



Simon Marsh and Mark Drake, peering from the cab of their trusty Cushman

Golf course and estates manager, Simon Marsh, is the man responsible, along with head greenkeeper Mark Drake, for the maintenance and grooming of Pennyhill Park Hotel and Country Club. This stately English Country Manor House, nestling on the Surrey-Berkshire border is something of a haven of calm from the bustle of central London just 27 miles away.

As a hotel it is in a category not dissimilar to Claridge's or The Ritz, catering for the wealthy few who can and do enjoy the pursuit of excellence. The owners must have realised that golf was 'taking off' and guests play on a progressively developing little nine-hole course, fish for trout in a three acre lake, ride horses, play tennis, shoot at clay pigeons and generally bask in the wealth laden atmosphere that pervades Pennyhill's every pore.

Wonderful, you might say, and to stay here is indeed a

Hole in one

DAVID WHITE at the exclusive Pennyhill Park Hotel, where he discovers bunker excavation in one very easy lesson

wonderful though staggeringly expensive experience. What is equally impressive is that Simon and Mark, together with a crew of five, not only look after the extensive estates and the golf course, but cater also to the demands of between 350-400 members, who pay over £600 a year (I said it was expensive!) to play over a 32 SSS layout that measures just 2,022 yards with five par threes and four par fours. With an estimated 35,000 rounds played every year (actually 70,000 if one assumes that players zip round twice), there is little chance of closing a hole or two down whilst essential work is carried out or additions are installed, thus when the need for two new bunkers was mooted the use of sophisticated earth moving equipment was demanded.

A call to Melroe Europe, the makers of Bobcat Skid-Steer loaders, was timed to neatly fit with plans to demonstrate the features of their revolutionary new Bobcat 753, and the

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stage was set. First, contours of the new bunkers were white-lined directly onto the grass, no doubt designed by tour player Roger Davis, who is a member and uses the course regularly. Next the Bobcat 753 was brought out to excavate the soil to exactly the right depth and contours, doing what only a Bobcat can do: stand on its head, turn on a sixpence and perform such miracles that you soon realise the wheel has been re-invented!

Within an hour the excavations were done; with scarcely a mark to show where the Bobcat had performed such wizardry, 40 tons of sand was expertly installed the following day and the bunkers were complete – start to finish – in 24 hours. Left a month to bed-down, they are now in play and quite properly frustrate all who land in them!

Simon has never prepared a course for The Open, and his nifty little nine will not be found in a list of any top 100 courses. But credit must be given that, like thousands of other greenkeepers up and down the country, he works hard under less than ideal conditions to create a course that one scribe described as a masochist's delight.

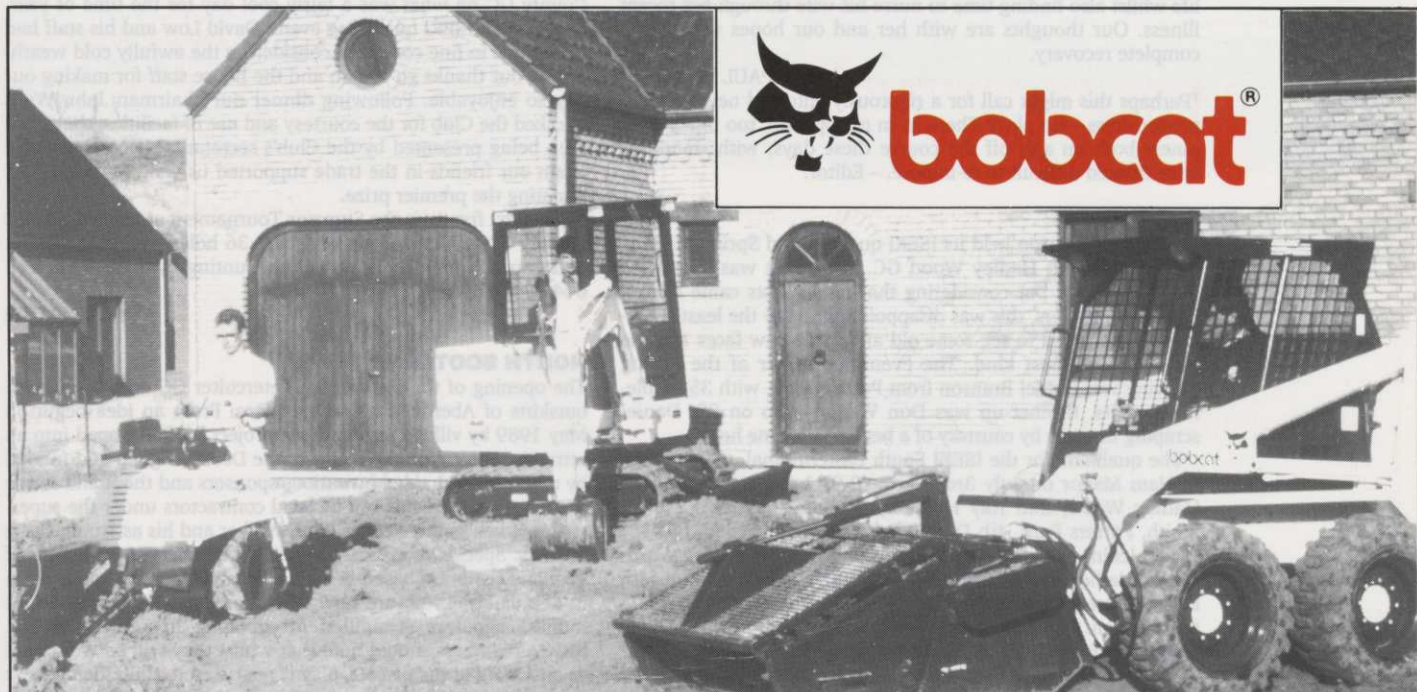
Of the course itself, it is another that claims no architect. Built just ten years ago, it has impossibly sloping greens, is on one of the highest points in Surrey – with resultant drying winds a constant negative factor – and has only about 1" of topsoil in some places. It has no automatic irrigation yet



**Bobcat 753 in action
at Pennyhill Park**

it drains well whilst consuming vast quantities of wetting agent. When Simon first came to Pennyhill there were rubber tee mats everywhere, these now replaced in entirety by 800+ sq. yard grass tees that seem to be surviving the constant onslaught.

The place has its share of visiting stars too, with tour players often staying at Pennyhill when Wentworth is a tournament venue, using the course for essential target practice. The course record – 30 – is held by Severiano Ballesteros, which proves it's no walk-over! With plans to add another nine holes, the future of Pennyhill seems set fair, as do the careers of these likeable young BIGGA greenkeepers, not to mention the other star of the show, the Bobcat 753 Skid-Steer loader.



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