Risk & reward
continued from page 17

"General Manager, John Quigley, is the man who put me forward for the Toro award."

It is perhaps a reflection in the quality of golf courses in the Irish Republic that a previous attempt to win the Toro award didn't get past Section level but it did ensure that this year Iain was ready.

"After that I stood back and took a fresh look at the entire operation and tightened up many working practices, and this final stage is going to be to the competition. They were fully aware of what was happening, when it would be happening and what the place would be like," said Iain, who would describe himself as employing the hands-on approach to the job.

The golf club will greatly appreciate the Toro Workman 2100 which they receive as part of the prize while Iain is already looking forward to the trip to the GCSAA Show in Dallas.

"I haven't seen the show for about seven years and ironically it was at Dallas the last time I showed up."

He is also complimentary of his staff of 12, whom he describes as being very enthusiastic and loyal. They benefit from Iain's success to the tune of £250 while the course achieved much more publicity when it hosted the 1991 Walker Cup.

In the run up to the match, then American amateur golden boy, Phil Mickelson, made a derogatory remark about Irish women - so unimpressed with them he didn't want to go into the rough to be too near them - which caused such a diplomatic incident that George Bush, "Dubya's" dad, had to apologise.

"The course went down well with everyone though as it always does," said Iain, who is married to Yvonne with two daughters Lisa and Lynnie.

Portmarnock has also received a couple of visits from Tiger Woods, who has taken to honoring his game for the Open with a few days in Ireland tackling some of the finer links courses.

"He comes into the club afterwards and is always very open. It's nice when things like that happen on your golf course."

It seems a lot of nice things are happening to Iain at the moment and they are all much deserved. "I turned 40 last week and now this. It's been a very good Millennium for me."

When in Rome... Find a way to get back!

For such an important day as the Toro finals you would imagine that a finalist would get an early night and be up, ready, and prepared well before the interview time.

Not Iain Ritchie. The tale of what happened on the day of the finals would make a fine sequel to John Cleese's film Clockwise.

To celebrate his 40th birthday Iain and wife, Yvonne, had booked to spend a week and now this. It's been a very good Millennium for me."

Above: The Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping finalists. Front row: Ronnie Bunting, Terry Farkins, Iain Ritchie and Gary Johnstone with the judging panel behind

one of the horrendous storms which hit much Britain.

"Left our hotel at 6am to get the 8.30 flight to Heathrow where I was due to change for Leeds/Bradford. When I got into the airport everything to and from London was delayed because of the storm. I then tried to buy a ticket to get to Amsterdam from where I could then fly directly to Leeds/Bradford but I couldn't because my luggage by this time had been checked in."

"With my interview at 3pm all I could do was keep Joe Bedford, who was at BIGGA HOUSE, informed by mobile what was happening. After what seemed like days we eventually did get airborne but there were further delays as we circled Heathrow at least 15 times. When we did land I had to run from Terminal 2 across to Terminal 1 for the British Midland lounge. I was carrying my presentation because I hadn't wanted to risk it going missing"

"By this time it was already about 3pm and I had been due on the 12.43pm flight to Leeds/Bradford. Fortunately this flight hadn't left and I thought finally things were going my way... but then it didn't take off until half past four."

"Sitting waiting for this flight I was desperate and quite prepared to hire a car, and driver if necessary, to drive me to York. It meant so much to me to be there."

"I had a car booked at Leeds/Bradford and knew that Aldwark Bridge was closed for redevelopment. I'd organised a route from my computer Route Master but Elliott (Small) came on and told me that this way was closed because of the weather so I had to go another way by memory."

"I eventually arrived at the Hotel at 6.30pm and, after a quick shave, was sitting being interviewed at 7.10pm, the scheduled time having been moved back as far as was possible to accommodate me."

"The last thing I wanted to do was jump straight out of the car and be slapped in the middle of an interview situation but the later it got in the day the more unfair it was on everyone else. I was thinking of Ronnie Bunting, who'd been on first at the beginning of the day and long he was having to wait."

"I felt that I had a nervous start to the interview but after that they had to shut me up at the end."

When in Rome... Find a way to get back!