

Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 31

Winter 2000

HAPPY MOWLENNIUM

Sorry, I could not resist that one, which was suggested to me by Tony Hopwood!

After a brief Winter hibernation we are now gearing up for a busy Spring leading up to the Annual Rally in May and a series of new and regular events over the coming year. Please take time to check out the dates of these events on page two. Our major event of the year is of course the Annual Rally at Milton Keynes Museum. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Club and, if you have not been to MK before, what better reason could there be to make this your first trip. If it is a bit too far to travel, why not check out one of our other events.

Thanks to everyone who has sent in ideas or items for the newsletter. Tony Hopwood has been busy again this issue, and I meant to say a big thank you in the last edition to Jon Jackson for the information he sent for the article on petrol. I am always pleased to receive pictures of mowers in members' collections as these help fill space and are interesting to readers. Shots of mowers on their own (or with you) against a plain background, the lighter the better, seem to work best. The more you send, the easier it is for me to finish the work more or less on time. Have a great 2000!



Chris Thompson sent in another of his old lawn mower postcards, again dating from the early part of the 20th century. The mower in the middle is a Greens New Century, although the other two are harder to identify. The mower on the left is an Anco, which was a name used for Army & Navy mowers, while the one on the right has the usual 'Oil Often' but nothing else. There is nothing on the card to suggest where the shot was taken or why, but Chris wonders if the boys are about to have some sort of race. This may be a good guess as they seem to be wearing plimsoles.

TOP TIP

Ever had that problem with wire brushes when the middle bristles get worn away or drop out but leave good sections at the ends? This can make using the brush for general work more than difficult, but if you cut the front off the brush back to where the rear bristles are still in place you have a great little tool for getting into those awkward nooks and crannies on the mower frame or cutting cylinder. Try it, it works!

Godiva Mowers



THE GODIVA MOTOR MOWER WITH TRAILER SEAT

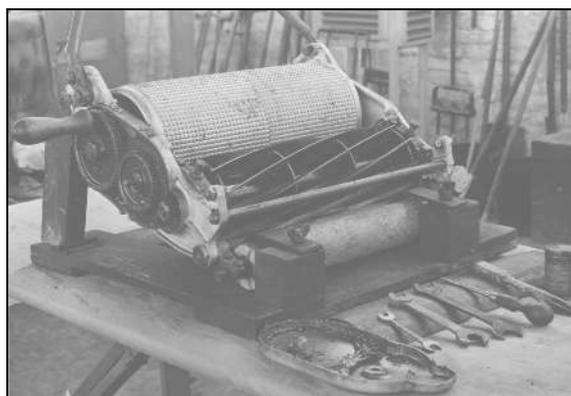
GENERAL SPECIFICATION.—First-class Motor Unit; countershaft with TWO inverted cone clutches (tercoils hand) engaging independently cutters and rollers; well-housed ball bearings to all spindles; steel gear cut sprocket and heavy roller chains (throughout); steel sides and handles; very spacious grass box; accurate, rapid and simple adjustments for height of cut, bottom blade and all chains; all working parts accessible; cutting cylinder easily removed for grinding; lubrication by grass gun (supplied with each machine).

15" (2-stroke engine)	£33 0 0	Extra for fitting 15" or 18" with	
18" (2- " ")	£37 10 0	4-stroke Engine	£4 10 0
22" (4- " ")	£52 10 0	Trailer Seat for any model	£5 0 0

BORROW A BANNER

Please remember that you can borrow one of the Club's special banners if you are organising a rally or even if you are just taking a few mowers to your local garden fete. The banner forms an eye catching backdrop to your display and members who have borrowed one in the past say that it helps get people to come and look at the mowers, which as we all know often leads to offers of new machines!

The Club pays the postage both ways and all we need to know is when you would like to borrow the banner well in advance so that we can get things organised. Contact Keith for more details.



In the 1930s, Ransomes supplied a special jig for use with its Certes mower that simplified the process known as back lapping. The mower is mounted in the jig, as above, and the side panel removed to allow a simple handle to be fitted on the rear gear wheel. Grinding paste is applied to the bottom blade and the handle turned to dress or re-bed the cutting cylinder and bottom blade.

WHAT'S THIS 'ERE?!



Andrew Grout really dressed the part of a 1940's gardener at the Bedfordshire Steam Rally in September. We had our own barbecue on the Saturday night before sampling the 'entertainment' that included the Saunders can-can girls (it was a bit chilly for legs that were as bare as those) and ending up in the beer tent. This included dancing to a Country & Western band, where Charles Crouchman in particular put the rest of us to shame, not only with his rock 'n roll, but also with his skill in spotting and attracted dancing partners!! The photo shows Robbie check whether Andrew had washed under his collar. *Dick Hardwick*

DIARY DATES

Derby Industrial Museum: Saturday 13 May. An exhibition of old lawn mowers at Derby Industrial Museum organised by OLC Member, David Meredith (Tel: 01283 701599/Derby).

Milton Keynes Museum: Saturday/Sunday 20/21 May. The Club's AGM will be, as ever, on the Sunday morning. Please put the dates in your diary now! Further details from Keith.

Chignall Village Hall Vintage Rally: Saturday 3 June. Held at Chignall Smealey, Chelmsford, Essex. Horticultural exhibits (including mowers) and related items such as literature and hand tools welcome at this rural one-day event. Details from Chris Thompson (Tel: 01376 320259/Braintree) or Norman Wastenev (Tel: 01245 440947/Chelmsford).

Banbury Steam Rally: 24/25 June 2000. Our second biggest event of the year, and one of the best steam rallies in the midlands. Open to all members of the Club. Details from Robbie.

Old Kiln Museum, Farnham: Sunday 2 July. The club has exhibited at the museum on a number of occasions and has been invited to participate in a special event celebrating the renovation of the museum's cricket pavilion and focusing on lawns and gardening. Details initially from Keith.

Farm Machinery Preservation Society, Essex: Saturday/Sunday 1/2 July. Farm Machinery Preservation Society Annual Rally, Gosfield, Braintree, Essex. Mowers welcome. Closing date for inclusion in programme, 25 May. Details from Chris Thompson (Tel: 01376 320259/Braintree).

Knowl Hill Steam Rally: 12/13 August. Since the last edition of Grassbox we have learned that John Keeley, owner of the rally site, has sadly died which may mean that the event is cancelled this year. Further information in future editions, in the meantime, more details from Keith.

Erewash Museum: Saturday 19 August. Our annual rally at the picturesque town museum in Ilkeston. All welcome, especially our members in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Details from Keith.

Three Counties Garden Show, Malvern: 23/24 September. This is a new event for the Club and we are very keen to make sure that it receives support from members in the area. Details from Tony Hopwood (Tel: 01684 592134/Upton on Severn).

PETROL FOR MOWERS

By Tony Hopwood

Following the piece in Grassbox 30 on unleaded mower fuel, I'd like to make several points.

The feature rightly emphasised that valve seat erosion mainly occurs when engines are run at high power for long periods, and that modern fuels are more 'lively' than pre-war motor spirit. Pre-war petrol was about 85 octane, while modern petrol is mostly 92-95 octane to suit modern lean burn car engines. The addition of lead to fuel started in 1927 and did not become general until the late 30s. It was originally added to allow higher compression ratios for sports and aero engines as an 'anti-knock' agent rather than to protect valves and valve seats.

It was not until sustained high speed running on motorways showed the need for a protective agent for valves and valve seats on ordinary production cars, that lead was recognised as vital to long term reliability rather than just a performance enhancer for high power engines.

Mower engines do not normally run under the sort of conditions that promote valve erosion, but a great deal can be done to protect them by reducing the effective octane rating of the fuel to the levels the engines were designed for by adding 10-15 percent duty free diesel (gas oil) or vaporising oil (kerosene) from the heating oil tank to the petrol. I have done this for over 30 years and have found it promotes smoother and cooler running and does not affect starting in cold weather.

The critical area is cooling. Air cooled engines need clear airways to keep cylinder head temperatures down. Fan belts should not slip, and ignition should not be retarded too far otherwise the engine and exhaust valves will still overheat. Effective cooling is vital to prevent valve seat erosion.

During the war many car engines, which were side valve low compression units like mowers, were ruined by running them on black market high octane (up to 120) aviation spirit, which actually had high lead levels, but was too 'hot' for car engines designed for lower octane fuel. This shows the importance of matching fuel to engine type.

A final thought on the subject of leaded fuel is that the best place for any lead replacement additive is in the sump oil not the fuel. Tests to approve leaded petrol in 1930 showed that a lot of the lead in the fuel finished up in the sump. Why not put lead in the oil to start with? It will still find its way into the combustion chamber and protect the valves. The lead still in the sump probably explains why car engine protection lasts up to 5000 miles after changing to unleaded fuel!



Chris Lambert sent in this post card from Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, formerly the home of the Rothschild family but now owned by the National Trust. The card is a modern reproduction of a photograph apparently taken in about 1900 in front of the Cricket Pavilion. The mower is a Green's, probably around 20" or 24" cut.

DIRECTORY UPDATE

The Club's Directory of Lawnmower Manufacturers and Models, edited by Chris Thompson, has now been bought by almost 100 people, mainly Club Members. We are planning to issue a revised edition of the directory in the near future with new entries and more information on selected mowers. We would be happy to hear from anyone who has any additional information (on existing entries or mowers not listed) that could be added to the revised edition. Please send any information to Keith at the usual address.

A "SHINGLER" DENNIS

By Tony Hopwood

The feature in Grassbox 30 on the Shingler brush attachment coincided with the addition of a unique Dennis to my flock. It's basically a 24 inch machine (No.3862) with the correct Blackburn FEA engine and dates from late 1925. What makes it different is a roller brush some 8 inches in diameter between the front rollers and the cutting cylinder, driven by a 1:1 chain drive from an outboard extension of the cutting cylinder shaft under a sheet metal cover.



This is a Dennis made variant, not a bolt-on adaptation, because the machine side plates are factory cut about 8 inches longer to accommodate the brush drive and height adjustment mechanism. The machine number plate carries no indication it is a special. There is an elegant brush height adjustment arrangement with curved brass height indicators showing the setting in inches above ground.

To allow for the longer wheelbase, the grass box is a different shape and is about 20 per cent shallower than the standard model.

Apart from the roller brush, there are other differences from my other 24 inch Dennis (No 3527), also 1925. There is a Binks carburettor, rather than an Amal, and the crankcase pressure fed sight glass lubricator stands clear of the oil tank rather than inside it. Does anyone know which is original? The tool box is fixed on brackets low down above the trailer seat tow bar rather than between the handle cross braces. The lining on the machine follows the later pattern of black and white on dark green, rather than a single red line and the grass box has a royal warrant and later Dennis logo, suggesting factory refurbishment(s) during its long life.



The BTH MI magneto has an improvised magnet made up from loudspeaker magnets and tool steel, but works well despite its odd appearance.

The previous owner was a retired gentleman of 87 who had laid the machine up a year or two ago because it was getting a bit heavy for him! He used it regularly for some 30 years after buying it second hand in Sussex.

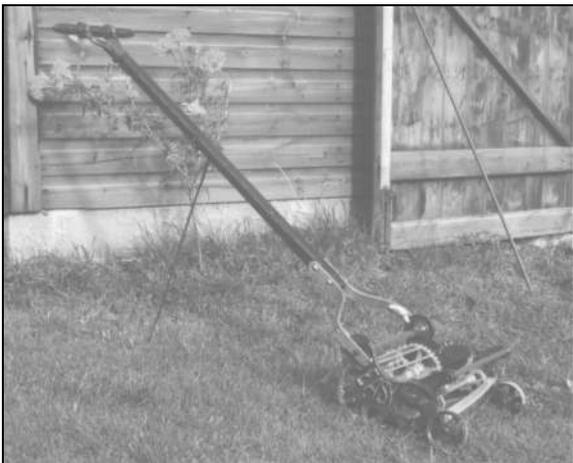
The machine was in very good condition, and after an editorial tidy and lubricating, I took advantage of the beautiful weather on New Year's day to have a Millennium mow with the trailer seat. It went well and proved very instructive. The brush seemed to offer no advantage and the main impression was that the machine was less handy, because the extra length made it much heavier to steer with a full grass box than a standard 24 inch machine.

An even bigger minus was that the extra 8 inches between rollers made it bridge and scalp on undulating grass - not a problem with the other Dennis machines I use. This is a fatal disadvantage because not many people have bowling green flat lawns! The same problem would have afflicted all Shingler conversion machines with the longer wheelbase at a low cut setting.

I have no references in my Dennis archive to suggest that this version ever went into production. It was probably built to see whether the Shingler idea was worth taking up after the patent expired. There is no doubt that the Shingler brush is very effective on flat games turf, provided the centre front rollers are absent and a fine cut cylinder used. None of these refinements are on the Dennis, so number 3862 remains a lucky survivor of an extinct mower innovation.

If anyone has any information on this variant, I would appreciate learning more about it. In the meantime the 'Shingler' Dennis will get a new exhaust and refurbished grass box in time for the new rally season.

MOWING MADE EASY



From the Hall & Duck Trust collection, this 12" Easy mower was made in the USA between 1880 and 1900. It was imported in to the UK by Selig Sonnenthal & Co of Queen Victoria Street and Lambeth Hill, London. An unusual feature of this mower is the rear roller made from iron rods rather than the normal solid castings.

The single jockey wheels at the front are often found on North American mowers of this period. The idea is allow long grass to remain upright as it enters the cutting cylinder. This arrangement was more suited to the grass found in the States, although the idea was tried on a number of British machines. However, British examples are often found in a configuration that allowed normal wooden rollers to be added or removed from a front axle to enable set-up with or without full width rollers. Green's Silens Messor and Shanks Caledonia are two of the more common mowers that can be found in this style.



CONVERT YOUR ROLLER MOWER INTO AN ELECTRICALLY POWERED CUTTING MACHINE

By fitting the powerful Ladybird Power Conversion Unit for use with standard manually operated roller mowers.



In 1970, Ladybird Appliances of Reading was manufacturing a power conversion unit for use with mowers such as the Qualcast Panther.

CONTACTING THE CLUB

Club Members often ask about the most suitable time and method of contacting the Club, which usually means Robbie or me.

Generally speaking I can take calls at any time during the day or evening as I work from home. There are times when I will not be there or will be too busy to spend a lot of time talking, but I have a voice mail facility. This takes messages when I am on the phone, so I may be there but talking to someone else. If you call, please leave your name and telephone number and a brief message about your enquiry so that I can do any checking or chasing before I call you back.

I can often answer questions about Club business when you call, but unless your query is urgent it may be preferable to send a letter or email because I can answer these when it is convenient for me (often late at night after the phone stops ringing).

Keith Wootton can be contacted by post at Milton Keynes Museum or at 7 Church Lane, Cold Higham, Towcester, Northamptonshire NN12 8LS. Tel: 01327 830675 or 0378 315966 (mobile). **Robbie Robinson** can be contacted at 10 Burchester Avenue, Headington, Oxford OX3 9NA. Tel: 01865 450899. The Club can also be contacted by email at: olc@artizan.demon.co.uk or via the web at <http://www.artizan.demon.co.uk/olc>

This is what they said:

The Ladybird power unit has been produced especially to convert roller mowers into electrically power-cutting mowers.

We confidently claim that the Ladybird is the lightest unit available, delivering more torque for less consumption of power.

The Ladybird power unit is the result of our many years experience and research into electric lawn mower drives - it is unique. A high speed AC/DC motor geared down through a train of nylon gears. Result! An almost indestructible unit, very light weight, with terrific torque and low power consumption. It can be used from any 5amp (or larger) earthed main outlet.

The Ladybird cannot be overloaded even under the most adverse cutting conditions. It can be fitted to your mower in a matter of minutes and is fully guaranteed.



Design - practical, metal and die cast aluminium components.

Power Unit - powerful AC motor, 110/115V - 230/250V fully suppressed for radio and TV.

Drive - High speed AC motor geared down through a train of nylon gears.

Controls - constant pressure type safety switch.

Weight - approximately 22lbs.

Colours - red and green.

Just plug into any earthed 5amp (or larger) mains supply. Fully guaranteed, price £14-10-0 complete with 75 feet of cable.

Incidentally, the first hand mower in my own collection was a 1910 Ransomes New Chain Automaton given to me by an uncle who had converted it to electric power in the 1960s by adding a washing machine motor in much the same way as this conversion kit. Needless to say that the mower was soon put back in its original condition! Keith Wootton.

Robbie is in a different situation because he works full time and is often out during the evenings on other projects such as organising Banbury Steam Rally. The best time to catch him is early to mid evening, between about 6 and 8pm, but **never** during the day. If Robbie is not in, and someone else answers, it may be more convenient for everyone if you offer to call back later rather than leaving a message or asking Robbie to call you.

Please bear in mind that both Robbie and I are basically doing all of this work in our spare time. Sometimes it does take a few weeks to reply to letters or even return phone calls. But we generally reply to all we receive, unless there is a bug in the system somewhere!

Michael Duck points out that the Gray's Inn mower featured in Grassbox 29 was made in Canada, which is of course more accurate than the original description of 'North America'.

Next Edition: Apr 2000
Edition 31 - February 2000
Edited and written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton