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CHEMICAL CONTROL OF *POA TRIVIALIS*  
ON  
NEW ZEALAND RACETRACKS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Applied Science at  
Massey University

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1996

## ABSTRACT

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*Poa trivialis* is a perennial grass weed commonly found in perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) racetrack swards throughout New Zealand. Its presence is undesirable as it does not tolerate high wear and is susceptible to dying out over the summer. Two pot trials at Massey University and one field trial carried out at the Awapuni racecourse were conducted during winter and spring 1995 to test the relative susceptibility of *Poa trivialis* and perennial ryegrass to a wide range of herbicides. A bioassay was also conducted to determine whether herbicide residues from the field trial could affect the germination of perennial ryegrass seed sown soon after treatment. Results showed that none of the chemicals at their chosen respective rates could completely remove *Poa trivialis* from a racetrack sward in the spring without some damage being caused to perennial ryegrass. Propyzamide and fenoxaprop at rates of 0.2 and 0.15 kg/ha respectively showed the most potential of the chemicals, severely damaging *Poa trivialis* (causing 50 to 75% reductions) with no adverse effect on perennial ryegrass 8 weeks after spraying. Propyzamide can also provide some control of *Poa annua*. Fenoxaprop was not improved by increasing the application rate or adding an oil. The performance of fenoxaprop was substantially reduced when applied with either MCPA or a picloram/triclopyr mix. Dalapon and asulam showed good potential to control *Poa trivialis* but at the high rates tested caused variable or harmful effects to perennial ryegrass. Ethofumesate and chlorpropham applied at rates of 2.0 and 2.5 kg/ha respectively gave inadequate control of *Poa trivialis*. None of the above herbicides, when used in the field trial, resulted in residues which reduced the germination of perennial ryegrass seed sown 3 weeks after spraying. Herbicides tested in the pot trials which showed poor control of *Poa trivialis* were atrazine, dicamba, isoproturon/diflufenican, linuron, mecoprop, methabenzthiazuron, metsulfuron, pendimethalin, prometryne, thifensulfuron-methyl, triclopyr, and trinexapac-ethyl. Diuron applied at 2.6 kg/ha provided good control of *Poa trivialis* but caused significant damage to perennial ryegrass. It is concluded that an integrated management approach that incorporates both cultural and chemical techniques will be required to control *Poa trivialis* on New Zealand racetracks. Future trial work should be carried out on propyzamide applied at rates of 0.2-0.3 kg/ha in autumn to establish the most appropriate time of year to apply this herbicide.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My sincere thanks to my supervisors, Dr Kerry Harrington, senior lecturer in the Plant Science Department who supplied whole-hearted assistance and guidance during the experimental work as well as in the subsequent manuscript preparation, and Martin Wrigley for his supervision, constructive criticism and critical suggestions.

I would like to thank New Zealand Racing Industry Board for partial funding of this project, and both the Sports Turf Bursary and Helen Akers Scholarship for financial assistance with living expenses.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their financial support and encouragement during this period of study at Massey University.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF PLATES .....	x
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
2.1 ROUGHSTALKED MEADOW GRASS ( <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> ) .....	2
2.2 IMPORTANCE IN NEW ZEALAND.....	2
2.3 BIOLOGY OF <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> .....	4
2.3.1 Morphology.....	4
2.3.2 Seed production and germination.....	6
2.3.3 Vegetative reproduction .....	7
2.4 REACTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS.....	7
2.4.1 Light .....	7
2.4.2 Temperature stress .....	8
2.4.3 Moisture stress .....	8
2.4.4 Wear tolerance .....	9
2.4.5 Nutritional requirements .....	10
2.4.6 Summary .....	11
2.5 CULTURAL CONTROL OF <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> .....	11
2.5.1 Prevent or reduce compaction .....	11
2.5.2 Select suitable turf grass species and cultivars. ....	12

2.5.3 Mow at correct height.....	12
2.5.4 Avoid excessive phosphate levels.....	13
2.5.5 Avoid shallow watering.....	13
2.5.6 Removal of thatch.....	13
2.5.7 Summary.....	14
<b>2.6 CHEMICAL CONTROL OF <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i>.....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.6.1 Ethofumesate.....	15
2.6.2 Carbamates.....	17
2.6.3 Dalapon.....	18
2.6.4 Fenoxaprop.....	19
2.6.5 Propyzamide.....	19
2.6.6 Sulfonyl ureas.....	21
2.6.7 Substituted ureas.....	21
2.6.8 Isoproturon/Diflufenican.....	23
2.6.9 Mecoprop.....	23
2.6.10 Dicamba.....	24
2.6.11 Triclopyr.....	24
2.6.12 Triazines.....	24
2.6.13 Pendimethalin.....	25
<b>2.7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3. METHODS AND MATERIALS.....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	27
3.2 TRIAL 1 ( INITIAL SCREENING POT TRIAL).....	27
3.2.1 Treatments.....	28
3.2.2 Spray application.....	29
3.2.3 Measurements.....	29
3.3 TRIAL 2 (FIELD TRIAL).....	31
3.3.1 Treatments.....	33
3.3.2 Spray application.....	33
3.3.3 Measurements.....	34
3.4 TRIAL 3 (SECOND SCREENING POT TRIAL).....	35
3.4.1 Treatments.....	35

3.4.2 Spray application .....	37
3.4.3 Measurements .....	37
3.5 TRIAL 4 (RESIDUE PERSISTENCE BIOASSAY) .....	39
3.5.1 Measurements .....	39
3.6 DATA ANALYSIS.....	41
<b>4. RESULTS .....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1 TRIAL 1 (INITIAL SCREENING POT TRIAL) .....	42
4.1.1 <i>Poa trivialis</i> (visual damage scores) .....	42
4.1.2 Perennial ryegrass (visual damage scores) .....	47
4.1.3 Shoot fresh weights .....	50
4.2 TRIAL 2 (FIELD TRIAL) .....	53
4.2.1 <i>Poa trivialis</i> (visual damage scores) .....	53
4.2.2 Perennial ryegrass (visual damage scores) .....	53
4.2.3 Change in sward composition.....	54
4.3 TRIAL 3 (SECOND SCREENING POT TRIAL).....	59
4.3.1 <i>Poa trivialis</i> pots (visual damage scores) .....	59
4.3.2 Perennial ryegrass pots (visual damage scores) .....	62
4.3.3 Shoot fresh weights .....	65
4.4 TRIAL 4 (RESIDUE PERSISTENCE BIOASSAY).....	68
4.4.1 Plant counts .....	68
4.4.2 Shoot fresh weights .....	68
<b>5. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>69</b>
5.1 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HERBICIDES.....	69
5.1.1 Ethofumesate.....	69
5.1.2 Carbamates.....	70
5.1.3 Dalapon .....	71
5.1.4 Fenoxaprop .....	72
5.1.5 Propyzamide.....	73
5.1.6 Ureas .....	74
5.1.7 Isoproturon + diflufenican mixture .....	74
5.1.8 Triazines .....	74

5.1.9 Others.....	75
5.2 TIMING OF HERBICIDE APPLICATION.....	75
5.3 WHY AND WHEN TO UNDERSOW .....	76
5.4 COST OF THE HERBICIDES .....	77
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	79
7. REFERENCES.....	81
8. APPENDIX 1.....	90
9. APPENDIX 2.....	91

## LIST OF FIGURES

---

FIGURE 2.1: DIAGRAM OF THE <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> PLANT.....	5
FIGURE 4.1: THE AVERAGE FRESH WEIGHT OF <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> SHOOTS HARVESTED FROM POTS ON 24 NOVEMBER 1995, 19 WEEKS AFTER APPLICATION OF THE HERBICIDES.....	51
FIGURE 4.2 THE AVERAGE FRESH WEIGHT OF PERENNIAL RYEGRASS SHOOTS HARVESTED FROM POTS ON 24 NOVEMBER 1995, 19 WEEKS AFTER THE APPLICATION OF THE HERBICIDES.....	52
FIGURE 4.3: THE AVERAGE GROUND COVER (%) IN PLOTS ON 28 SEPTEMBER 1995 (A WEEK BEFORE SPRAYING).....	56
FIGURE 4.4: THE AVERAGE GROUND COVER (%) IN PLOTS ON 18 NOVEMBER 1995 (6 WEEKS AFTER SPRAYING). ....	57
FIGURE 4.5: THE AVERAGE FRESH WEIGHT OF <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> SHOOTS HARVESTED FROM POTS ON THE 14 JANUARY 1996, 6 WEEKS AFTER APPLICATION OF THE HERBICIDES.....	66
FIGURE 4.6: THE AVERAGE FRESH WEIGHT OF PERENNIAL RYEGRASS SHOOTS HARVESTED FROM POTS ON 14 JANUARY 1996, 16 WEEKS AFTER APPLICATION OF THE HERBICIDES.....	67
FIGURE 4.7: THE AVERAGE SHOOT FRESH WEIGHTS OF PERENNIAL RYEGRASS PLANTS AT HARVEST 1 DECEMBER 1995, 5 WEEKS AFTER SOWING THE SEED.....	68

## LIST OF TABLES

---

TABLE 2.1: THE RELATIVE WEAR TOLERANCE OF TWELVE TURF GRASSES WHEN GROWN IN THEIR RESPECTIVE REGIONS OF ADAPTATION. ....	10
TABLE 3.1 TREATMENTS APPLIED AT POST-EMERGENCE TO POTTED <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> AND PERENNIAL RYEGRASS AT THE PLANT GROWTH UNIT MASSEY UNIVERSITY ON 14 JULY 1995.....	28
TABLE 3.2: BLOCK DESIGNATIONS FOR GROUND COVER % OF <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> IN THE FIELD TRIAL.....	32
TABLE 3.3: TREATMENTS APPLIED TO FIELD PLOTS OF <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> AT AWAPUNI RACECOURSE ON 3 OCTOBER 1995 .....	33
TABLE 3.4: TREATMENT APPLIED AT POST-EMERGENCE TO POTTED <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> AND PERENNIAL RYEGRASS AT THE PLANT GROWTH UNIT MASSEY UNIVERSITY ON 19 OCTOBER 1995.....	36
TABLE 4.1: THE EFFECT OF HERBICIDES 3, 6 AND 12 WEEKS AFTER BEING APPLIED TO TRANSPLANTED <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> IN POTS ON 14 JULY 1995.....	43
TABLE 4.2: THE EFFECT OF HERBICIDES 3, 6 AND 12 WEEKS AFTER BEING APPLIED TO TRANSPLANTED PERENNIAL RYEGRASS PLANTS IN POTS ON 14 JULY 1995.....	48
TABLE 4.3: THE EFFECT OF HERBICIDES APPLIED IN THE FIELD TRIAL ON 22 OCTOBER 1995 TO <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> AND PERENNIAL RYEGRASS 2 WEEKS AFTER SPRAYING.....	54
TABLE 4.4: THE EFFECT OF HERBICIDES 3, 6 AND 12 WEEKS AFTER BEING APPLIED TO TRANSPLANTED <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> PLANTS IN POTS ON 19 OCTOBER 1995.....	60
TABLE 4.5: THE EFFECT OF HERBICIDES 3, 6 AND 12 WEEKS AFTER BEING APPLIED TO TRANSPLANTED PERENNIAL RYEGRASS PLANTS IN POTS ON 19 OCTOBER 1995...	63
TABLE 5.1: PRICE PER HECTARE FOR APPLICATION OF HERBICIDES ASSESSED IN THE FIELD TRIAL (SOURCE OLIVER & BURTT 1995).....	78

## LIST OF PLATES

---

PLATE 3.1: THE "SWINGING PENDULUM SPRAYER" WHICH WAS USED IN THE POT TRIALS .....	30
PLATE 3.2: THE FIELD SITE ON THE DAY OF APPLICATION, 3 OCTOBER 1995 .....	32
PLATE 3.3: THE SHELTERED OUTDOOR SITE AT MASSEY UNIVERSITY PLANT GROWTH UNIT WHERE THE 2ND POT TRIAL WAS CARRIED OUT WITH THE <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> POTS IN THE FOREGROUND UNDER SHADE CLOTH.....	38
PLATE 3.4: THE POTS OF THE GERMINATED PERENNIAL RYEGRASS ( <i>LOLIUM PERENNE</i> ) SEEDS, CULTIVAR "ELLETT" THAT WERE USED IN THE SEED GERMINATION TEST AT THE MASSEY UNIVERSITY PLANT GROWTH UNIT. ....	40
PLATE 4.1: <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH ATRAZINE.....	44
PLATE 4.2: <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH DIURON.....	44
PLATE 4.3: <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH FENOXAPROP.....	45
PLATE 4.4: <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH ISOPROTURON/DIFLUFENICAN MIXTURE.....	45
PLATE 4.5: <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> 12 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT ISOPROTURON/DIFLUFENICAN MIXTURE.....	46
PLATE 4.6: PERENNIAL RYEGRASS 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH DIURON.....	49
PLATE 4.7: PERENNIAL RYEGRASS 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT (UNTREATED CONTROL) .....	49
PLATE 4.8: FIELD PLOT 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH DALAPON.....	58
PLATE 4.9: <i>POA TRIVIALIS</i> 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH FENOXAPROP.....	61
PLATE 4.10: PERENNIAL RYEGRASS 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH THE CONTROL TO THE LEFT (SCORE 2) AND ISOPROTURON TO THE RIGHT (SCORE 10).....	64
PLATE 4.11: PERENNIAL RYEGRASS 6 WEEKS AFTER TREATMENT WITH ASULAM .....	64

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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*Poa trivialis*, commonly known as rough stalked meadow grass, is a perennial grass weed frequently found in racetracks throughout New Zealand (Field & Murphy 1987). Its presence is undesirable as it does not tolerate high wear and is susceptible to dying back over summer. For high quality racing surfaces in New Zealand, it would be preferable if tracks were composed of 100% perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) (Fleming 1994). A shift in sward composition away from *Poa trivialis* can be aided dramatically by cultural control techniques. Attention to drainage, aeration, fertiliser treatments, sensible location of rails and fences, regular under-sowing and irrigation may all discourage *Poa trivialis* in a perennial ryegrass sward (Fleming 1994). However, in many situations, due to adverse climatic or edaphic conditions *Poa trivialis* can still form a significant proportion of the sward. As cultural methods alone seldom reduce populations of *Poa trivialis* to an acceptable level there is a need for direct chemical elimination of *Poa trivialis* from racetrack swards. Also for ease of management, it would be preferable if this weed could be removed from the racetracks using a herbicide.

It has proved relatively easy to find a chemical which will control *Poa trivialis* (Kirkham 1983; Mueller-Warrant & Brewster 1986). However, many effective treatments cause phytotoxicity to perennial ryegrass in the sward (Henderson & Brock 1976; Mueller-Warrant 1990; Jensen 1984).

Use has been made of ethofumesate (Nortron), though this is an expensive option (\$440/ha) and not thought very effective at killing *Poa trivialis* (Harrington 1994). Other herbicides may be more effective, but such options need to be investigated with well-designed pot and field trials.

The objective of this research was to determine which chemicals, if any, can be used to effectively remove *Poa trivialis* from racetracks with minimal damage to perennial ryegrass.