phil**brown**

When the going gets turf

The life and times of a mowing magnate

When I mentioned in the office the other day that I had once run a lawn mowing business, people looked surprised. What, you're telling me I don't look like someone who used to mow lawns for a crust?

I may have overstated the case though. Business is too grandiose a term for what I used to do and it was always on a pretty small scale.

As a teenager, I started doing odd gardening jobs (some odder than others) to earn money that I could put towards a new surfboard.

I practised my skills as a gardener on our neighbours with mixed success. A lady who lived near us on the Gold Coast, a Mrs Langford (a gracious woman who was a former dancer and a friend of Sir Robert Helpmann), asked me to weed her garden for $20. She probably shouldn't have gone inside and left me to it, though, because when she came back out she screamed. The things I had pulled out of her garden bed weren't weeds at all as it turned out. Who knew?

> I nearly mowed their cat once because I wasn't looking where I was going

A mate and I did gardening work for one of the teachers at school too. He was a real slave driver and while we slogged our guts out on a Saturday morning helping landscape his backyard, he would sit on the back deck and knock the top off a tallie while watching us work. I liked his style.

I did mowing for a number of other occasional clients including a woman who ran a modelling agency. She had a rather attractive daughter who was a model herself and she tended to disport herself in a bikini on a banana chair in the backyard which was a tad distracting. I nearly mowed their cat on one occasion because I wasn't looking where I was going.

I did more mowing at university in Toowoomba and at one stage I got so busy I started subcontracting to mates.

There was something meditative about mowing – the repetition of going up and down, up and down – that appealed to me. I have been thinking about all this since doing a story on a new exhibition called *Garden* that has opened at the excellent QUT Art Museum. One artist, Brisbane sculptor Sebastian Di Mauro, has done works featuring artificial grass and he said his inspiration had been his mowing adventures. He grew up in South Johnstone, north Queensland and, as a boy, it was his job to mow the grass, which gets pretty lush up that way. To some, mowing is a chore but Sebastian found it fun and used to make patterns with his mower. Cheap thrills, right?

I enjoyed mowing too but nowadays I have someone else mow my lawn for me and, let me tell you, that is equally satisfying.