

Institution of Agricultural Engineers

Michael Dwyer Memorial Prize 2014

AUSTIN JARRETT

Austin trained at Writtle Agricultural College and left with a HND in Agricultural and Mechanical Engineering in 1985. He then spent two years with the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) on placement at Ratu Kadavulevu, Fiji as a lecturer in Agricultural Engineering.

On his return to the UK, he took up a position in sales with Turfland Professional Turf Equipment Ltd. Turfland specialised in the supply and service of a range of products to the rapidly growing turf production industry, which was mechanising quickly at that time. Austin gained invaluable commercial experience and applied his mechanical engineering skills in this off-shoot to agriculture at a time, when these businesses were growing profitably and were eager to embrace innovative mechanisation.

In 1990, Austin decided to make the progression to become self-employed and started Turfmech Machinery Ltd; importing, distributing and servicing specialised and niche machinery for the UK golf and turf production industry. As the business grew he started to design and manufacture machinery for golf courses and import, then modify American machinery to operate in British conditions.

Manufacturing operations grew rapidly in the 90's with the development of reciprocating hollow-tine aeration products for golf greens. This combined with a beneficial alliance with a major American golf machinery brand gave his company access to the ever expanding world-wide golf course market.

In 2007 he acquired the well-known Allett Mower brand from Reekie Engineering in an expansion plan designed to access the football stadium and sports-surface market. This business has now been grown with international sales of professional mowing systems which mow and stripe some of the most well-known stadiums of the world. This range of cylinder mower products was strategically expanded further in 2011 with the acquisition of the ATCO mower product range from 'Bosch Lawn and garden'. Increased sales into domestic mower markets followed, with mass market customers such as Homebase.

After leading the expansion into a worldwide market in the 90's Austin identified an opportunity from his own experiences and started another associated business called Steel Service Centre Ltd (SSC Laser). This sub-contract business has grown since that time to have six regional offices in the UK, with a further two manufacturing sites. SSC Laser specialise in supplying small British engineering and manufacturing businesses with laser cut profiles on a next-day basis. This strategy supports Austin's career long vision that a sustainable British engineering industry should be based on innovation and a quick response to change. These are the main competitive attributes a successful company need when competing against low cost countries in today's global market.

In his spare time Austin is an Ultra Marathon runner. Austin has gained a place in the 2014 Marathon Des Sables, a 250km self-supported race across the Sahara desert, described by the Discovery Channel as the 'toughest footrace on Earth'.