

His Highness Sheik Mohammed Bin Rashid, Minister of Defence in the government of the United Arab Emirates, is known throughout the world as an enthusiastic supporter of horse racing.

He will soon be known, and possibly become just as famous, as the driving force behind another international sport - golf.

A mere thirty minutes car journey from the centre of the prosperous city of Dubai, a golf course is nearing completion among the sandhills of this Arab State.

With a climate to equate with the desert region of Arizona and California, similar engineering principles to those employed in the arid parts of the USA, have transformed the shifting sands into 170 acres of lush grassland. Fairways are submerged below the dunes, winding their way to the greens in a similar fashion, to the golf holes on a Scottish links.

The Emirates Golf Club has developed from an idea so bold and wildly exciting its concept reads more like fiction than fact.

As we know, Sheik Mohammed is an ardent fan of thoroughbred racing. One afternoon he was watching the latest video tapes flown out from England, with his resident engineer, Stephen Trutch an ex-pat. from Leeds and incidentally a seven handicap member of the Headingley club. During a break in the racing an item was screened discussing the development of a new golf course in Britain. "That's what we want out here", said Steve with a degree of flippancy, no doubt thinking of the rolling fairways of Moortown and Alwoodley with a touch of nostalgia. "Tell me more", said Sheik Mohammed winding the tape back for a replay.

A Karl Litten, Gary Player design

The site was carefully chosen with the Bedouin and camel pastures in mind. Course architect Karl Litten in association with Gary Player was engaged to design the golf course and now, with just months to its public opening, lush green fairways lined with palms, ornamental shrubs and giant cacti are materialising like a mirage emerging from the shimmering sands.

The techniques for growing grass in the desert is new, highly practicable, but vastly expensive. The secret is water - millions of gallons. In Palm Springs and Desert Highlands, Arizona, the water comes from the huge dams or re-cycled sewage. In Dubai there is no such source, but they do have access to the sparkling blue waters of the Arabian Gulf, and it just so happens the de-salination plant is in the ownership of Sheik Mohammed's family.

Two huge lakes were constructed to hold four and six million gallons of water respectively. The lakes built within the 18 hole course layout are an integral part of the overall irrigation system vital to the growth of grass on the greens and fairways. Japanese carp and perch are already thriving.

Green grows the desert - C



With summer temperatures well over 100 degrees F. the Toro sprinkler system will need to be pumping around 1.25 million gallons a day to prevent the grass from scorching to a burnt matting. Until the imported species of Bermuda grass, Tifton 328 for the fairways and Tifton 419 for the greens, become fully established, the watering will be round the clock, but later in the year the pattern will change to night watering only.

A total of 740 sprinklers have been installed, many of them, the big 690mm model from Toro used in a two speed mode. These give a half circle slow - half normal speed, to ensure optimum watering of selected areas. As a comparison, most UK courses watering green tees and fairways would use 250 sprinkler heads. At the Emirates Golf Course there are over three times as many!

The construction of the greens is a tale in itself. The area has been excavated out to a depth of around two feet, a layer of gravel is put down to six inches and covered by a sheet of Terram. Irrigation water can pass through, but weeds, stones and tree roots cannot pass upwards through the material.

On top to a depth of about 16 inches has been laid a mixture of medium granule sand mixed with clay and imported soil. Water will hold in the clay sand mix feeding the roots despite the excessive evaporation at surface level.

A championship golf course in the Middle East has already excited a number of players on the European Tour. Tommy Horton, Chairman of the Tour Committee, has visited this project and despite an unprecedented cloud burst which curtailed his inspection, has expressed considerable interest in the Emirates Golf Club as a possible venue for a slot in the opening events of the European Tour.

As far as membership is concerned, few Arabs play golf, but there are plenty of ex.pats. who do, taking their little piece of artificial turf to tee up the ball on tees and fairways, before putting out on a 'green' constructed from oil bound sand.

Membership fees of Dh. 5,000 to Dh. 10,000 (Dh6 to the £) have been dismissed by Stephen Trutch as speculation. He said he knew rumours have been bandied about Dubai but fees and membership structures have not yet been decided. He added that a decision will be made when people are able to see what they will be getting for their money.

Certainly no expense has been spared to produce this all grass eighteen hole oasis, the first in the Arabian Gulf.

The Daily Telegraph recently carried an advertisement for a general manager at the Emirates Golf Club offering a salary package amounting to a remarkable £50,000 a year. Small feed perhaps when one considers the Dubai links have already cost over £10 million to build.



An artist's plan of the 170 acres golf course. Lakes at either end of the site can supply up to 1.25 million gallons of water to irrigate fairways, tees and greens.

Brick paths wind their way through the links style fairways, for the canopied golf carts.

A luxurious club house designed to look like an enormous Bedouin tent overlooks the eighteenth green.

The three million pound development will contain restaurants, locker rooms, lounges and a pro's shop. All cooled by the latest in air conditioning.

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