The ultimate turf management exhibition in Europe

Jim Cook spent three days exploring Harrogate Week and found it to be time extremely well spent.

After a few days spent in the old spa town of Harrogate at this certain time of year, it is difficult not to feel that you have been part of something a bit special.

An exhibitor at the show told me his company return annually because it is the biggest ‘shop window’ in the industry, in Europe. This statement is certainly true, the opportunity for sales and promotion is huge, but it is also a fact that the week offers an experience outside of the capacious halls that is simply unrivalled throughout the continent.

Workshops and seminars with some of the biggest names in the business run throughout the week and newly-qualified greenkeepers have the chance to plot their way to becoming a Course Manager with the guidance of the Personal Development Zone. From welcoming old pubs tucked away below street level to the multitude of restaurants, coffee shops and modern, vibrant bars, all within a short stroll of each other, the networking opportunity that Harrogate town itself provides is truly tantalising.

It was with all this and the upcoming ‘Harrogate buzz’ in mind that I arrived at the exhibition entrance at 9am on Tuesday, January 18.

If the eager throng of visitors that bustled outside Hall A was anything to go by, then this year’s Harrogate Week looked likely to be a resounding success.

BIGGA Chairman, Paul Worster, cut the green ribbon to start BTME and Clubhouse 2011. Previous to this, the Continue to Learn Education Programme, had begun on Sunday, with record numbers in attendance. As the halls steadily began to fill, it was down to the Media Centre for the opening press conference with Top Green and Rigby Taylor who were launching their Euroflor flower seed mixes.

Brian Robinson, Seed Research Director, at Rigby Taylor, emphasised the biodiversity the flowers should encourage, due to long flowering periods from spring to autumn and this was the first of many positive environmental sentiments to be broadcast over the week.
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The announcement of Dennis acquiring SISIS was made by Managing Director of Dennis, Ian Howard. He emphasised how the two companies were metaphorical headlights, side by side, whilst parent company Howardsons Ltd was the battery driving them.

Although I did not have the opportunity to see many of the seminars and workshops, I managed to catch the presentation given by Course Manager of the Old Course, St. Andrews, Gordon McKee and Gordon Moir, Director of Greenkeeping at St. Andrew’s Links, entitled ‘Preparing the Old Course for the 2010 Open Championship’.

This proved immensely interesting as they spoke about many things including how daily maintenance of the course continued around contractors setting up grandstands, and removing sprinklers in preparation for The Open. They talked about increasing Fescue in preparation for The Open. They talked about increasing Fescue and often, problems with Pearlwort and how fungicides have not been used on the course for 20 years. A fascinating insight into life at St. Andrews came when the laborious methods of a company developing a computer game about the course were explained and how greenstaff worked around this.

The annual awards ceremony saw BIGGA members recognised for their achievements in front of a crowded room.

STRI’s Golf Environment Awards recognise the most environmentally proactive clubs in the UK and it was in the Queen’s Suite where presentations were made for the 2010 winners.

Regional awards were given to David Cole, of Loch Lomond GC; Meurig Lumsley, of Aberdovey GC; Brian Storey, of Silloth on Solway GC and Mark Broughton MG, of Alderburgh GC.

Overall winner was Colin Webber, of Portmore Golf Club, who was commended as being a fantastic exemplar of the greenkeeping industry. He thanked his family and colleagues and accepted the award on behalf of all the team. James Hutchinson, of Fairhaven GC, was the winner of the individual award.

Ben Warren, Director of Communications at the Golf Environment Organisation, presented GEO certification to MacRitchie Links GC, on the Kintyre Peninsula, Scotland, and Auchterarder GC, in Perthshire, Scotland, and said he looked forward to many more BIGGA members receiving this award next year.

Master Greenkeeper awards followed with Greg Evans, of Ealing Golf Club, receiving the GEO certificate from Jonathan Shilling, STRI’s Golf Environment Awards Manager.

The BIGGA social night went down extremely well, iteratively, as this year’s entertainment was a beer festival held at the Old Swan Hotel. The night was a definite success with attendees enjoying a buffet, live band and a wide selection of real ales.

It was with thick heads that many of us approached Wednesday morning’s calendar of events.

In the Queen’s Suite above Hall C, Chris Kennedy, Director and Course Manager of Wentworth GC, gave an overview of major refurbishments of the West Course.

His working relationship with Ernie Els proved a source of amusement and interest to the massed onlookers.

Els had said that the point of making changes was not to alter the character of the course, that would have been a crime, but to bring it up to specifications needed to host the largest competitions.

Chris mentioned turf from their old greens, sold for charity, raised £27,000.

The vast amount of manpower and materials involved in the refurbishments was apparent from Chris’s presentation and he was keen to recognise the rest of the team responsible saying, “Everyone who has been involved from 2005 has done a fantastic job.”

Back to the press conferences where Vitax Amenity launched their new fertiliser, Enhance R Prime, which won IOG’s ‘Best New and Innovative Product’ award in the Fertiliser and Pesticides category.
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Master Greenkeeper awards followed with Greg Evans, of Ealing GC, becoming the 52nd person to achieve this status. Stuart Yarwood, of Lynn GC, and Alan Pierce, of Han Manor GC, also received the accolade alongside Alan Hess, of Augusta Pines GC, in Texas, USA. Alan thanked Sami and Rachael for their support and made a moving speech thanking his father for encouraging him to become a Superintendent.

Gordon also played in The Open Championship at St Andrews in 1965 and Royal Birkdale and went on to become Course Manager at such courses as St George’s Hill and Wentworth Park, where he prepared the course for some top European Tour events. He became Course Manager, at Churston Golf Club, in Devon, where he stayed until retirement.

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Innovative Product’ award in the Fertiliser and Pesticides category. where Vitax Amenity launched their new fertiliser, Enhance R Prime, for a Greenkeeper and presented a cheque along with Terrain Autumn to Iestyn Carpenter, of Corhampton Golf Club.

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HARROGATE WEEK 2011

THE ULTIMATE TURF MANAGEMENT EXHIBITION IN EUROPE

FEBRUARY 2011

Harrogate

The ultimate turf management exhibition in Europe

TUESDAY 18 JANUARY 2011 9AM - 5PM
WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY 2011 9AM - 5PM
THURSDAY 20 JANUARY 2011 9AM - 4PM

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The introduction of an Envirozone was new to this year’s exhibition and with environmentalism becoming such an importance for golf courses, it was encouraging to see the area lively with activity over the three days.

Stands from British Climate Services, Golf Environment Organisation, Envirosports Ltd, Solarwall Ltd, Vermigraund and British Wild Flower Plants sent out a clear message that the industry is working hard to dispel myths about golf courses not being environmentally friendly or offering bio diversity and sustainability.

In relation to this, BTME 2011 saw Syngenta launch Operation Pollinator, which is a project designed to create new habitats in out of play areas of golf courses, for bumblebees and pollinating insects.

It is well documented that bumblebee numbers have declined by 70% over the past 40 years and Syngenta’s press conference on Wednesday afternoon made the very agreeable statement that the plight of the bumblebee should be reversed.

For the incentive, golf courses are being sought to join a national scheme in which they commit to establishing at least half a hectare of Operation Pollinator seed mix, which is designed to encourage bumblebees and pollinating insects by being rich in pollen and nectar food sources. Simon Elsworth, Turf and Landscape Manager at Syngenta, said that with the correct management, golf courses could provide the perfect habitat for bumblebees and other pollinating insects.

Late on Wednesday afternoon, BIGGA and the Golf Environment Organisation announced the establishment of a partnership between the two bodies. It will see them collaborating in promoting sustainability in golf facility management.

The partnership aims to make sustainability easier for greenkeepers and course managers to understand, and provide support for their improvement efforts.

Incoming Chairman at BIGGA, Andrew Mellon said the whole industry needs to pull together and collaboration with like-minded bodies brings more strength to golf’s efforts.

The attendance figure of 6019 for the week is higher than in 2010 and shows that despite budget pressures, people are willing to make the effort for something which is worthwhile. The Continue to Learn Education Programme in the Queen’s Suite provided a catalogue of informative, educational seminars and workshops throughout the entire week, while the exhibition halls bustled throughout.

With the success of this year’s show still ringing in their ears, the BIGGA team has already begun preparing for Harrogate Week 2012, which will undoubtedly prove once again to be the ultimate turf management exhibition in Europe.
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