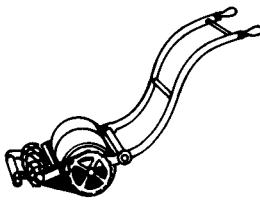


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 48

Spring 2004

JOIN US AT MILTON KEYNES

The big event looming on the horizon for the Club is the Annual Rally at Milton Keynes Museum in May. This year it's fifteen years since we organised the rally at the Museum that led to the formation of the Club. Some of us have been to every one since - and it feels like it too! There's more about the event on the advert sheet and I hope many of you can be there to make it really special. Hopefully the weather will be better than last year.

This Grassbox is crammed with features and photos and I am really pleased that many of these have been contributed by members of the Club. I'm always happy to receive items for inclusion (and most are used eventually) so keep sending them in.

You'll find out more about some new transfers on the separate sheet too. I'm pleased with them and they'll be on sale at MKM in May. See you there!



Mike Duck shows how to operate the Hall & Duck Trust's 1909 Ransomes motor mower at the Malvern Autumn Show last September.

INSURANCE NOTES

This year's third party public liability certificates have now been sent out to all members. Anyone who joined the club after 1 March will receive theirs in due course. Please be aware that this insurance is only valid if you are a current member of the Club. This means you must rejoin when we send out renewal notices in June for cover to continue for the rest of 2004.

HEADING FOR HENDON

This year we have chosen the Royal Air Force Museum in Hendon for our "Grand Day Out" on Sunday 18 April. Hendon is one of the best known museums in the country and houses an amazing collection of aircraft from World War One to the present day. We will be arriving at 11.00am (no need to wait outside, go in and find us) for a fun packed day. The museum is open from 10.00 to 18.00 and admission is FREE.

MOWER IDOL!

ITV is preparing a new documentary on the history of everyday objects and, of course, they have chosen the lawnmower as a possible subject. There is a chance that a camera crew will be at the MKM event on the Saturday to record some scenes for inclusion in the show. Be sure to dress smartly!



Christopher Thompson found another postcard featuring lawn mowers but this one is a little different - not quite Easter Bunnies but the closest he could find. The card is post-marked 1905 but it's not very easy to see the mower which seems to have a square section crossbar. It would be nice to think it was a Ransomes Lion, Leo or Cub!

WE'VE BEEN ON EASYJET

The Club was featured in the March edition of the easyJet in-flight magazine. This is the article mentioned in Grassbox 47 that was originally written for the Daily Mail.

IS IT A BRUSH OFF?

Rob Lloyd wrote in to suggest that the "mystery" item seen at the Malvern Autumn Show (Grassbox 47) could be a device like those used for clearing loose "clay" from the white lines on red clay tennis courts. Sounds possible!



This 24" Automower Type H was featured in the colour section of Grassbox 46 although it wasn't possible to include much information about it. This example, which belongs to Alan Hardwick, was made in 1939 although the model was in production from the end of 1938. It was originally ordered by Bath Council, just up the road from the Automower factory in Norton St Phillip, but was never delivered. The mower was a bit ahead of its time and has a Lister engine built under license from the Wisconsin company of America. The mower has a 10" diameter cutting cylinder and was designed for heavy duty contract mowing over rougher ground. It weighs 416lb and cost £49 when new. The picture shows Alan at the controls and was taken by Dick Hardwick.

DIARY DATES 2004

Annual Rally 2004: Saturday 15/Sunday 16 May. Our Annual General Meeting will be on the Sunday morning at 11.30am. Everyone is welcome. For additional information, please see the special article on the advertisement sheet enclosed with this issue. If you have any queries, please contact Keith at the usual places (see p4).

Bells Piece Gardeners' Open Day, Farnham: Saturday 15 May. One day event in support of Leonard Cheshire Home. Details from Colin Stone. Tel: 01428 604003 (Hindhead).

Talylllyn Railway Rally, Ty Mawr: 25/26 May. Further details and entry forms from Anthony Coulls, 23 Victoria Street, Shildon, County Durham, DL4 1PE. Tel: 07833 194286 (daytime). E: ajcoulls@yahoo.co.uk (Note: contact details changed from previous Grassbox).

Rural Life Centre, Farnham: Sunday 6 June. Special vintage lawn mower day at this popular rural museum. Details from Colin Stone. Tel: 01428 604003 (Hindhead).

West Dean Garden Show: Saturday 19/Sunday 20 June. This is a popular event with collectors throughout the south and in a lovely setting. Details from Richard Jones.

Bramshott Village Gardens Open Weekend: Saturday 19/Sunday 20 June. Display in support of local church and charities. Details from Colin Stone. Tel: 01428 604003 (Hindhead).

Big Wheels Weekend, Farming World, Faversham: Saturday 19/Sunday 20 June. Includes 25th Anniversary of NVTEC Kent Group. All mowers welcome. Details from N Lawrence (Tel: 01843 845546) or P Old (Tel: 01304 619898)(Kent).

South Suffolk Open Gardens, Layham nr Hadleigh: Sunday 20 June. Event is looking local collectors to display a few mowers. Details from Michael Woods. Tel: 01473 823798 (Ipswich). E: michaelwoods@suffolkonline.net

Banbury Steam Rally: Saturday 26/Sunday 27 June: Details from Robbie.

Upton-on-Severn Steam Rally: There will be no special mower section this year as no suitable area on the rally field could be found. The site should be enlarged before the 2005 and Tony Hopwood hopes that a grassy area will be allocated for mowers. In the meantime, there is always the Malvern Autumn Show in the same area to look forward to.

Bedfordshire Steam Fayre: Saturday 18/Sunday 19 September. Details from Dick Hardwick. Tel: 01462 816018 (Shefford).

Farming & Country Festival, Farming World, Faversham: A great day of country fun, one of the biggest vintage events in Kent. All mowers welcome. Details from N Lawrence. Tel: 01843 845546 (Kent).

Malvern Autumn Garden Show: Saturday 25/Sunday 26 September. Details from Tony Hopwood. Details from Tony Hopwood on 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).



This image of a Rotoscythe was taken from one of the company's brochures published in the 1950s.

CHECK OUT CHEFFINS

It's that time again - and a sure sign that the Summer is nearly here. The first Cheffins sale of the year will be held in Sutton, Cambridgeshire on Saturday 24 April. There are bound to be a few mowers for sale but perhaps more importantly it's a great chance to meet up with other collectors. As always we'll be having a pint in the Prince of Wales, Bluntisham in the afternoon.



Jim Ricci attended a show at Waters farm, West Sutton, Massachusetts, USA with some of his mowers and gardening tools last October.

DON'T LET SPLIT PINS DRIVE YOU NUTS!

Mowers use split pins to fix nuts against vibration, writes Tony Hopwood. Getting them out can be difficult if they are well festered and rusty. You need the right tools to extract split pins. I find small electrical side cutters and round nosed pliers are best if the pins are intact and can be loosened in the hole after the application of a release agent or good old fashioned diesel. First thing is to straighten, clean and close the bent tails, then loosen the closed end with the round nosed pliers in the loop. Try to wiggle the pin in the hole and work it out to a point where you can use the side cutters to grip it and lever it out against the nut. Don't try to tap it out with a small hammer until it is very free. If it breaks off or is too rusty to move, then force can be used to shear the pin by turning off the nut. This works best if the nut is first loosened on the bolt by rocking it with the right sized spanner. If the nut is seized, you risk shearing the bolt which may be difficult to replace. Use lots of oil.

Once the bolt is off the machines, the pin can be punched or drilled out on the bench. Use a thin parallel punch with a flat end, not a centre punch which will burr the pin over. Only use a centre punch if you are drilling the pin out then use a centre drill to start the hole in the right place.

When the pin is out, the thread may need cleaning up. Most threads on pre war mowers are BSF or BSW. So look out for old hex dies which can be run on to the bolt with a spanner rather than using a round split die which needs a holder and more space. There are still lots of cheap hex dies, often ex WD, at autojumbles and car boot sales but as years pass old imperial taps and dies will get rarer and dearer so buy them when you see them.

When refitting, mark the axis of the hole on the bolt head with a file or hacksaw so you can line it up with the nut without having to see through it. You don't even need to use split pins. I find heavy copper wire bent into a ring at one end and with a tail at the other works well and is easy to undo because it won't rust and easy to cut or shear off.



You Should Try Putting Some Petrol In It!

REBUILD A BADGE? ARE YOU CRAZY?

Christopher Proudfoot describes how he rebuilt the badge of a Greenson mower (as seen in Grassbox 47).

The badges often found on the handles of British sidewheel mowers typically have a curved banner at the bottom – where the motto would be in a heraldic badge. Sometimes, these are found broken off, particularly on Green's, which are rather thin castings.



This Greenson had broken on both sides, conveniently leaving the word GREENS in the middle, though the right-hand break went through the 'S' a bit.

One solution would have been to borrow a complete badge and have a copy cast. However, this would result in an inferior casting (and the originals were not that good, even before they acquired several layers of chipped paint and many years of corrosion). Furthermore, there are those of us who object to the loss of original material; look at it from the point of view of a future owner, would you rather buy a mower with two-thirds of the original badge, or a 100% repro. one?

Also, for the real train-spotter, there can be small variations between castings which may seem insignificant or even unnoticeable, but which might tell someone something in the future. Therefore, nothing original should be discarded.

The photos show the stages in rebuilding this one. I started off with a piece of tinplate, turning the bottom edge up to the correct curve, using a complete badge as a template (I could have used what was left of the curve on the broken one, had another not been available). The object of the raised edge was partly to provide a positive location in building up and assembling the sections, and partly to stiffen the tinplate. The tin does not need to go far up the back of the badge, but just as far as the lower screw-hole is useful; clamp it in place and then force a tapered punch into the hole from the back, indenting the tin with a datum point which means it will always go back in the same position.



The missing cast iron is replaced by aluminium, partly because it is easy to work, and partly because its light weight will put less strain on the glued joints. Two sections of flat aluminium are cut roughly to the outline of the ears, as thick as the original without the lettering. The broken edges of the badge are filed clean, the aluminium bits filed to make a clean butt joint, and then the two are glued in place, with the tinplate back glued on at the same time. Glued? I was using a strong resin type called JB Auto-Weld, which is grey in colour and possibly stronger than Araldite – I don't know, and I am sure that Araldite would be fine. I left plenty of it built up on the damaged letter 'S', to be trimmed to shape once it had set.



Then, once the adhesive has set hard, trim the new metal to the correct outline, cut some thin strips of aluminium to make the 'rim', bend it to shape and glue it in place. Now for the lettering. I made these out of aluminium, building the first three out of simple strips glued in place. The O was made out of a strip bent into an oval (difficult to get it just right, so leave it a bit thick until the glue has set and then do the final shaping with the aid of a Dremel. (If you haven't come across one of these yet, they are very handy little miniature electric drills, meant for people who like making their own jewellery. I don't, but among 'impossible' tasks I have managed with the Dremel, apart from shaping mower badges, were removing a broken tap from a brass gramophone soundbox and taking a piece of Georgian glass out of its 200-year-old putty without breaking it any more than it already was.)



The N was cut and filed from aluminium in one piece, and with hindsight I perhaps should have done this for the H and the E. Making them in sections was quicker initially, but gluing them in place and keeping the bits all in alignment was a bit of fun. Final shaping (both of aluminium and resin) was done with the Dremel, with a fine file worked across the top to get it all flat.

The pics. show the basic parts ready for assembly, those parts in place, the letters added (and the iron treated for rust) and the final result after painting. I didn't count the man-hours involved. What's the point?

JP NUMBERING AND DATING

By Henry Ellis

Hand Mowers

Following my article in Grassbox 44 a considerable number of responses from members, representing about 300 mowers, has enabled me to review the numbering system I had originally proposed and has rebutted my contention that dating was not possible from the serial numbers. From the numbers of the mowers I now have, it seems that from about 1926 the serial numbers not only coded the model and size but also the year and month of manufacture.

Before, I suggested four distinct numbering sequences but there now appear to be three. From 1921 to about 1926 there were numbers only (apart from the leading size- code letter of the Supers) so it is still not possible to date them accurately. From about 1926 to 1951 there was a year letter, A (1926) to Z (1951) followed by a month letter A (January) to L (December). Before these letters came the model/size code letter(s) as listed in the previous article – for example **JR LC 202** is a 12" Major (JR) made in 1937 (L) in March (C) of that year, and **XM LF 51** is an 11" Minor (XM) made in 1937 (L) in June (F). The number following the letters is the number of machines of the same type built in that particular month; for example, if they continued to make 11" Minors into July 1937, the first one would be XM LG 1. Similarly, the first Major made in July 1937 (if they did make one), would be JR LG 1; this is on the basis that I have recorded no 'duplicate' numbers so far.

When JP got to the end of December 1951 (ZL) they started through the alphabet a second time as indicated by 2AA (January 1952), but this time the year/month code was followed by the model/size code letter(s) – so **2EL H 55** is the 55th 12" Monarch (H) made in December (L) in 1956 (2E) and **2TE G 57** is the 57th 12" Maxees Mk3 (G) made in May (E) in 1971 (2T). Incidentally this is the latest (youngest) JP I've recorded and by the end of 1971 mower production at JP had ceased altogether (Leicester Mercury, 11 January 1972).

The mains electric models (based on the Super hand mower and made from 1947 to 1955) were numbered in the same way but with the prefix **E/**. For example **E/F YE 3** is the 3rd 14" Super Electric (F) made in May (E) 1950 (Y), and **E/2CB X 3** is the 3rd 16" Super Electric (X) made in February (B) 1954 (2C). When Super hand mowers were converted to mains electric operation, the prefix became **EC/** as in **EC/--FA 23**, a 12" Super hand mower originally made in January 1931 and converted sometime post-war. There were mains electric and two-stroke engine conversions for the Monarch and Maxees 12" and 14" models in the late 1950s/early 1960s (driving the cylinder cutter only), but as I've yet to locate any, I am unsure of how they were numbered. Can anyone help?

The Golf Green (GG) and Bowling Green (BG) versions of the 16" Super hand mower (12" and 14" versions also exist) are characterised by an aluminium delivery plate and centre section of the rear rollers. They usually, but not always, have a nine-bladed rotary cutter, an extra-thin bottom blade and a rear sprocket with more teeth than the front sprocket to speed-up the cylinder cutter. The numbering has the same pattern as the other hand mowers, eg **AX ZE 10** – 16" Super with aluminium parts (AX) made in May (E) 1951 (Z). This example is the BG version – the GG version could have had the same number; the difference between the versions is that the GG has the front rollers behind the front tie bar to shorten the wheelbase.

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 07778 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@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk or the web at: <http://www.oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk>

Power Mowers



I have some difficulty here, as I need more examples to make sense of power mower numbering/dating. Pre-war, there were the 16" Super and 24" Super Power mowers and their serial numbers start with the type number: 22 for the 16", and 21 for the 24" (both air- and water-cooled models). I have recorded some with year/month letters and others, presumably pre-1926, with a type number followed by a number only. Post-war, saw the introduction of the 14" and 16" Super Simplexes in 1947, with the numbering recognisably the same as the hand mowers but without the month letter, so for example, **PX V 725** seems to be the 725th 16" Super Simplex (X) power mower (P) made in 1947 (V), and **2C PF 218** is the 218th 14" Super Simplex (F) power mower (P) made in 1954 (2C). These examples are fitted with 2-stroke engines; when 4-stroke engines are fitted the prefix **4/** is added. From 1955, with the introduction of the Super Mk 4 power mowers, the numbering changed to B15, B17 or B20 depending on size, followed by the year letter and then a number, as in **B17 2D 35**, which is the 35th 17" Super Mk4 (B17) made in 1955 (2D); whether it is actually the 35th 17" Mk4 or the 35th Mk4 of any size, is not yet clear. Super Mk4 electric models are numbered as the petrol engine versions but with an **E/** prefix.

When the Super Mk5 came out in 1962, the number was prefixed by **5/** as in **5B15 2K 4**. After about 1965 (year code 2N) the numbering appears to change to the pattern of **20 5 E 57** and changes again in about 1967, when the Super Mk5B came out (this model has a modified transmission with a toothed belt drive from the engine to the rear rollers, doing away with the multi-plate clutch), to, for example, **20 5 TG 108** (T for Toothed belt?); the last Super Mk5B I've recorded has TH in its number and is probably in the final year of production. The 14" and 16" Simplexes power mowers seem to follow the same numbering pattern as the Super Mk4/5s, with the few Simplexes B models I've recorded also incorporating a T in the number.

The 14" K-type power (KP) and electric (KE) mowers, from 1957 onwards are relatively rare, but the two I've seen seem to carry the date in a more obvious way, as in **KP 12/57** and **KE 26/62**, but I need more examples to confirm this. Again, can anyone help?

Thank you to all who have responded over the past year with your JP numbers; they have been a huge help. To those that haven't been able to respond so far, do please get in touch.

Next Edition: Jul 2004

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