



Risk & reward

continued from page 17

"General Manager, John Quigley, is the man who put me forward for the Toro award."

It is perhaps a reflection in the quality of golf courses in the Irish Republic that a previous attempt to win the Toro award didn't get past Section level but it did ensure that this year Iain was ready.

"After that I stood back and took a fresh look at the entire operation and tightened up many working practices, and this time I got the staff more involved in the competition. They were fully aware of what was happening, when it would be happening and what the place would be like," said Iain, who would describe himself as employing the hands-on approach to the job.

The golf club will greatly appreciate the Toro Workman 2100 which they receive as part of the prize while Iain is already looking forward to the trip to the GCSAA Show in Dallas.

"I haven't been to the show for about seven years and ironically it was at Dallas the last time I was there."

He is also complimentary of his staff of 12, whom he describes as being very enthusiastic and loyal. They benefit from Iain's success to the tune of £250 while Iain is sure that will be added to by the golf club.

"I've had very little turn-over in the last 10 years, mostly it's been retrials."

Prior to moving to Ireland Iain had been Head Greenkeeper at Ladybank, a wonderful heathland course not far from Cupar, Fife.

"I was at Ladybank for five years from '85. It was a super club to work for, I was



Above: The Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping finalists. Front row: Ronnie Bunting, Terry Farkins, Iain Ritchie and Gary Johnstone with the judging panel behind

a member as well and it was difficult to leave, particularly as in '90 we had an Open Qualifier for the St Andrews Championship and I would have loved to have stayed and prepared for that. I must admit I have very fond memories of Ladybank.

"However, there was a big carrot being dangled in the shape of Portmarnock and an Irish Open which was held 10 weeks after I got there," said Iain who adds that his arrival at Portmarnock was the first time he had ever set foot on Irish soil.

That Irish Open went well with a high profile winner in Jose Maria Olazabal

while the course achieved much more publicity when it hosted the 1991 Walker Cup.

In the run up to the match, then American amateur golden boy, Phil Mickelson, made a derogatory remark about Irish women - so unimpressed with their beauty he didn't want to go into the rough to be too near them - which caused such a diplomatic incident that George Bush, "Dubya's" dad the then US President, had to apologise.

"The course went down well with everyone though as it always does," said Iain, who is married to Yvonne with two

daughters Lisa and Lynzie.

Portmarnock has also received a couple of visits from Tiger Woods, who has taken to honing his game for the Open with a few days in Ireland tackling some of the finer links courses.

"He comes into the club afterwards and is always very open. It's nice when things like that happen on your golf course."

It seems a lot of nice things are happening to Iain at the moment and they are all much deserved. "I turned 40 last week and now this. It's been a very good Millennium for me."

When in Rome... Find a way to get back!

For such an important day as the Toro finals you would imagine that a finalist would get an early night and be up, ready, and prepared well before the interview time.

Not Iain Ritchie. The tale of what happened on the day of the finals would make a fine sequel to John Cleese's film *Clockwise*.

To celebrate his 40th birthday Iain and wife, Yvonne, had booked to spend the long weekend in Rome only discovering later that the Monday coincided with the Toro finals.

Let Iain take up the story.

"There was nothing to do but for me to fly out early on Monday morning and for Yvonne to come back at the scheduled time later that night.

"However, the day coincided with day

one of the horrendous storms which hit much Britain.

"I left our hotel at 6am to get the 8.30 flight to Heathrow where I was due to change for Leeds/Bradford. When I got into the airport everything to and from London was delayed because of the storms. I then tried to buy a ticket to get to Amsterdam from where I could then fly directly to Leeds/Bradford but I couldn't because my luggage by this time had been checked in.

"With my interview at 3pm all I could do was keep Joe Bedford, who was at BIGGA HOUSE, informed by mobile what was happening. After what seemed like days we eventually did get airborne but there were further delays as we circled Heathrow at least 15 times. When we did land I had to run from Terminal

2 across to Terminal 1 for the British Midland lounge. I was carrying my presentation because I hadn't wanted to risk it going missing

"By this time it was already about 3pm and I had been due on the 12.45pm flight to Leeds/Bradford. Fortunately this flight hadn't left and I thought finally things were going my way... but then it didn't take off until half past four.

"Sitting waiting for this flight I was desperate and quite prepared to hire a car, and driver if necessary, to drive me to York. It meant so much to me to be there.

"I had a car booked at Leeds/Bradford and knew that Aldwark Bridge was closed for redevelopment. I'd organised a route from my computer Route Master but Elliott (Small) came on and

told me that this way was closed because of the weather so I had to go another way by memory."

"I eventually arrived at the Hotel at 6.50pm and, after a quick shave, was sitting being interviewed at 7.10pm, the scheduled time having been moved back as far as was possible to accommodate me.

"The last thing I wanted to do was jump straight out of the car and be slap bang in the middle of an interview situation but the later it got in the day the more unfair it was on everyone else. I was thinking of Ronnie Bunting, who'd been on first at the beginning of the day and how long he was having to wait.

"I feel that I had a nery start to the interview but after that they had to shut me up at the end."