

A Green Chairman... a Vertical Mower... and Happiness...

by **F. A. LAYTON**, Superintendent, Cypress Point Club, Pebble Beach, Calif.

Once upon a time I had a green chairman who had an obsession with grain on greens. We used all the combs, brushes and rakes available at the time, and we even invented a few of our own. None did the job as we wished.

Then a machine came into production specifically designed to mow putting green turf vertically. I called his attention to this new machine and suggested that we buy one. He agreed. The machine was delivered during the winter, and since the grass was dormant at this time, we postponed its use until early spring.

The day finally arrived when we were to try our mower. There didn't seem to be much information about the height we should set the machine so that it would do a good job. We just made a guess adjustment and ran the machine in a north and south direction.

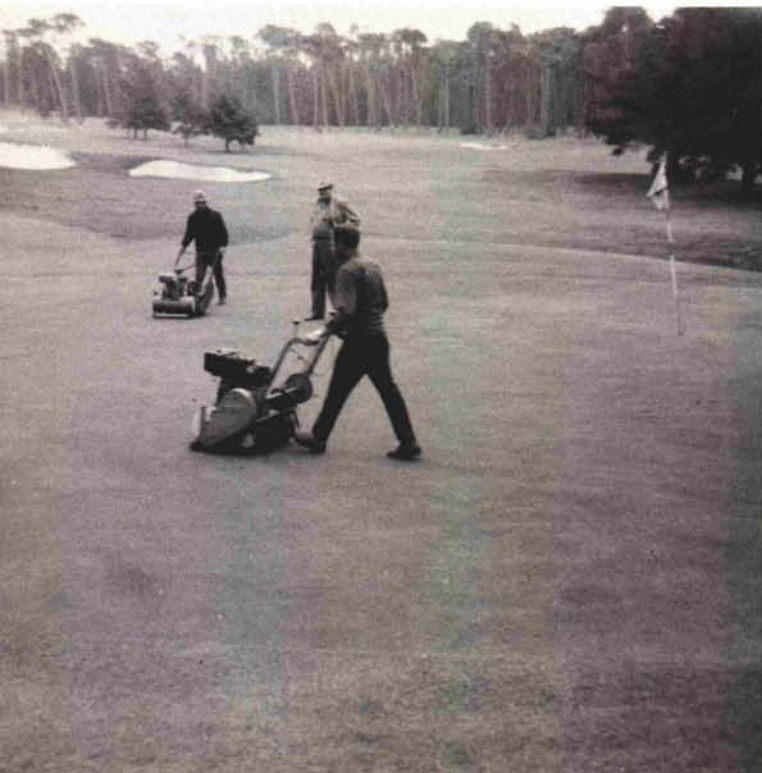
It was soon obvious that the mower was set too high, so we lowered the cut and tried again. Once again it seemed that we were too high; we lowered the machine a second time. Now we were getting something done!

We ran the machine over the green twice at right angles to each cut. We then mowed the green and were pleased with the results. There were a few spots that were quite badly scored, but we figured they would heal over quickly, and so we continued with our job.

We finished all greens the next day, and then I went back to check those that were done the previous day. They were quite brown, but I knew this would soon pass. However, after another day the greens looked worse than ever. I was checking them each day now very closely, even getting down on my hands and knees and using a magnifying glass.

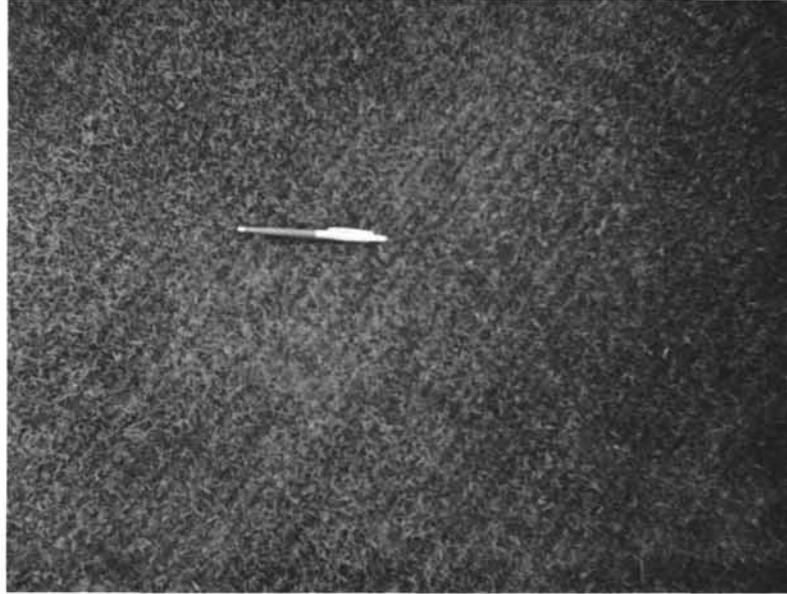
Greens in this condition certainly proved a problem. What to do? I knew what I wanted to do: dig a hole and bury them, but of course this was out of the question. Ten days later there was evidence of new growth, only about 1/32 of an inch, but a start. They finally healed and we had nice looking greens once more.

You may well imagine my surprise when, about one month later, the green chairman said



The action during one of the light but double vertical mowing operations at Cypress Point Club, Pebble Beach, Calif. Fred Layton, Superintendent, looks on.

How light is "light vertical mowing"?
Author Layton says to "just touch the
grass blades."



some of the greens were developing grain and we should run the machine again. I counted to 10 (slowly), and started to mention color and general appearance of the greens. I did not get very far. He admitted that the greens did look off color for a while, but they putted nicely and that was the important thing. The appearance of the greens now was in second place.

The next day we went to the far dark corner of the barn (where we had stored the machine for the rest of the summer) and brought the monster out of hiding. We dusted it off, and just to make certain we did not have a repeat performance, we raised the machine to a higher cut. We followed our original plan of mowing in two directions on each green. The results were not too bad, but still with considerable discoloration. We then returned the machine to its dark corner because this would be the last it would be used that summer.

Some people are obstinate. About one month later this man wanted the machine run again. I did not care too much for the idea because we had a member-guest tournament in about 10 days and I couldn't see the greens in such a condition at this time. But the green chairman was a nice fellow and so we would give him his wish, with reservations.

We raised the height of cut until we were just into the grass and let it go at that height. The result was that we removed the grain but had no drastic change in color. We (the crew and I) were very well pleased with the results. Judging from the comment from the members, they, too, were very happy with the condition of the greens.

A short time later—you guessed it—"Let's run the machine again!" We left the machine at the higher cut and again had no discoloration or deep score marks. This, then, must be the way the machine should be run. Not too

deep a cut, but use it more often. We used the machine once more that year, and because winter was coming, we called it quits. We would start again the next spring.

During the winter I gave the vertical mower some additional thought and came up with the following schedule. First, we would apply fertilizer to the green. Then about 10 days later we would use the machine.

The first cut would be fairly deep, about 1/8 inch. The greens were mowed at 1/4 inch, so we were removing about half the grass.

Then, when the greens had about two weeks to heal we would top dress them. From then on we would fertilize each month and a week later we would run our machine. The height of cut would be at about 3/16 inch. I mention figures here, but we still go more by what the results look like, not by a measured setting. I believe it is called "the eyeball adjustment."

This program was started 15 years ago. It was not so much my idea, but rather at the insistence of the green chairman. At the time I'm certain neither of us thought it would ever evolve into what it has become today. He has since moved away. The program was standard operating procedure quite some time before he left.

Although it started a long time ago and we have tried certain variations, we still come back to our original plan: not too deep a cut at one time and run the machine more often; monthly in most cases. There are many times when you will see the greens and will conclude that they do not need verticle mowing. We have found this to be negative thinking. One of the keys to the success of the program is the regularity of operation:

Twice over lightly, and each month of the growing season.