

GOLF IN SWEDEN

by

Michael Williams

AFTER being presented with the first prize for the Scotec Greenkeeping and Groundsmanship course at Elmwood College, Cupar, Michael Williams, an assistant at The Gleneagles Hotel, was invited to participate in an exchange visit organised between the hotel and Ljunghusen Golf Klubb in Sweden.

MY host, Stig Persson, was the high profile chairman of the Swedish Greenkeepers Association and general manager of Ljunghusen golf course. I worked during my first day in Sweden at Ljunghusen and then went on to the Swedish Greenkeepers Conference in the evening. This was held at Hollviken, about 30 miles south of Malmo on the south western tip of Sweden. The Falsterbo peninsula is a tourists' resort with three golf courses; Ljunghusen; Falsterbo, the oldest in Sweden; and Flommen. The three golf courses host the PLM Open in rotation. This year, the tournament is being hosted by the Falsterbo club.

The Ljunghusen club is 55 years old and has been extended twice since its conception in 1932; in 1954 to an 18 hole course, and then again in 1965 when an extra nine holes were added. The course was originally built as a nine hole golf course during the first boom in Swedish golf in the 1930's. Since then, as is happening all over Europe, the country is experiencing a second boom, with many new golf courses being constructed. At the eastern edge of the golf course is the Ljung nature reserve where many migratory birds assemble from both Sweden and Norway before continuing south.

salt marsh

The golf course is constructed on a salt marsh, having approximately six inches of semi-decomposed peat on top of



a pure sand base. There is obviously a very high water table with many lagoons scattered around the course. With such a high water table, during winter the ground can freeze to a depth of 5ft, which results in a mass die-back of the grass. This problem does not exist solely at Ljunghusen, but throughout Sweden. Alongside the problem of winter freezing is that of low light levels. Greenkeeping practices therefore have to be adjusted to encourage the growth of grass under such restrictive conditions.

aeration

Aeration is not carried out to the same extent as in the UK. I cannot recall seeing any aeration equipment, although the greens had been hollow-cored with four inch centres.

Sand is taken from the beach at Skanor and is stockpiled for a year before being used by all three golf courses on the Falsterbo peninsula. At Ljunghusen they add nothing to the sand - it is spread over the green using a fertiliser spreader mounted to a Ford 1710 tractor. Once the sand has been spread there is no rush to clear the green. During such operations a composite course is used, i.e. playing the first nine then holes 19-27.

The golfers are extremely patient. If a greenkeeper is working on a green the golfer cannot play until the green is clear, and could forfeit his membership if he were to play a shot prematurely.

Ljunghusen have two Toro triplex mowers and no handmowers. One is set for cutting the greens, while the

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other is used on the tees. Despite the fact that greens are not excessively large, the total dependence upon Toro's was due to shortages of staff.

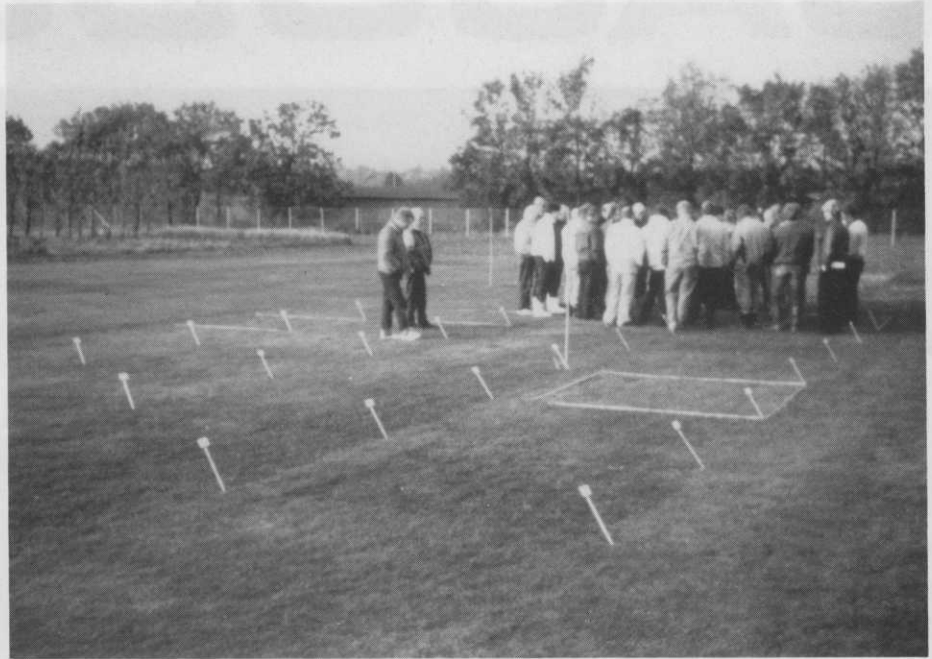
Once a green or tee has been cut, no switching is done. Many of the tees I came across, not only at Ljunghusen but throughout Sweden, were largely uneven and narrow, with very little room for moving a tee box laterally. One or two courses has resorted to the use of artificial tees.

sponsorship

It would appear that almost anything on the golf course can be sponsored - from the greenkeeper's pick-up to the holes on the course. Stig Persson drives a Subaru pick-up which is literally covered from bumper to bumper with sponsors' emblems. School children are sent to the club twice a year for a fortnight at a time to gain practical experience. They can choose for themselves which area of industry they prefer - anything from banking to greenkeeping.

conference

The Swedish Greenkeepers Conference took place at Hollsiken during the week I was in Sweden and was held at an army camp which had been leased out for the duration. There was an international flavour to the conference, and Gordon Whitteven from Toronto in Canada gave a speech on his personal mistakes over 25 years! This covered everything from mishaps with weedkillers, to greens which had to be reconstructed after being used just once, to the inevitable caddie-car in a bunker. Weibulls, the seed company who have given us *Poa pretensis* 'Sydsport', *Agrostis tenuis* 'Boral' and *Agrostis stolonifera* 'Emerald' gave us a tour of their headquarters.



peninsular

After the conference I was invited to visit Molle Golf Klubb, which is situated in the Kullaberg National Park on the outskirts of the town of Molle. The golf course is situated at the end of a peninsular, which is also the home of Europe's most powerful lighthouse. There are many deciduous trees on the course, the majority of which are beech '*Fagus sylvatica*'. The course is under the control of the national park and any work undertaken requires their authorisation. Consequently, there are very few grassed tees - the majority are artificial. There are only three bunkers on the whole course, and one was the result of a tree falling down in front of the second green - the hole it made wasn't filled in! The greenkeepers' shed is extremely cramped and somewhat reminiscent of an antique shop, with two tractors dating back to the 1950's! The environmentalists will not allow the club to expand the sheds. Molle was far removed from what I had seen at Ljunghusen. The greenkeeper there was proud of the fact that his greens were switched daily. The switch, incidentally, was

adapted from an old fishing rod, and it was hard work to move it across the grass.

expansion

Sweden is Europe's second largest golfing nation after Britain, and is currently experiencing a period of expansion. Throughout the country there are many new courses being built or being extended into 18 or 27 hole complexes. Many of these clubs are expanding their range of facilities by building country clubs, with shooting and fishing offered as an alternative to golf. This period of growth is being fuelled by large amounts of money being injected into the industry through sponsorship, etc. This is keeping the price of a game of golf extremely low compared to Britain - approximately half in real terms. Many greenkeepers have an agricultural background and an attempt is being made by the SGA to improve their system of education, but there are no specific courses being offered for greenkeeping training. Perhaps this is a measure of how far they have to go - hopefully they will succeed.