

'A first class show... difficult to better but easy to spoil'

by Colin Hegarty of the Golf Research Group

BIGGA members don't want to lose what they've got at Harrogate. That is the clear message from a survey conducted by an independent research organisation, the Golf Research Group.

BIGGA commissioned me to survey members' wishes after the Association was approached by P&O Events with a proposal to combine the BTME with other grounds maintenance sectors and move the new 'unified' show to London's Olympia.

A two-page, 10-question survey was mailed to 1,474 members who are head greenkeepers. A covering letter asked them to consult with their staff, who are members, before replying. Twenty-five percent (370) of these questionnaires were returned within the deadline – considered by pollsters to be an excellent response rate.

The survey found that:

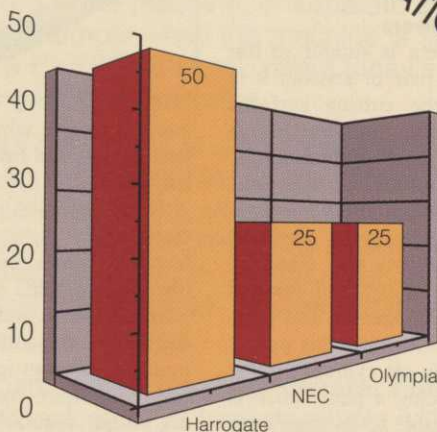
- ◆ 70% of BIGGA members have visited the BTME at Harrogate at least once;
- ◆ Half the membership are in favour of continuing the exhibition at Harrogate, compared with 25% whose preferred location was Olympia;
- ◆ Of those members who have been to Harrogate, 64% said it was their preferred location, while only 16% said they would like to see it moved to Olympia;
- ◆ Of the members preferring Olympia the vast majority, not surprisingly, came from the south. But it is interesting to see that their second choice was Harrogate and not the NEC at Birmingham;
- ◆ 67% of northern greenkeepers would prefer the show to be at Harrogate, and only 8% of northern greenkeepers want it to be in London;
- ◆ A question about 'where and how members learn' at the BTME showed that 36% of their time is spent talking to the exhibitors on stands, 32% of their time is spent talking and learning from other greenkeepers, and 32% of their time is spent learning more formally from the seminar programme which is run in conjunction with the show;
- ◆ Nearly a quarter of members who attend the BIGGA week stay for three days – 19% stay for one day, 14% for two days, 22% for three days, 5% for four days and 11% for the full five days;
- ◆ Of the 56% of members who have visited the IoG's show (this year called SALTEX), most go for just one day and only 1% attend on all three days;
- ◆ 9% of BIGGA members are also members of IoG.

Members were also given the opportunity to expand their views.

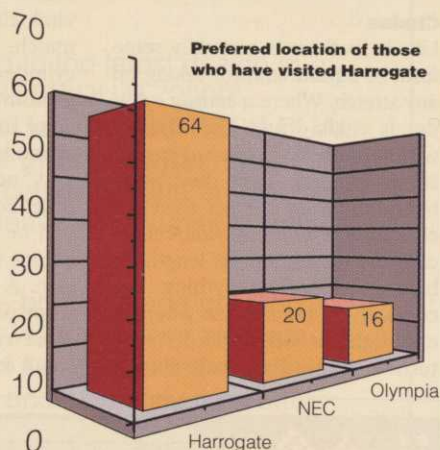
Typical comments from members included:

"Harrogate is a compact, friendly venue and has a good reputation. The NEC could

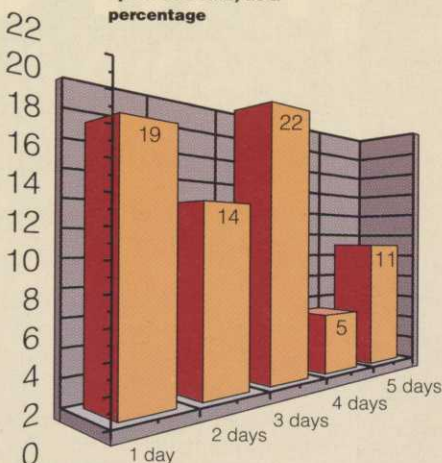
What BIGGA members thought of the proposals to change BTME



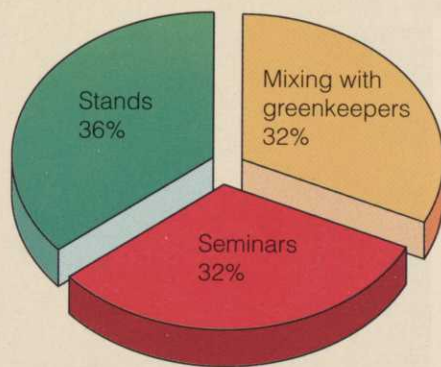
Above: Preferred location for BTME – percentage of BIGGA members



Below: Number of days spent at BTME, as a percentage



Below: Learning forums at the BTME – where members learn



be a bit impersonal – and what about accommodation? Olympia has parking problems, expensive accommodation, even travelling from the outskirts of London can be a problem."

"Olympia is much closer to my home address but I am not sure the accommodation would be available to keep the close-knit companionship which is always available at Harrogate."

"Why oh why should we greenkeepers 'North of Watford' have to succumb to the industry's notion that London is the best

venue for everything? Harrogate is centrally located for all greenkeepers, making it more likely that our Scottish 'cousins' will attend. Harrogate is a success, I don't ever remember sitting on a motorway slip road there for over an hour watching the exhibition from afar."

"I see this proposal as further erosion of our independence."

"A first-class show marked on every greenkeeper's calendar. Difficult to better but easy to spoil."

● See also Grass Notes, Page 50



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