

# Europe's imminent golf explosion

*John Lelean sets the scene for a major article in next months issue of the Golf Course after the recent hugely successful 'Golf Course Europe' exhibition and conference in Wiesbaden*

European golf is booming. That is the message that came from an eleven nation European Golf Course Conference held in Wiesbaden this month.

France has the largest number of new courses under construction where 134 mainly private developments are expected to be ready for play by 1992 to add to the current count of 330. Though just to keep pace with the growing interest in the game a further 150 will need to be built by 1995.

In Sweden, demand far outstrips the 198 existing courses, where the average membership at an 18-hole club is well in excess of 1,000. The Swedes estimate they will need a further 530 courses within the next five years.

The Dutch, who claim the game of golf started in their country in 1297 and not on the Scottish Links, have 40,000 members registered with clubs and another 150,000 golfers who play the public courses, on driving ranges, and at "golf accommodations" on hockey

and football pitches.

Holland have 100 registered plans to built new courses, but many of these are unlikely to be developed because the Dutch Government is insisting on a guarantee of public access, by both footpaths through the course and a ban on balloting for membership. Local opinion is also influenced by pressure from the fast growing Green Party, totally opposed to the cutting down of woodland or man made constructions on rural land.

The "German Greens", were also in evidence at the Wiesbaden Conference, picketing with banners and leaflets on the footpath outside the Rhine Main Hall.

Throughout the European Continent the ban on most pesticides and weed killing chemicals is making the work of the greenkeeper a nightmare. Dandelions and daisies abound, worm casts litter the putting surfaces and in Germany it is not unusual for golfers to find their fairways turned into

ploughed fields overnight by badgers digging for grubs.

The demand for golf in Scandinavia and Holland has forced the introduction of a golfer's licence. This so called "Green Card" is only issued to those who can pass a written examination on the etiquette and rules of golf, followed by a practical test on driving, chipping and putting.

No golfer is allowed on any course unless they can produce the green card, whether they have club membership or not.

Golfers then proceed to handicap status in a similar way to golf in Britain. The rest just wait in hope of eventual club acceptance, but for most this is unlikely for another ten years. The scheme attracted considerable interest at the conference and will probably be introduced throughout the Continent by the European Golf Association. An end perhaps to the five hour rounds in Spain, among the "hackers".

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