



Phil Helmn: "This club and course are not just for golfers. I'd like people to enjoy the course for other things - essentially it remains a beautiful parkland."

ONLY

Aspiring to excellence is one of the secrets of Overstone Park's success. It's a philosophy shared by course manager Phil Helmn

Despite the spectre of recession, which has seen off many golf course developments, there is at least one oasis of optimism for new courses in this country.

Overstone Park Golf Club in Northamptonshire opened for play last July, at a time when green shoots of recovery were only thinking of making an appearance. This ambitious project encompasses an 18 hole parkland course, a development of 122 second homes for the golf-obsessed, a health and leisure club and even a 27 acre trout lake, complete with resident "fishing professional."

Donald Steel designed the par 72, 6602 yard course, which is set in 800 acres of picturesque Victorian walled parkland on the eastern outskirts of Northampton. It's a site of notable beauty and Donald took a pragmatic approach to the course design: "My philosophy is to work with the land's resources rather than against them," he said. "The land has many mature trees and an existing lake and it was our aim to make use of these natural features."

"We have tried to produce 18 very individual holes with a lot of variety between them."

Responsibility for the course lies with Phillip Helmn, a course manager with big ambitions. Phil, aged 28, worked at a club in Vero Beach, Florida after leaving Myerscough College, where he was a student for three years. Apart from his diploma with honours, Phil also picked up the Top Turf Student trophy and Top Research Studies trophy along the way.

His route to his present post came via Camberley Heath Golf Club in Surrey, where he was deputy head greenkeeper, and Collingtree Park in Northampton where he was head greenkeeper under course manager Peter Jones.

Phil joined Overstone Park when it was under construction and worked closely with Donald Steel and Brian D Pierson's construction company to grow the golf course in and open it for limited play within six months. It was a hectic half year, which also comprised appointing a full maintenance crew of eight and selecting and buying a stable of the best machinery.

"Some 90 per cent of my major grass cutting machinery is Toro, simply because of its quite

THE BEST WILL DO



Top picture: at work on the course at Overstone Park
Above: maintenance staff with some of their machinery

Phil Helmn, seated, with Andrew Humble of Erringtons of Evington, Leicester, who supplied Overstone Park with their Toro kit. "They give me unrivalled quality of service and therefore peace of mind," said Phil.

justifiable reputation for quality and reliability. I think my main reason for choosing Toro, however, was my experience in the past of their efficient back-up service."

Firmly in Phil's sights is a strong desire to achieve high standards of excellence on the greens. He also wants to nurture a course that will be appreciated by more than just the golfing fraternity.

"I identified the turf we wanted from fields in Norfolk and Yorkshire," he said. "Then, to enhance the Victorian setting, we planted trees, shrubs and an abundance of wildflower mixes, containing specimens such as corn poppy, foxglove and red campions.

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Testimony to the early successes of Overstone Park, which is the centrepiece of the Watermark Club leisure resort, is the fact that 50 timber finish homes were sold within three months of opening, at a value of £4.5m. Starting at £79,000, the properties have a prime location near to the first and tenth tees and all owners receive two free lifetime memberships to the club, worth nearly £10,000.

Overstone Park staff

Phillip Helmn – course manager
Craig Williams – deputy head greenkeeper
Andrew Parsons – assistant greenkeeper
Paul Knowles – trainee greenkeeper
Christopher Stanley – trainee greenkeeper
Simon Atkinson – head landscaper
Martin Green – golf course mechanic

Major machinery in the Overstone Park stable

- 1 Toro GM 3100 petrol triplex mower (with various attachments)
- 1 Toro 5100D lightweight fairway mower
- 1 Toro 455D rotary deck rough mower
- 1 Toro 216D triplex mower
- 1 Toro 216 petrol triplex mower
- 1 Toro pedestrian greens aerator