

THE history of Woodcote Park, Epsom, Surrey, goes back to the middle of the 12th century and it provides an admirable setting for the layout of the two 18 hole courses which belong to the RAC Country Club. From the elegant clubhouse building one has a commanding view of a lovely Capability Brown type of landscape, dominated by the golf courses which were laid out in 1915 by Herbert Fowler, the well known golf course architect.

The RAC Country Club has a good reputation among golf enthusiasts and those in the professional ranks, and the strategy of the courses was put to the test when the Martini International was played there in 1978. The Bob Hope Classic event allowed TV viewers to appreciate the beautiful surroundings and the superb golfing qualities of many of the holes.

The head greenkeeper responsible for the upkeep of the golf courses, Bob Wiles, 43, is a genial, friendly man, who is held in high esteem by all his enthusiastic staff. Said Bob: "I left school at the age of 15 and went to work on a farm briefly, then eventually go employment at Epsom Golf Club in 1962.

"I came to the RAC Club ten years ago with my wife, Janet and three children, Nicola, Sharon and Scott. We live in an old farmhouse on the edge of the course. My main hobby is karate, I am a brown belt and am studying for a black belt at the moment.

"I love the challenge of the job here," Bob continued, "and hope to remain with this club for the rest of my career. We have two courses, the Coronation and the Old course - the Coronation being the shorter of the two.

"Having staged international golf events here in the past we are aware of the popularity of the venue and it has given us valuable experience in the preparation of the course for important tournaments. I have a good rapport with all my club officials and am fortunate to have a knowledgeable and experienced estate manager, Keith Symon, with whom I have an excellent working relationship

# OUT ON THE COURSE



## THE RAC COUNTRY CLUB

When Bob Wiles was proudly taking me on a tour of his new greenkeeping headquarters at the club I was agreeably impressed and can honestly say his facilities must be among the best in the country and will be the envy of all his contemporaries. He explained "We have converted the old stable block into a modern greenkeeping complex, having a fully equipped workshop employing a qualified engineer, Tony Worsfold, and a trainee assistant. All our repairs are done here. No machinery is sent to manufacturers agents for overhauls. Each unit gets stripped down every year and is completely rebuilt with our own labour force."

### Story by John Campbell

"Our main items of equipment are three Toro GM 3's, two Toro 216's, four Cushman and four tractors. There is a lot of grass here to cut - altogether about 300 acres, every blade of which gets clipped on a monthly rota during the growing season. On the chalky downland, drainage and growth is good and we are able to present the course in first class condition for major tournaments and club competitions. At one time we did have quite a bit of compaction on the greens of the Old Course, but use of a Verti-Drain over the past four years has cured the condition.

"We have a little bit of thatch on some of the greens and I have recently purchased a 'Coremaster', an Australian aerating machine, to start a hollow tining programme combined with overseeding in

the spring. The greens tend to hold a lot more surface water than they used to due to amount of thatch that has accumulated. After de-thatching operations we will follow up with an 80/20 dressing to help break down the build up of fibre".

Bob went on to talk about his staff: "I have two course foremen - Andy Davey, is in charge of the Old course, and John Shepherd, who recently joined us from Piltown Golf Club last year, is in charge of the Coronation course. There are five experienced staff working on the Old and three on the Coronation course. We also have a YTS lad who goes to college once a week. Good training is important for your greenkeepers. The job is much more technical now that courses are expected to be open 365 days a year. Nowadays, financial matters dictate that we have to be like the Windmill - never closed!

"All our staff are very industrious and we like to give them every encouragement. The club is good to us; there is a bonus and non-contributory pension scheme and meals are also supplied. We have all attended first-aid classes, chain saw instruction courses and we are about to start a course on pesticides which will help us to understand the rules and regulations about their application.

"Being fortunate in having first class workshop facilities, we are sometimes able to modify pieces of equipment to suit our particular requirements. One example was on our hydraulic 5-gang mowers, where no matter how securely the height of cut

setting was adjusted on each unit, it always seemed to work loose and slip out of alignment to affect the mowing height. To eliminate this we put a bolt right through the complete framework on each unit and now keep them permanently at three quarters of an inch. This was done two years ago and I have found no detriment to the fairways in mowing at this height all the year round".

When I asked Bob Wiles if he has any ideas on how a golf course should be run, he said, "An experienced head greenkeeper should be left to get on with the job. I am very lucky here at the RAC Country Club and it is left to me to run the course as I see fit - I do report to the greens committee once a month, but they never interfere with the day to day running of the course and they expect me to sort out my own problems. Everything I have asked for machinery-wise has always been provided and in return they expect me to keep the courses in first class playing condition.

"Our country club is embarking on a great expansion programme of some £2.5 million. This includes a sports complex consisting of six tennis courts, four squash courts plus an undercover heated swimming pool to be built over the next year" said Bob; "In my opinion the RAC is going to be one of the premier clubs in Europe".

On reflection, after seeing over his operation, I would tend to agree with him!



The RAC lost 400 trees during the hurricane force winds last year.



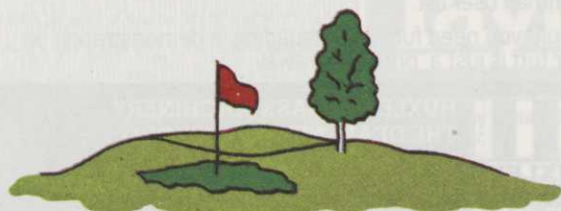
Bob Wiles (extreme left) and his staff at the RAC Country Club.

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