How do the team at Burghley Park Golf Club cope with hundreds of caravans – and dogs – on their fairways when the world famous horse trials roll into town? Steve Castle found out, and also heard how the greenkeepers and their vertidrainer helped save the equine event this year.

**PROFILE**

**Name**: Dave Salisbury
**Role**: Course Manager
**Born**: Burton upon Trent
**Handicap**: 14

**Favourite sports team**: Stamford AFC – Dave is a director
How do the team at Burghley Park Golf Club cope with hundreds of caravans – and dogs – on their fairways when the world famous horse trials roll into town? Steve Castle found out, and also heard how the greenkeepers and their vertidrainer helped save the equine event this year.
“We just stood there for about an hour, I certainly had a tear in my eye. It was total devastation.”

Dave Salisbury was in full flow as he recalled the horrific condition some areas of Burghley Park’s golf course were in days after the Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials on an unforgettable Monday morning in 2008.

The club allows hundreds of caravans and motor homes to park on certain fairways during the world famous event, usually with manageable disruption. However, a perfect storm of very wet weather five years ago left parts of the course reminiscent of a particularly damp Glastonbury festival.

It’s clearly still fresh in the memory for Course Manager Dave. He recalled: “I had very heavy rain at exactly the wrong time and we were pulling motor homes out of the mud throughout the week. There were huge ruts and a foot of sludgy mud everywhere. I’ve spent the majority of my working life at this course, so to see in that state was heart-breaking.”

But the club soon swung into recovery mode. It was agreed that external contractors would be hired to assist the four-strong greenskeeping team in getting the course back in play as soon as possible. Dave hurried across the country, visiting various turf nurseries to choose the perfect fescue dominant turf before selecting County Turf in the arena was a mess. They’d delivered dozens of horse jumps in designated areas on four fairways (the 10th, 17th, 18th and practice) and one of the rough in between. We rope the areas off before they arrive where we think there’s a danger someone driving along at night might accidentally cut across a green or tee.”

As well as dealing with the aftermath of the trials, Gary – who first helped his dad rake bunkers on the course aged just five – recalled how he came to the rescue in dramatic fashion ahead of this year’s event.

He said: “I received a phone call late one night from the Clerk of the Course, Philip Herbert, sounding extremely worried. It turned out a lorry driver had accidentally driven onto the soft grass in the main arena where they hold the dressage, and its wheels had sunk in six inches deep. Philip said: ‘Somebody told me you’ve been out vertidraining – is there any chance you could help?’

‘Early the next morning I went to check it out and the field was in the arena was a mess. They’d watered it to a depth of eight inches because they wanted the going to be soft, so a huge articulated lorry delivering dozens of horse jumps in had left it in a terrible state.

‘I put the vertidrain across it on full heave – which dad had never seen before and drove as slowly as I possibly could. When I’d finished you couldn’t see where this lorry had been. Philip was very grateful.

‘In fact it did such a good job we’ve been vertidraining our tees on full heave since – but it’s always good when you can trial it somewhere else first!’

The 16th century Burghley House in the centrepiece of the large estate in Stamford, and over the last few decades has capitalised on its commercial potential. As well as the equestrian event it now holds regular concerts, exhibitions, markets and the ‘Rat Race’ – an adventure sports weekend. The golf course itself, which uses a separate entrance, has undergone huge changes since Dave’s arrival in 1980.

He said: “When I joined it was a blank canvas – literally a field with 18 holes laid out with no trees, bunkers or ponds – in fact it had no distinguishing features whatsoever. It was managed by two greenkeepers – myself and Stuart McCrossan who’s still here today.

‘There were hundreds of sheep allowed to graze on the course with electric fencing around the greens. So we’ve planted hundreds of trees and built the ponds and bunkers in house, and we’re still making changes and continuing to prog-

But Dave concluded: “The changes made after the Mackenzie and we’ve been constantly evolving. If we’d had stood still people wouldn’t have wanted to play here – and I truly believe we’re the best course in the area. As a result we have 75% beams and fescues cut to 3mm. For perennial grasses – annual meadowgrass is too unpredictable for me. I love this course, if I could wrap it up and take it home with me every night I would.”
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But the club soon swung into recovery mode. It was agreed that external contractors would be hired to assist the four-strong greenskeeping team in getting the course back in play as soon as possible. Dave hurried across the country, visiting various turf nurseries to choose the perfect, most durable turf before selecting County Turf in Scunthorpe.

The team knew that with the trials ending in early September, they had little growing time left in the season. Dave said: “We closed the back nine immediately but within three or four days of us we had a short course open on the back nine by cutting temporary tees and greens and using three short holes. We employed a landscaping firm, checked the specifications with the STBR and laid the turf and had completed the work by the end of September.”

You may think the team course the prestigious trials – but in fact it’s an ideal time to complete management as Dave’s son Gary explained.

“We’re closed for eight days which is a godsend because we’re a very busy course, we must average 150 rounds a day and we’re rarely closed because the course is built on a limestone hill which offers superb natural drainage.”

“So this week we’ve vertidrained all the tees and greens in two days and now we’re moving on to vertidraining the fairways.”

“Each of the four small teams have 100 golfers out there’s very little room to work on the course. You’ve got 100 golfers out there. It was heartbreaking.”

As well as dealing with the aftermath of the trials, Gary – who first helped his dad rake bunkers on the course aged just five – revealed how he came to the rescue in dramatic fashion ahead of this year’s event. He said: “I received a phone call late one night from the Clerk of the Course, Philip Herbert, sounding extremely worried. It turned out a lorry driver had accidentally driven onto the soft grass in the main arena where they hold the dressage, and its wheels had sunk in six inches deep. Philip said ‘Somebody told me you’ve been out vertidraining – is there any chance you could help?’

“Early the next morning I went to check it out and the field grass in the arena was a mess. They’d watered it to a depth of eight inches but they wanted the going to be soft, so a huge augmented lorry delivering dozens of horse jumps in had left it in a terrible state.

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The 16th century Burghley House is the centrepiece of the large estate in Stamford, and over the last few decades has capitalised on its commercial potential. As well as the equestrian event it now holds regular concerts, exhibitions, markets and the ‘Bat Race’ – an adventure sports weekend. The golf course itself, which uses a separate entrance, has undergone huge changes since Dave’s arrival in 1980.

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“There were hundreds of sheep allowed to graze on the course with electric fencing around the greens. So we’ve planted hundreds of trees and built the ponds and bunkers in-house, and we’re still making changes and continuing to progress now.

In 2010 the club employed golf course architect Tom Mackenzie to conduct an audit, and they’ve adopted some of his ideas including adding new bunkers and reshaping existing traps. It’s clear that the small team at Burghley Park have a difficult balance to strike. With a small budget in a rural area, and with plenty of courses nearby, they face constant competition for members.

They also require a busy course to keep funds coming in – but naturally this restricts their ability to work on the course as Gary explained earlier.

But Dave concluded: “The changes made after the Mackenzie audit prove we’re constantly evolving. If we’d have stood still people wouldn’t have wanted to play here – and I truly believe we’re the best course in the area.”

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John Deere
2x 2620 Pro Gators
1x 2500A Greens Mowers
2x 2653A Surrounds Mowers
1x 3230 Precision Cut
1x 3200 Compact Tractor
1x 7400 Terrain Cut
1x 1440 Out Front Rotary
1x 3245C Semi Rough Mower
1x 3250G Fairway Mower
4x Hand Mowers
1x Kubota Compact Tractor
1x Wiedenmann Terra Spike XF
1x Dakota Turf Tandem
1x Massey Ferguson Tractor & Backhoe
1x Ryan GA30
1x Ramsomes HR9609 Rough Mower
1x Bantam Sod Cutter

MACHINERY LIST

Top: The 18th fairway, September 2013
Middle: The course minus the constructor.
MACHINERY LIST:
- The precision fairway in September 2008
- The trials – [Picture]
- The course before vertidraining in September 2008
- The fairway trials

FEATURE
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