



It's got to be Gordon

Tim Moat reports on a fitting end to a magnificent year for Gordon Irvine

The new ICI Premier Greenkeeper is Gordon Irvine.

The award, acknowledged to be the most prestigious in greenkeeping, was a fitting end to a year of achievement for Gordon, course manager at Mill Ride Golf Club in Berkshire.

Last January, the 29 year old Scot became the youngest ever Master Greenkeeper. He was awarded his plaque by the Duke of York, who asked for his help in sorting out some troublesome private lawns. Two or three trips to the Duke's private residence and lengthy discussions on the art of fine turf maintenance gave Gordon a rare insight into royalty. It was also an opportunity for "a spot

GREENKEEPER OF THE YEAR



Professional Products



of excellent public relations for BIGGA," he grinned.

Gordon's achievements continued in 1993 with the birth of his daughter, Samantha Louise and reached another high spot in elegant surroundings at Aldwark Manor

in December.

All in all, it was quite a year for Gordon Irvine. He has accomplished more than many greenkeepers could ever wish for and now the award of all awards – "Greenkeeper of the Year" – is also his.

It was the word "remarkable" that Roger Mossop, marketing manager of ICI Professional Products, used to sum up Gordon's talents when he handed over the prized plaque: "I hope this is a stepping stone to even greater things," he said at the awards ceremony, "and not a culmination. The 1993 ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year is Gordon Irvine, a man with a remarkable career in front of him..."

'To have reached even this far was achievement enough'

➔ Roger's speech, plus an impressive banquet, a spot of bowling and a social drink signified the end of a day when five of the country's finest greenkeepers came together for an occasion they will remember for the rest of their lives. To have reached even this far was achievement enough.

It was, as all judges hasten to add at these times, a hard decision to choose the winner from excellent candidates. In this, the fourth year of the competition, the five finalists had initially been nominated by their peers to become best of their individual BIGGA section, before regional finals went on to yield the famous five who made it to the final. "All candidates possessed the right characteristics and any one could have been the winner," said Roger Mossop who noted that 1993's entry had been the highest ever. The standard had been, he said, "exceptional."

The final hurdle in deciding just who would win the accolade which could be seen as a passport to greater things, was a 45 minute interview conducted by BIGGA's executive director Neil Thomas, BIGGA education sub-committee chairman Huw Parry, and the ICI Professional Products team of Roger Mossop and Richard Minton. Imagine the fear which grips contestants as they approach the spotlighted black chair in the BBC's "Mastermind" programme and, as one of the candidates explained later, that's just what it felt like as the call came for their own big moment.

The interviews themselves were not as onerous as imagined. Every effort was made for the proceedings to be informal but as Graham Wood – the eventual runner-up – pointed out, there was little getting away from the idea that this was like an interview for an important job.



Winners all: From left, Terry Huntley, Laughlan Millar, Tony Mears, Graham Wood and Gordon Irvine, with Richard Minton and Roger Mossop from ICI Professional Products

Any one could have been the winner

"You're aware that you're dealing with people who really know what the game is all about," he said.

But it was an occasion none of the five would have missed. Laughlan Millar, who was eventually placed third, said he saw it as a "great honour" to be considered to be one of the top five greenkeepers in the country. From a family containing some 15 greenkeepers, it was more than section level honour at stake and Roger Mossop paid Laughlan great tribute as it was revealed that he was one of 11 nominees in his section.

Tony Mears, in the middle of studying two hours a day, five days a week for the Master Greenkeeper Certificate, said the encouragement he had received from his club had itself been very rewarding. "The letter was posted on the notice board," he said, "and the reaction was just great. People kept coming up to me to wish me all the best." The interview, said Tony, was "exhilarating."

Terry Huntley was full of praise for BIGGA and ICI Professional Products for giving greenkeepers a "real sense of purpose." He was proud of the lifelong friends he had made through his membership

of the Association and was grateful for the way BIGGA continues to "push greenkeepers forward". Terry, course manager at Ashford Manor Golf Club in Middlesex, said there was a high level of interest in the competition at the club. "They're already cock a hoop I've come this far."

The day, however, belonged to Gordon Irvine who said before the result was announced: "Everybody has to set goals. The Master Greenkeeper Certificate was a private goal and I entered this award to recognise the greenkeeping team and the golf club as well."

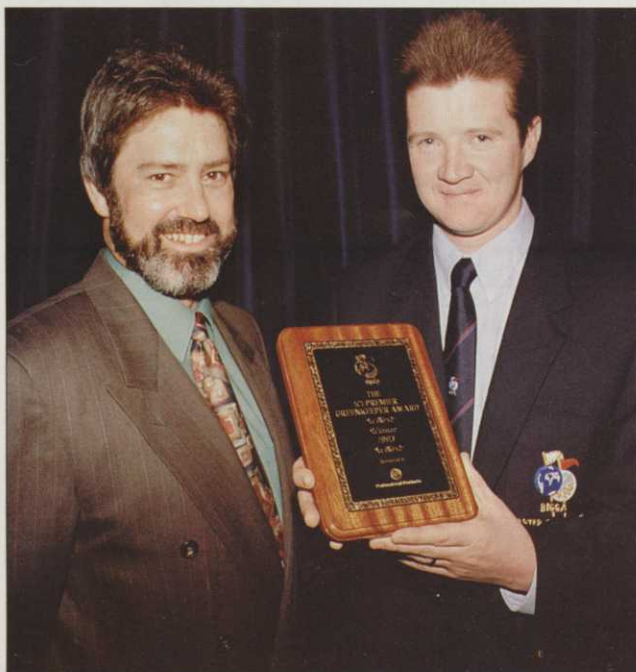
"I've got a lot of respect for ICI Professional Products. They're a very professional company and that came across in the interview."

"This award carries so much clout."

Gordon's pivotal role at Mill Ride Golf Club where he started as clerk of works in 1989 finally tipped the balance in his favour for the prestigious title. Gordon has had to cope with the affects of recession to help build the club and to give it a solid foundation on which to grow. "It was a great challenge to see it through," he said.

It was just the challenge necessary for the judges to see just who was to carry the banner high as ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year. "Gordon has made great strides at his club," Roger Mossop told the audience at the award ceremony. "He's done everything there plus he's found time for the Master Greenkeeper Certificate and he's an NVQ assessor."

In announcing that for the first time a Scot had won, a humorous voice with a north of the border accent finally broke any tension that may have remained when he piped up from the back, "You've got it right at last!"



Roger Mossop, Gordon Irvine and the "award which carries so much clout"