

PORTUGAL

GOLF continues to boom all over the world and Portugal is no exception to this explosion in the game.

The Algarve coast in the south of the country has long been a special favorite for the Northern European golfer in ever growing numbers and in recent years the pressure on courses has become considerable.

The early sixties saw Portugal's Algarve have its first course at Penina, designed by Henry Cotton and built by Alex Swan. Others followed quite quickly- Vale do Lobo, Vilamoura, Palmares-all inspired by British expertise.

But the 1974 revolution put a severe halt on development and although tourists began to flood back once political stability was restored, it is only now that confidence in the long term economy of the country has grown sufficiently to allow real investment in new projects.

Exclusive

Courses are now being planned all along the coast and three or four are under construction. Two are at Quinta Do Lago, an exclusive and stunningly beautiful resort where the existing 27 holes, which has hosted the last three Portuguese Opens, is being extended to 54 holes.

In Quinta do Lago, as in so many developments today, courses have taken on the role of beautiful gardens for the luxury homes that line the fairways. Therefore design has to accommodate both villa and villages in order that the financial equation works.

The eighteen hole Sao Lourenco golf course is no exception. Designed by an American practice, Joseph Lee Associates, to championship length and calibre, it is the property of Bovis International Ltd., who are developing properties around the course.

The course has, however had its problems. Early construction was left entirely in local hands, and without adequate experience, the finish being produced was less than satisfactory.

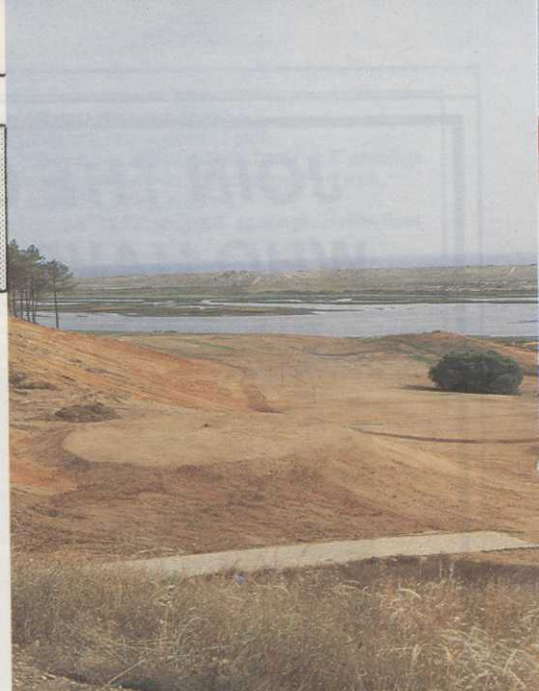
As a result, Bovis commissioned Howard Swan to inject specialist construction management to the project. Soon after, Neville Coleman, a site manager with Golf Landscapes was appointed to oversee the construction work on behalf of Bovis. Earlier this year Neville took charge, and together with local landscaping contractors and the Toro Irrigation agents, the course is nearing completion.

All work carried out on the course is under the guidance of Howard Swan. Howard spends up to eight days a month at the course, administering the construction process. It was certainly an inspired choice by the developers for he has ensured that no work is accepted unless it is to the highest standard and much of the golf course has had to be rebuilt in the past six months to ensure adequate quality of finish.

Now that construction and irrigation are close to complete, and landscaping is well underway to Swan's design the maintenance programme has commenced, and Peter Wisbey was engaged in June as golf course superintendent.

Peter is well known in greenkeeping circles, having been head greenkeeper at North

The 6th green and cart path



A view from the 6th tee of the course at Sao Lourenco

Foreland, an Open Championship qualifying course and, a leading light in the Greenkeeping Association.

Since his arrival in the Algarve, Peter has grown in confidence, having taken a change in job, staff and climate, not to mention lifestyle and language, comfortably in his stride.

Extrovert

Communication, at first a problem, has now been successfully solved by the appointment of Manuel Castro. This extrovert Portuguese has spent much of his life in Angola and until recently was head greenkeeper at Quinta do Lago. He has many talents - interpreter and engineer amongst them. The rest of the team are all locals who have learnt quickly under Peter's instruction.

Conditions are, of course, totally foreign to Peter, but he has received a great deal of assistance from Howard who, with his many trips to the States and attendance at GCSAA seminars has made a study of greenkeeping practices and grasses in a variety of differing climates.

The greens at Sao Lourenco are Pennncross Bent and already look as if they will provide excellent putting surfaces.





Peter Wisbey gives the 15th fairway its first cut

All the other parts of the course, greens surrounds, tees and fairways, were originally planted with Tifton 41A Bermuda grass, but because of poor workmanship they did not establish well.

The summer of 1987 has seen an extensive resprigging operation take place with 41A, but supplemented on the green surrounds and tees with a cool season mix of Bluegrass, Fescue and Bent, and on the fairways with common Bermuda. This action has ensured a fine cover of grass within three months, capable of taking play.

Much of the marginal areas of the course, sides of fairways, carries and tee banks have been planted with mesembryanthemum, a locally harvested succulent, yielding brightly coloured orange, yellow, red and pink flowers throughout the spring, summer and autumn.

Pine Avenues

The course winds its way through Pine avenues on undulating land, relatively sandy in its make up. A central string of lakes ensures that water comes into play on the 9th, 10th and 17th, and there is a most spectacular finishing par four to an island green beneath a hillside, atop of which is the clubhouse and hotel site.

Peter or "super" as he is known, has had to cope with many problems in his first few months and he has known moments of frustration, but not quite as many as working for a members' club in England!

Stocking the new course with machinery was an important part of Howard Swan's brief from Bovis and together with superintendent Wisbey's expert advice, some £150,000 of equipment is now on site. Some has been brought locally, but most has come from the UK. It is simply not available in Portugal.

Getting it there

But getting it there isn't easy.

Shortly after Peter's arrival, the first container of equipment arrived, but it was three weeks before Customs came to inspect the contents and give it a cursory glance for clearance. Three weeks of frustration for everyone, especially Peter.

Of course, not all the equipment is new. Some of the machines are secondhand or ex-demo models, as Peter believes the initial wear from a new course will be considerable. One piece of new equipment still to arrive and eagerly awaited is the Toro 450D. This versatile unit will help considerably with fairway management and will make contour mowing relatively simple on the hybrid Bermuda surface.

Even getting things locally is pretty difficult. There are no turf suppliers, so Bentgrass and Bermuda nurseries have been built.

Drainage pipes took eight weeks to come, eventually arriving by bus! Getting the right fertiliser is almost impossible - 5.10.15 compound requested from a local supplier was to cost £30 per kilo, and would be on 12 months' delivery from Israel! An order for Hoof and Horn became, in the supplier's own words, the supply of "hands and feet" special, and Peter is still waiting for it to arrive!!

All this, with Manuel Castro's invaluable help. What might it be without it?

Even then, Aquagro comes by charter plane, in a suitcase. Flags, poles, and holecutters arrive in golf bags. Spares and sprinklers in hand luggage... all from the UK.

Mesembryanthemum



The machinery shed!

Whilst Peter holds strong traditionalist views on the game and how it should be played, he is aware of the opportunities on offer to the skilled head man from the UK in the booming golfing market of Europe.

Big business

Golf is big business with budgets to match and playability is the key. So many courses at luxury developments are poorly maintained, that this must offer our greenkeeping talent export potential.

There is no doubt that what has been achieved by the British team at Sao Lourenco has put a professional stamp on a fine product and will lead to similar and equally exciting opportunities elsewhere in southern Portugal fairly soon.

Watch the golf course in the next few months for more news on the British influence on Portuguese golf.



..... **on the golf course**