

- [home](#)
- [news](#)
- [features](#)
- [comment](#)
- [letters](#)
- [advertise](#)
- [subscribe](#)
- [about us](#)
- [contact us](#)

IOG Saltex: open space, open air, open mind

With an eye on the weather, The Leisure Review visited IOG Saltex to see what an exhibition for the leisure sector looks like in the open air.

The ten-minute boat trip from Windsor town centre to the racecourse is a reassuringly low-tech way to arrive at IOG Saltex and entering the exhibition site from the river also puts the Institute of Groundsmanship stand that features a 1930s groundsman's truck and potting shed, both lovingly restored, among the early points of interest. Together they provide a pleasingly traditional view of the open space sector and a stark contrast to much of the rest of the show. Away from the museum pieces, a modern, hi-tech approach to the 'sport, amenities, landscaping' of the show's strap line is demonstrated at every turn and the non-expert visitor is likely to come to the swift – and correct – conclusion that this is a sector of the leisure industry that has come a very long way from the potting shed.

All the things that one might expect to find at a show dedicated to open space management and landscaping are here: machinery and tractors of all descriptions; holes dug at high speed by bizarrely shaped equipment; piles of earth being shifted with great precision from one side of a square of ground to the other; outdoor clothing and personal protective equipment; horticultural provisions and expertise; pole-climbing and tree-felling; turf-lifting and line-marking. The sounds of this showground are the sounds of labouring engines, loud conversations and flags beating in the stiff breeze. Planes overhead, making for Heathrow at three-minute intervals, provide a regular background drone and serve as a reminder of the pleasantries of an outdoor event.

This is a modern industrial sector and the demands and challenges of the modern workplace are made very clear at every stand. There is a brisk trade in bibs and boots and all the material to keep man and machine safe on site. 'Are you compliant or complacent?' ask the people at Armorguard, sending a shiver down the spine of all but the most confident of passers-by. Few look surprised or even impressed that site safes – secure, moveable lockers and containers – come so large or that line-marking machines are being guided by lasers. Motorised wheelbarrows and vacuum excavation systems raise eyebrows only among those who have not been paying sufficiently close attention over the past couple of years and The Leisure Review has to keep its excitement well hidden as it steals furtive looks at the Leica Geosystems display.

The full breadth of the sector is also on show, making the promise of 'sport, amenities, landscaping' seem something of an understatement. There is soil and seating, planters and playgrounds, belts and braces; proper equipment and fitting environments for sports of all kinds; matting for all uses, practical or imagined; outdoor gym equipment and indoor ice rinks; aluminium boats, including skiffs, punts and platforms; amphibious weed clearers; traps and trailers; golf carts and greenkeeping; and Kubota on a grand scale. If it is not here on site, there is a strong chance that you might not need it.

The sun comes out, conditions are dry under foot and Windsor racecourse with Saltex in full swing is an interesting and enjoyable place to be. Such is the rush of bonhomie and pleasantries that even the green Ransomes bags, placed on the shoulder of every visitor as part of the exhibition's welcome pack, seem stylish. It is the sort of place where sitting down for pint before lunch seems appropriate rather than reckless and where comments over the price of the coffee are pointed rather than bitter. It is no surprise to spot someone who looks very much like a senior member of the team that presents another major exhibition for the leisure sector enjoying a lunchtime meeting outdoors, perhaps discussing how some of this feel of relaxed purposefulness might be captured. Could taking the roof off the NEC be one of the points on the agenda?

The roof is, of course, the issue. Anyone who has been to Saltex more than twice has probably had the damp experience: squelching through the turf in the belting rain and wondering where the nearest exit is. It is also notable that even on the best of days the scale of the Windsor site can be daunting and the emphasis on the outdoor exhibits can make the seminar programme seem peripheral. However, when the sky is clear and the weather is clement it is hard to resist the conclusion that you are in the right place to find things out, do some business and go away with some new ideas to go with your new contacts. And at the end of the day when you are sitting on the boat heading back towards Windsor the NEC seems a reassuringly long way away.



Digging the new breed: precision soiling

“The sun comes out, conditions are dry under foot and Windsor racecourse with Saltex in full swing is an interesting and enjoyable place to be.”



Displays of professional dexterity



The Parks Mobile, circa 1934

The Leisure Review, October 2009

© Copyright of all material on this site is retained by *The Leisure Review* or the individual contributors where stated. Contact *The Leisure Review* for details.

The Leisure Review is written,
designed and published by:

tlr.comms
TLR Communications Limited