



A severe Challenge

The final of Hayter Challenge this year will be just that – a Challenge as the intrepid men who have already battled through the sectional and regional qualifiers have then to pit their wits with the might of West Lancashire – a course which can test the best.

You want proof? It has regularly welcomed top professionals particularly for final Qualifying for The Open Championship when it is played at Royal Birkdale but the professional course record is still a well preserved 66. That is high when you see scores at other qualifying, and indeed Open, venues. One point of note. In his first year as a professional Nick Faldo led the qualifiers at West Lincs for the 1976 Open with two rounds of 72 and 69.

You also get an idea of the difficulty when Head Greenkeeper John Muir asks if we really want to play off the back tees for the Hayter Final.

"If we have a breeze it's like other people's winds and many people would struggle to make the carries," he explained.

And you believe him because if you read the

HAYTER

club's excellent brochure you'll find a piece about John Hawkesworth, a former Walker Cup player now competing on the European Tour who returned a 68 in the Youths' Championship of 1982.

"Unfortunately it was not recognised as an amateur record because the R&A ordered the 10th tee to be brought forward – because players could not reach the fairway with their drives into the teeth of a gale!"

It's not just the carries which are long. The whole course takes a bit of beating. Off the back tees it is 6767 yards and there are nine holes over 400 yards, five of them par-4s.

"It really is a traditional links course. The first four holes follow the shore and it is two loops of nine one clockwise and the other anti clockwise so you have to be able to play in all winds," said John, who heads a team of

six at West Lincs.

Another feature which West Lincs has which is a feature common among many of the top links courses is that it runs along a railway line.

The club was established in 1873 and was one of the original 24 clubs to contribute to the cost of the Amateur Championship trophy.

Like many clubs at the moment it is very dry adding to its links feel but unlike many clubs John Muir says he can remember it much drier than it was in the middle of August.

"Earlier in the year the water table was as high as it has been for 60 years and even now it is now as low as it was in '84 or '87," he explained.

So the 63 players representing the seven regions battling it out at West Lincs had better ensure that their games are honed for the occasion. I'd recommend a crash course of hitting 3-irons and keeping them low under the wind.

■ Photograph by Brian Morgan