

# Nice and

# EURO

Being an island nation, it is natural enough that many of us should regard the likes of Jacques Delors, the wheeling and dealing behind closed Maastricht doors and the infuriating parochial dictats of Brussels based Eurocrats with a fair degree of cynicism.

When the long running debate over our entry into the European Community becomes a final reality on the 31st December 1992, will it, we wonder, *really* turn the key to fresh opportunities for anybody prepared to cross the threshold? In my opinion, the short answer is 'Yes', especially for those of us involved in a whole range of activities which collectively forms an industry geared to supporting the game of golf.

Entry into the community of twelve will provide a wider choice of employment and free-trade opportunities: for greenkeepers, golf club managers, golf course architects, constructors, contractors and manufacturers of equipment and machinery essential for the well-being of today's golf course development, management, preparation and on-going maintenance – providing the Eurocrats are kept at bay!

Such opportunities are not only real, they have been on offer – and in many instances, taken-up – ever since golf started to become popular on the Continent. In the mid-1980s for example, agronomist George Shiels was asked to oversee the standards of greenkeeping and course maintenance at the Monte Carlo Golf Club. This eventually resulted in the on-the-spot appointment of Mike Merrick, a young English greenkeeper, as "Le Boss" of greenkeeping affairs on the slopes of Mont Agel, home of the Monaco Open tournament. At that time, Mike didn't speak a word of French. Having accepted the opportunity to broaden his career, he later told me that he spent the entire flight time from Nice back to Heathrow wondering how he would cope – and equally important, just how his wife would react to his news!

Twenty-odd years earlier, the late Sir Henry Cotton was taking advantage of his vast professional playing experience and imagination to create new golf courses in Portugal.

Going back even further in time, Bob Buckingham, head of Hampshire-based Toro machinery sales for Europe, tells me that golf course mowers manufactured by his company have been exported into Germany for over 40 years.

Exceptional cases you may think, but are they? Remember if you will that the game of golf has its origins buried deeply in our sporting history. We were building and caring for golf courses long before Bleriot's flimsy aeroplane was the first to stagger across the Channel in – when was it, 1907?

That was long before Germany's revolutionary diesel powered train, the 'Flying Hamburger' broke all existing pre-war railway speed records – and even longer still before General Franco led Spain into his bloody, military based dictatorship.



CEDRIC JOHNS  
goes on the trail of  
entente cordiale



Spanning some eighty-odd years, those events happened decades after the game of golf had become an organised sport in this country. Little wonder then that when it comes to the finer points of construction, preparation and maintenance of golf courses, the rest of Europe eyes Britain with respect. We have a history, tradition and knowledge of the game with which they cannot compete.

Why, for example, do you think that this magazine carries advertisements from Golf Clubs in France, Germany, Italy and other European countries inviting British applications for the position of head greenkeeper? Being an island nation – and a moderate people – we tend to overlook our own strengths. We are not too enthusiastic about blowing our own trumpets – but this is no time for modesty. We can and should get out there and show them a trick or two!

Some already have. Mike Greaves, whose Bucks-based company, Agripower, builds and maintains sports pitches and golf courses, views the advent of European free-trade as a positive step forward. "We have recently carried out work on a French golf course – our first involvement across the Channel – and I see this development as a good opportunity to extend our interest into Europe."

In the neighbouring county of Oxfordshire, White Horse Construction Limited say that they have received several enquiries from Continental Europe. "We have made no real attempt to promote ourselves – as yet – but we are keeping a close eye on the developments," reports the company's contracts manager, Kevin Smith. Down in Dorset, the Brian Pier-

son organisation have not only been employed on golf course work in Bordeaux and Toulouse but have also opened an office in Paris to service the French golf market. "Languages are a problem – especially when we receive very detailed specifications from developers over the Channel" says Mark Pierson. "Discussions at architect, developer and especially hotel group levels are easier" he says, "for most business people use English". Nevertheless, Mark is working hard studying both French and German. "Our standards of golf course construction are usually much higher than those accepted in other countries, yet surprisingly we are finding that our cost projections are lower", he concluded.

In Pocklington, Yorkshire, fine turf specialists Inturf say that although they are fully committed to existing developments in the UK and Eire they are fully aware of the potential of the European market. As managing director, Derek Edwards, put it, "I believe that Europe will be good for us – both as individuals and as a nation. Our present commitments mean that we cannot seriously promote ourselves in European markets until late '93. Nevertheless, we currently have plans to open a new operational base in Kent – when established, it will give Inturf the perfect entrée via the Channel Tunnel".

Dr Peter Hayes of the Sports Turf Research Institute is equally positive. "We have been providing advisory services throughout Europe for a number of years. Indeed, the demand for our services is increasing simply because of a lack of local expertise on the other side of the Channel." However, in the context of turf, Dr

# does it...

Hayes expressed the opinion that even setting aside the possibilities of restrictions being imposed on the exportation of soil, the sheer weight of large deliveries might be uneconomic. In his view, British turf suppliers would find it worthwhile establishing a link with a similar, existing company and grow turf on the Continent. Equally, the possibility of problems arising when British companies get involved in other European countries can be real enough, he suggests.

In Germany, specifications for golf course construction are very much allied to German based DIN standards – which differ from our own BSI requirements. This raises the question of Brussels style bureaucracy! Negotiations are already under way (with the Sports Council and the STRI battling for the UK) to endeavour to reach agreement on the new Franco-German driven CEN standards, which will set the specification for the construction of greens.

At present, standards for the construction of soccer and hockey pitches and tennis courts are being debated. As an example of what this entails, Dr Hayes tells me that Germans are seeking to establish a standard for soccer pitches – similar to the 'super' levels laid down for the Olympic Stadium at Munich.

One can imagine the reaction of UK Parish or Town Councils or other local authorities faced with the costs of providing 'park's pitches' equating to those standards of excellence! The STRI takes the view that providing a grass pitch is able of producing an even bounce of the ball, has sufficient traction (grip) and that drainage is good, the actual components used in its construction is of relatively no great import...

Golf courses? Dr Hayes is of the opinion that this important area will not be discussed and finalised for another two or three years.

As might be expected, that doyen of British greenkeeping practices and construction methods – Jim Arthur – has his own views on the subject. "Bureaucrats and politicians are meddling in matters which are beyond their comprehension," says Jim, referring to attempts by Brussels to standardise everything – never mind golf. He continued, "British architects and constructors, some of the most experienced people on the European scene, are apprehensive about the underlying implications of the Euro-CEN standards relative to golf course design and construction. There is no logic in Eurocrats wasting their time and our money trying to impose themselves by creating 'rule book' standards which will apply to both construction and the management of golf courses. Because they have no real experience or tradition of the game they are being blinded by the American way of doing things. They perceive target greens as the ultimate way that golf should be played this side of the Atlantic. Unless we dig our heels in, we British are in danger of selling our birthright down the river!"

Over-riding Brussels, CEN and all that, Jim is convinced that the game of golf as we know

it will be taken over by professionals. "Europe or not, it will all come down to money" says Jim. "The game will deteriorate into a professional lottery – run by and for professionals."

Greenkeeping? "There are some very good young people coming through" he says. "Hopefully, they will not be compromised by the dictats of commercially minded entrepreneurs motivated by the wrong reasons."

Talking of greenkeeping, David Whitaker, course manager at Wisley, made some pertinent comments related to his experience gained during a two and-a-half year stint at Golf du Domaine Imperial, an 18 hole Swiss course. In charge of a 9-hole in this country and keen to better himself, David jumped at the chance of going to Switzerland. "I didn't speak French and my support team of locals had never seen a golf course before – never mind worked on one!" he says.

Nevertheless, David soon got to grips with his dual problems and says that he soon developed his labour force into a working team – who wanted to learn more. Like so many young greenkeepers, David moved – in his case to Switzerland – to broaden his experience but not to stay indefinitely. "I always knew that I would return to home soil at some time" he says.

In David's opinion, countries such as France, Germany and Belgium are waking up to the needs of providing greenkeeper training. "Lots of chaps went for the money," says David. "Now, thanks to the efforts of BIGGA, salary levels in the UK are catching-up fast."

British greenkeepers eyeing EC countries should also bear in mind that many of the new developments are based on America practices – sand based greens, creeping bents and wall-to-wall irrigation. These types of courses call for a radically different approach compared to traditional UK turf management techniques.

In the final analysis, Europe is of course all about people, so the last word on the subject goes to BIGGA's Education Officer, David Golding. "Europe has come to us for greenkeepers" says David, "especially since we have raised the level of education to the point where many young greenkeepers are of outstanding management calibre. "In contrast", he continues, "little formal training is, or has been, available to young people in countries like Germany, Spain, France, Portugal or Holland".

Equally he confirmed that BIGGA approved colleges are increasingly aware of the potential importance of golf on the European continent. This autumn, Cannington College (Somerset) is introducing an HND educational programme linking European studies with greenkeeping courses. Elsewhere, other colleges have set out to encourage the use of a second language. Yes, the signs are good for those with a positive attitude, n'est pas!

■ The author, Cedric Johns, is an ex Fleet Street journalist who now runs his own marketing consultancy. He is also the editor of 'Pipelines'.

## New faces join BTME Steering Committee

Two new members have joined the 1993 BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition Steering Committee.

Lorna Tyson, from Lancashire College and Arthur Wood, from Iseki UK, were introduced at the Committee's first meeting for the 1993 event, at Aldwark Manor on May 21st.

The June 1st deadline for space allocation had prompted many exhibitors from 1992 to confirm their place for the 1993 event, the meeting heard. Together with new companies currently being allocated space, the Exhibition halls are rapidly filling up.

The Seminar Programme is now taking shape, together with the Social Programme, but details are still to be finalised. "Watch this space!" says Debbie Savage, BTME Exhibitions Officer.

Because of the big success in January, the Old Swan will once again be designated BIGGA's Exhibition and Conference Hotel. Rates have yet to be finalised, but price increases are expected to be modest and may not be increased at all.

A BTME newspaper is again to be produced for distribution to the trade. Companies planning to exhibit at the 1993 event are invited to submit information and photographs for publication.

For more information on the 1993 BTME, or for a copy of the Information Pack, contact Debbie Savage on 03473 581/2 or by fax on 03473 8864.

● BTME 1993 Steering Committee members are: Neil Thomas, Bill Lynch, Debbie Savage, BIGGA; Linda Manning, Arthur Wood, Iseki; Richard Bishop, Karen Smith, Ransomes Sims & Jefferies; Mike Coleman, Fuchsia Print & Publicity Services; Rachel Semlyen, Rolawn; David Palmer, Supaturf Products; David Boothby, Lely (UK) Ltd; Roger Mossop, ICI Professional Products; Jonathan Harmer, Farmura Environmental Products; Jonathan Gaunt, Golf Course Architect; Richard Manby, Joe Manby Ltd; Lorna Tyson, Lancashire College; Colin Gregory, Hardi Ltd.

## Modus 'T' set up machinery factory

The new management at Modus 'T' have been keeping a low profile while setting up their 10,000 sq.ft turf machinery factory at Wem in Shropshire.

"Having a 24 year old engineering company up our sleeves meant that we knew what to do, but I definitely had trouble separating my 'upmilling scarifiers' from my 'cast iron fish plates', says MD Adam Greaves. Design engineering work on redesigning the Powercore and Tri-Master products is completed, with the Powercore MkII prototype undergoing extensive field trials. Inherited quality shortcomings have now been remedied across the range and all parts are dispatched within 24 hours. Details, Tel: 0939 233213.