like, it is comforting to know that personal contact and pride in quality products are still alive and well at Lofts Seed. **WTT**