

# THE PUTTING GREEN

## WHAT GOLFERS WANT FROM PUTTING GREEN SURFACES!

by Harold Swash with John Nelson

**O**UR guide as to what golfers want from putting green surfaces is Harold Swash, pictured sizing up a putt on one of the putting greens at The Royal Birkdale Golf Club, the venue of the 1991 Open Championship (Head Greenkeeper, Tom O'Brien MBE, looks on approvingly).

Harold is known throughout the world of golf as "Britain's Putting Doctor". It is an accolade deservedly bestowed by the game's top professional names in the world of golf!

He is an excellent putter (as well as being a category one amateur golfer) — if your life depended on a putt being sunk, he would be the one you would choose to putt for you.

But his reputation as Britain's Putting Doctor rests on his mastery of the theory and practice of putting and putters. He is more than just an excellent putter. He is a successful designer of putters, (he is an automation production engineer by profession) and he is able to judge whether or not your putter is right for you. He is also able to spot the flaws in your putting action (if you have any, of course!).

Recently he achieved further national and international publicity through designing the Wilson Long Putter which Sam Torrence and Peter Senior have used to over-come the 'Yips' and give themselves a new lease of life on the circuit.

Harold recognises, however, that successful putting is more than just having the right kind of putter with a fluent and true putting action. It also depends on being able to read putting greens correctly, and it is this attribute on which he will be concentrating in this series of articles in "Greenkeeping Management".

There is no mileage in having a correct putting action and an appropriate putter if you can't read putting greens; but, equally, there is little point in being able to read putting greens if your reading tells you that they aren't true, and that they are **unpredictable**.

Harold's view is that putting should not be a lottery. The putting green surfaces should be true, consistent, comparable and predictable. The golfer should be provided with the opportunity to read them and putt successfully on them if he reads them accurately and has sufficient putting skill.

Even the fastest of putting greens are acceptable if they satisfy these criteria. No doubt you join the rest of us in staying up late on the first weekend in April each year to watch via satellite TV the US Masters Tournament at the Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia.

I'm sure you are fascinated seeing the world's finest golfers coping (with difficulty) with the lightning fast putting greens. (There is only one topic of conversation among the players — the speed of the putting greens and whether or not it is faster than the previous year).

It is true that the former Bermuda Rye grass at Augusta National was replaced in the late 1970's by Bent grass (actually Pennecross) to provide superior putting



Harold Swash on the putting green.

green surfaces and give them the speed and firmness which were wanted. But it is equally true that the world-wide reputation which Augusta enjoys for the speed of its putting greens has been made possible only by having available a tool for measuring and thereby controlling their speed and, further, guaranteeing their consistency and comparability.

This tool is the Stimp Meter and Harold will be describing what it is and its potential value to you later in this Series. His guess is most of you haven't seen one — let alone used one — and he would find it helpful if you would fill in the short questionnaire which accompanies this article and return it to him via the Editor.

He will also be explaining his own invention — the Bump Meter — which is a relatively more sophisticated tool for measuring the undulations on putting greens.

He will be covering the design of putting greens; analysing qualities of putting greens such as size, slope, shade and exposure; and providing his own check list on how to recognise good putting greens (and less good putting greens).

He hopes to be able to formulate a Putting Green Rating Chart so that a relative value can then be assigned to any golf course reflecting the quality of its putting greens.

Harold is convinced about the crucial importance of putting — he would argue that golf tournaments are invariably won and lost on the putting green; and hence his delight in being invited to initiate an ongoing dialogue through the pages of Greenkeeping Management with Members of BIGGA.

JOHN NELSON

## WHAT GOLFERS WANT FROM PUTTING GREEN SURFACES

### A Questionnaire for Greenkeeping Staff on the Stimp Meter and the Speed of Greens

Please tick the appropriate 'Yes' or 'No' for each question, and then return the Questionnaire to the Editor of Greenkeep-

ing Management. It is an anonymous enquiry so there is no need to sign it.

1. Do you use a Stimp Meter Yes/No

2. How important to you is the speed of your greens: Yes/No

Very important? Yes/No

Important? Yes/No

Unimportant? Yes/No

3. Do you vary the speed of your greens according to, say, everyday use, weekend competitions, championships? Yes/No

4. How do you vary the speed of your greens: Yes/No

Lowering the cutter blades? Yes/No

Cutting more frequently? Yes/No

Lowering the cutter blade & cutting more frequently? Yes/No

5. Do you consider the Augusta National greens for the US Masters to be too fast for the participating professionals? Yes/No

6. How much slower would you cut the Augusta National Greens for your own Members: Yes/No

A little slower? Yes/No

Much slower? Yes/No

7. What percentage of your Members could putt on the Augusta National greens with any degree of confidence/success: Yes/No

Over 75% Yes/No

Over 50% Yes/No

Between 25 and 50% Yes/No

Under 25% Yes/No

8. What would be the reaction of your own Members if your greens were as fast as are the Augusta National greens for the US Masters Tournament: Yes/No

Supportive? Yes/No

Upset/turbid? Yes/No

Hostile? Yes/No

9. Do you take into account the bumps and hollows on your greens when deciding the direction of your cut? Yes/No

Thank you. If you feel that you need to accompany any answer with comment, please do so.

HAROLD SWASH