

European Golf Course conference attracts influential visitors

by John Lelean

The golf boom in Western Europe was evident for all to see at the first Golf Course Europe Exhibition and Conference held in the well appointed Rhein-Main Halls at Wiesbaden in October.

The event attracted 2,574 visitors from 14 countries, with 350 delegates registering for the conference sessions, to hear the 50 guest speakers, presenting technical, design and golf marketing papers.

Although the exhibitors were relatively small in number, the response by visitors to the accompanying conference was exceptionally encouraging. It was obvious from the first day of the three day event that there are a massive number of potential golf course developments waiting on the launch pad from the Arctic Circle to the Southern tips of Italy and Spain.

There are so many prospective golfers on the European Continent, the existing courses will need to be more than trebled in the next ten years to give any hope of club membership to the vast numbers wanting to take up the game.

The problem facing golf club developers are enormous. As well as the exorbitant cost of land, political, and environmental considerations are likely to play a significant part before the demand for golf can be anywhere near satisfied.

In Northern Europe, particularly Holland, Belgium, and West Germany, where there is probably the greatest pressure to build new courses, a strong well organised environmental lobby, staffed and supported by young intellectuals are opposed, not only to the application of fertilisers and chemicals, but to the concept of land use change, even if it is to build golf courses. Their political aims appear to be based on preservation, rather than conservation.

This is the message that came through from many of those at the conference, who are either wanting to extent existing courses or develop new ones.

A much wider spread of knowledge among those who may not necessarily want to play the game, but understand that responsible golf course maintenance and management can enhance the environment rather than destroy it, is the only way the demand for golf on the Continent will be satisfied.

As a first exhibition aimed purely at the professional section of golf construction and maintenance, many of

the leading British and American manufacturers and distributors decided not to take stand space. Following so close after the IOG International Show at Windsor and equating the costs of three days in the heart of Germany, it was no doubt a financial decision, not to take part.

However those that did participate, felt in the main it was a most worthwhile event, particularly from the quality of the enquiries and subsequent orders.

Companies representing Golf Course Design and Architecture were the most prominent, five of the 15 with stands coming from the USA. Ten UK based companies took stand space, but apart from McConnell Dabro, none of the turf maintenance machinery manufacturers were represented. Ransomes, Toro, Jacobsen, Cushman, Huxley, Charterhouse all gave the event a miss, which was surprising with such a potential market about to open up.

Fisons Horticulture was the sole UK-based supplier of fertilizers and chemicals to take stand space and they certainly did not regret their trip from Ipswich.

According to Export Manager Tony Hutchinson the timing of this show could not have been better. He told "the Golf Course" - "We have seen the European golf course industry expanding dramatically and as one of the UK's leading suppliers, we decided the time had come to launch our professional product range on the Continent."

The main product featured was the Greenmaster Fine Turf Fertiliser range,



specially designed to meet the needs of greenkeepers with a choice of nutrient ratios, accuracy of application and performance reliability. Displayed against a background picture of Jim Thorne, Wimbledon's Head Groundsman, the Fison range attracted considerable attention from the "tennis mad" Germans.

"For Fisons this first GCE Exhibition was a success. The quality of contracts and their reaction to the Greenmaster range, plus the back-up we give from our Research and Development Station, was well received", added Tony Hutchinson.

Among the design companies who found Golf Course Europe an outstanding success was Calum Todd, the European Consultant for Bradford Benz. He said the enquiries received on the stand ranged from Ireland to Russia and Finland to Hungary with even an approach from Korea. "Many of these initial contacts have already been converted into firm contracts and we will surely be back to Golf Course Europe in 1990", added Mr. Todd.

Likewise Chris Williams of the International Golfers Club, launching their computerised golf management system reported great interest, with several orders resulting. The quality of attendance in terms of commercial decision taking was another plus point. Bob Roberts, Sales Manager for Dura Plastic Products of Beaumont California, manufacturers of irrigation pressure fittings said the company thought long and hard before deciding to show their products at the Exhibition, but it was a decision they had not regretted. There was an excellent response to the firm's product and they obtained more than sufficient orders to make the trip worthwhile.

A number of expatriate British Greenkeepers were seen at Wiesbaden, including Peter Shaw, one time Head Greenkeeper at Preston Golf Club, now working for Heinz Fehring Golf Projekt near Munich, Stewart MacIntosh, managing a course outside Munich and Kevin Munt now with, Golf Projection International, who have plans to move into the U.K. market on behalf of overseas clients in 1990.

Next year there will be another Golf Course Europe at a venue to be announced shortly at approximately the same dates in October. Details can be obtained from Ellen MacGillivray, EXPOCONSULT - P.B. 200, 3600 AE MARSEN, Netherlands.