How well do you know your greens?

When you miss a short putt is it always your fault? Leaving aside the putter, the wind and the jangling of coins in your opponent’s pocket, what else comes to mind? Could it be the surface of the green, which so often gets the blame for those three putts? Yes it could, and more often than you might think, as Malcolm Peake tries out the Greenstester.

The Greenstester evolved because Nick Park, a long term member of The R&A Golf Course Committee, felt there was a requirement for an affordable tool which could regularly measure the trueness of golf greens. When golfers stand over a putt, if they strike it on the right line and at the right pace they expect to have every chance of holing the putt.

The test is undertaken on my home course of Temple, and I was soon invited to use other local courses such as Beaconsfield, Bearwood Lakes, The Berkshire, Henley, Maidenhead, and Stoke Park. The Course Managers became involved in the tests, contributing with suggestions and comments on the performance of the prototype, which helped define the final model.

The testing in Ireland was on a links course dominated by fescue grasses, while in the Thames Valley the testing was on downhill heathland and parkland with fescue, bent dominant or nearly pure Annual meadow grass (Poa annua) greens. With some of the courses having push-ups greens over 100 years old, and others modern USGA type specification, we felt that nearly every type of golf green in Northern Europe would be covered.

From six feet, four out of six putts are on the hole on a poor surface. But until recently, there has been no way of quantifying the problem in an objective fashion. However, a new tool has been launched which helps to monitor the surface performance of greens throughout the year.

The Greenstester is an exciting and affordable new measuring tool which is supported by The R&A, and used for assessing objectively the reliability of putting surfaces.

The idea for the Greenstester was underwritten by The R&A and Office of Golf at the time of the greenkeeping work. The Course Managers became involved in the tests, contributing with suggestions and comments on the performance of the prototype, which helped define the final model. The testing in Ireland was on a links course dominated by fescue grasses, while in the Thames Valley the testing was on downhill heathland and parkland with fescue, bent dominant or nearly pure Annual meadow grass (Poa annua) greens. With some of the courses having push-ups greens over 100 years old, and others modern USGA type specification, we felt that nearly every type of golf green in Northern Europe would be covered.

The Greenstester was gradually developed after tests using the Stimpmeter.

Fintan Brennan, Course Manager at Portmarnock Hotel and Golf Links, had 15 years’ experience in the steel industry, and with his engineer brother Ray immediately grasped the potential of the Hitting Out test, and developed a special survey ramp.

The testing on the exceptional true fescue dominant greens of Waterville and Portmarnock Links produced excellent results, but it was felt the ramp needed to be trialed on a wider variety of playing surfaces. It was agreed that testing should be undertaken on my home course of Temple, and I was soon invited to use other local courses such as Beaconsfield, Bearwood Lakes, The Berkshire, Henley, Maidenhead, and Stoke Park. The Course Managers became involved in the tests, contributing with suggestions and comments on the performance of the prototype, which helped define the final model.

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For over a year, with Temple’s Course Manager Martin Gunn, we tested the reliability and speed of the their greens, and over the trial period we collected an immense amount of data. It became clear from our anecdotal evidence that the dominant fescue/bent greens provided the most reliable putting surface for year round golf. As an aside: the fescue/bent greens suffered much less disease, required less fertilizer, pesticide and water applications, in fact were more economical to manage in every way.

At Temple this type of surface allows the golfer to play the course as intended, giving the golfer more options and more challenges.

The Club is using the information gathered and now micro managing the different greens to bring them to a similar high fescue/bent standard.

Recently I saw a piece in the Golf Course Architects magazine written by Dr David Greenshields of the Asian Turf Centre, who took delivery of a Greenstester earlier this year and trialled it in Japan, India, the Philippines and Thailand.

He said “The R&A Holing Out Test is an important addition to the evaluation of putting green performance, because it allows us to make a perfect stroke, is the green reliable enough that the ball will go in the hole? Those greens that are reliable, meaning that the ball goes where it is intended, are sure to reward good putting. In fact, I for one, am excited about that prospect.”

Keith Adderley, Secretary at Temple, said: “Having been a facetinated observer during the process which saw the Greenstester conceived, tested and manufactured, I can see nothing but benefit from its use.

A simple and cost effective tool that, if used on a regular basis, will enable us to create a bank of meaningful data, which can be used to continually improve the performance of putting greens.

From where I sit the golf industry seems genuinely interested in finding out more when they see the Greenstester being used on course. It will benefit Course Managers, Secretaries/Managers, Green Committee, and golfers.

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For more details see www.greenstester.com

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Interpretation of results should be kept in context as even surfaces which record 10/10 from any given distance are only true and reliable on that day, and only on the line of the putt.

On one course used regularly for testing the Course Manager has found that he can reduce the moving and/or rolling and still attain the required green speed and reliability, which has yielded savings in a number of areas.

All of these causes of poor surface performance are preventable on a well-built and well-maintained putting green except, perhaps, during periods of extreme weather.

As an aside: the architect of the Greenstester is already gaining recognition around the world and one of the earliest agonists of the Greenstester is Dr Michal Woods, Chief Scientist at the Asian Turf Centre, who took delivery of a Greenstester earlier this year and trialled it in Japan, India, the Philippines and Thailand.

He said “The R&A Holing Out Test is an important addition to the evaluation of putting green performance, because it allows us to make a perfect stroke, is the green reliable enough that the ball will go in the hole? Those greens that are reliable, meaning that the ball goes where it is intended, are sure to reward good putting. In fact, I for one, am excited about that prospect.”

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From where I sit the golf industry seems genuinely interested in finding out more when they see the Greenstester being used on course. It will benefit Course Managers, Secretaries/Managers, Green Committee, and golfers.
From six feet, four out of ten putts can miss the hole. Recently, there has been a new tool put to use on golf courses. Course Managers or any Golf Club official to measure the consistency of their greens and for recording the information. The Greenstester is already gaining recognition around the world and one of the earliest agronomists to appreciate its benefits is Dr. Micah Woods, Chief Scientist at the Asian Turf Centre, who took delivery of a Greenstester earlier this year and trialed it in Japan, India, the Philippines and Thailand. He said “The R&A Holing Out Test is an important addition to the evaluation of putting green performance.”

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Keith Adderley, Secretary at the Agean Links, is excited about that prospect. “If we make a perfect stroke, is the green reliable enough that the ball will go in the hole? Putting greens that are reliable, meaning the ball goes where it is intended, are sure to reward good performance, because it allows the golfer to play the course of Temple, and I was soon invited to use other local courses such as Beaconsfield, Beaumaris Lakes, The Berkshire, Hennerton, Maidenhead, and Stoke Park. I am excited about that prospect.”

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