



the golf course

Cut and run

Be aware that although green speed is seemingly easy to measure, it can also be notoriously inaccurate. Accuracy will depend on the skill of the user, using a recognised standard operating method, with suitable Stimpmeter spots that should be used each repetition and in calm weather conditions (wind speed no more than 10mph). In windy conditions, readings should be taken under cover, which is not practical day-to-day. Therefore, comparing green speed figures taken at different sites, by different people, in different weather conditions, is likely to be meaningless.

However, measuring green speed on your own site for the purpose of understanding and improvement can be useful – more on that later.

What are the key factors affecting green speed?

The table shows the main aspects that will affect green speed. As you can see, top of the table in importance is the weather, which we have no ability to control.

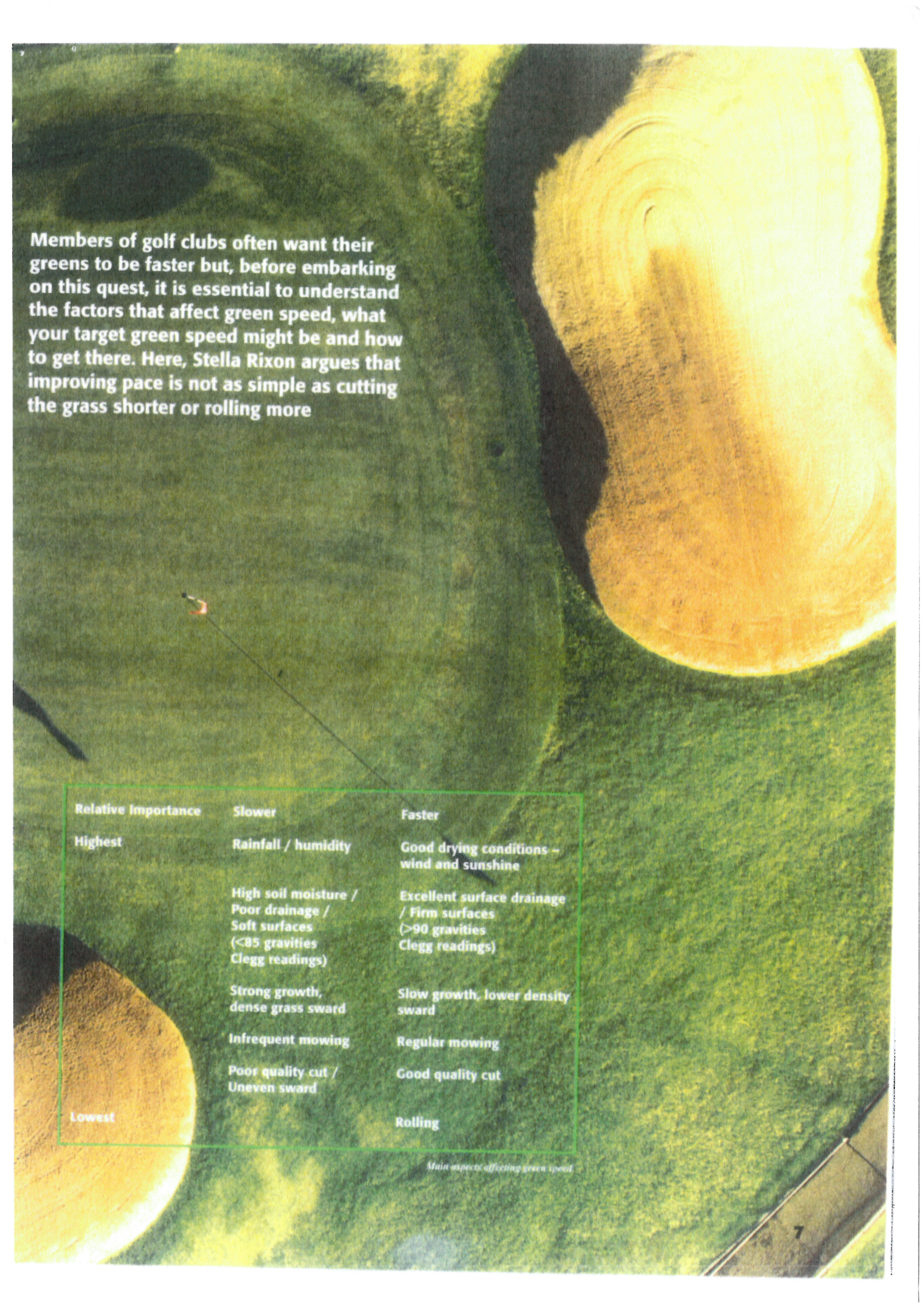
Environment

However, we can affect the ability of the greens to dry out by maximising drainage, air movement and light to the surfaces. This is also vital for the general health of your turf. To demonstrate this point, measure green speed (accurately) throughout the year on a green open to light and air, compared to one in a sheltered and shaded position, and you will soon appreciate the limitations of the green's environment and what degree of variation is found on your course. There can easily be a foot difference between the wettest and driest greens on a course.

Therefore, a thorough assessment of the environment around each green is a good starting point. Increasing light availability from the east and south and opening up to the prevailing wind (usually from the south-west) should be your focus for selective tree / shrub removal. If tree work is not possible, then, if your budget allows, clubs can consider use of fans and lighting rigs. However, this is not attainable for most. In which case, a sheltered green will rely heavily on excellent drainage to give it any chance of drying out. Essentially, take all available action to improve the growing environments in an effort to naturally improve green speed.

Firmness is the key

For year-round sustainable pace you need firm, dry surfaces which require good drainage. Very few UK greens have sufficiently high infiltration rates to be able to maintain moisture less than 30 per cent year-round. The majority are not blessed with well-drained soils and therefore need good surface run-off, light / air, soil improvement and control of organic matter levels (less than four per cent) through sand amelioration and, in many cases, installation of drainage systems.



Members of golf clubs often want their greens to be faster but, before embarking on this quest, it is essential to understand the factors that affect green speed, what your target green speed might be and how to get there. Here, Stella Rixon argues that improving pace is not as simple as cutting the grass shorter or rolling more

Relative Importance	Slower	Faster
Highest	Rainfall / humidity	Good drying conditions – wind and sunshine
	High soil moisture / Poor drainage / Soft surfaces (<85 gravities Clegg readings)	Excellent surface drainage / Firm surfaces (>90 gravities Clegg readings)
	Strong growth, dense grass sward	Slow growth, lower density sward
	Infrequent mowing	Regular mowing
	Poor quality cut / Uneven sward	Good quality cut
Lowest		Rolling

Main aspects affecting green speed