

**Jason Taylor, Deputy Course Manager at the London Club, spent a week at Valderrama assisting in the preparations for the American Express World Championship events. He reports back on how he got on...**

# Valderrama adventure



My adventure starts in the Superintendent's office at the London Golf Club back in the spring '99. I'd decided that I would like to be involved in the set up for a major tournament. After checking the European Tour dates, I had a list of a few possibilities, but one European venue stood out above all the others - Valderrama. This was a golf course which I had heard many times being described as Europe's best.

After sending a letter to Jaime Ortiz Patino, the Club President and proprietor of Valderrama, I received an e-mail back requesting a meeting at his London office in Bond Street.

At this meeting I discussed what I would like to do and why, with Jaime Ortiz Patino and he said he would be happy for me to visit during the week of the American Express Championships on the 1st to the 7th November.

He also said that his assistant would be able to help me find accommodation for the week. All that was left was for me to arrange flights and time off.

In the week before I left for Spain I contacted Jaime Olano, the Superintendent at Valderrama, to finalise the arrangements on my arrival.

At the airport and on the coach to Valderrama, I kept seeing large bill-

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boards with Tiger Woods on, with the words, "Meet me at Valderrama." When I arrived at my hotel it was quite late so I had a meal in the restaurant and booked a Taxi for 4:30 the following morning so as to be at the course for 5am.

After pulling up at the very grand main entrance I was given directions to the maintenance compound. As the taxi pulled up I met Jaime Olano

who was also just arriving. He took me into the maintenance compound and gave me a brief tour of the yard and the various buildings around it. The first thing I noticed was that every piece of equipment was red and he explained that the club had a policy of only buying Toro equipment as they felt that this was the best, and delivered the highest standards of after sales service.

After this tour Jaime introduced me to a number of his colleagues. The majority of the staff were sat around a large table in the mess room tucking into coffee and bread rolls. This happened every morning and was a very pleasant way to start the day. The guys were all very friendly and interested in why I was there. The only problem was that none of them spoke much English and I spoke no Spanish.

One of the guys whom I was very happy to meet a little later was Ken Woods, an ex-Myerscough student, who had moved over to Spain to work full time at Valderrama. He spoke fairly good Spanish and this helped me to communicate with the other staff.

There was a large plan on the mess room door which listed everybody who was working during the event and exactly what they were going to

be doing in the morning and afternoon of each day. I was down to join one of the three crews raking bunkers in the morning shift which was from 5am to 10.30am. There were two other members of my crew, Juan, who spoke no English, and Pedro, who spoke a few words. We did however manage to communicate through a mixture of Spanish, English and sign language.

While getting ready to travel out onto the course I was wondering how we were going to see the bunkers to rake them, but on leaving the yard the first thing I saw was Jaime Ortiz Patino, whom I immediately recognised from our London meeting, dewing off a floodlit green. All the greens were lit by floodlights either mounted up in the branches of the cork oaks which surrounded most of the greens or by temporary lights mounted on stands which were removed during the day.

The bunkers, rather than being raked, were actually swept, using soft yard type brushes, with a 12 inch band rough raked around the outside. Instead of using sand in the bunkers crushed marble was used. This made for a brilliant white colour with a coarser texture than sand. When you were in the bunker with the sun





reflecting off of the marble it looked more like snow than sand.

As the sun started to rise I was able to see the true beauty of the course. The first thing that you notice is the majestic cork oaks, which frame all the holes at Valderrama. Most of these are at least 200 years old.

The golf course was originally designed by Robert Trent Jones. When Jaime Ortiz Patino acquired it in 1985 Robert Trent Jones was asked to come back and redesign it, with hosting a major championship in mind.

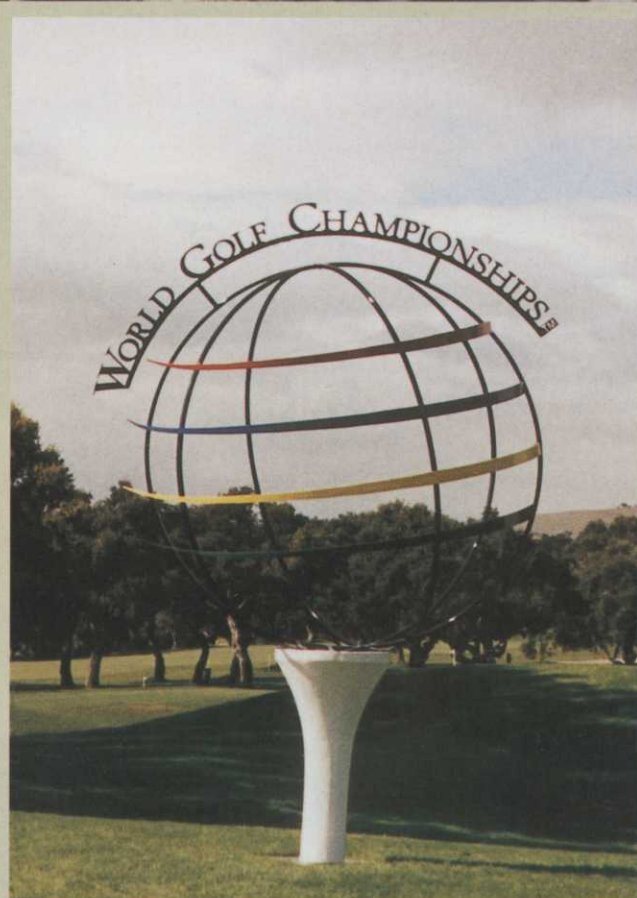
The final hole to be redesigned and constructed was the 17th and Trent Jones suggested that Seve Ballesteros design this. This he agreed to do and created a hole which is a long par-5 with the green guarded at the front by a lake. The green actually slopes forward towards the lake and many players found this to their peril. The most memorable of these was Tiger Woods on the final day. This made him take eight shots on the hole. He did, nevertheless, go on to win the event.

While we were raking the bunkers, the greens which consisted of Pencross creeping bentgrass were being cut using Toro GM1000 hand mowers which had spotlights fitted

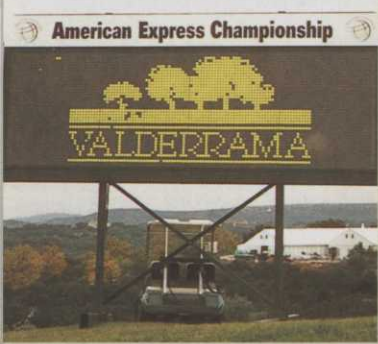
to them, and were powered by an alternator which was run off of the engine via a fan belt. The greens were double cut in the morning to a height of 3.17mm and then single cut in the afternoon after play had finished for the day. In the mornings the greens were all stimped to check that they were not only fast enough but that they were all of a uniform speed. If the overall speed needed increasing on all or just selected greens this was done by extra mowing or rolling. The speed of the greens for the tournament ranged from 11.5 to 12.5 feet. The roller that was being used had only just arrived at the club from America and was being operated by Charlie, an American who had come over to roll for the event and to instruct the staff on the rollers operation. It was a hydraulically powered machine which was much bigger and heavier than any roller that I have previously seen being used on greens in this country.

The Pencross tees and approaches were also cut in the dark again using Toro Pedestrian machines with spotlights mounted on them. The tees were cut at 11mm during the tournament and the approaches at 8mm.

The Bermuda grass fairways were again cut in the dark every morning



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at a height of 9mm using Toro GM3200 Triple mowers. The only way in which these differed from those which are widely used on greens is that they had slightly grooved tyres, a rollbar and lights fitted. There were eight guys mowing fairways and these would stripe fairways in pairs, one working in an 8-2 direction and the

other at 10-4. The fairways at Valderrama really did look superb and when I asked Jaime Olano how he achieved this he replied that they were basically scarified and fed. He said he wished that the rest of the surfaces were as easy to look after.

When our shift finished at 10:30 we were free to do what we wanted,

be it watching the golf or going home for a siesta. The afternoon shift started at 4:30 and finished at 7pm. During the afternoon I carried out a number of different tasks which included hand watering, clearing leaves and the large cork oak acorns from the green surrounds.

Valderrama has to be one of the most beautiful golf courses anywhere in the world. I think the longest lasting impression on me will be the sun setting and casting shadows through the cork oaks. At this time the whole course has an almost magical feel about it.

The golf course at Valderrama is kept green using a Toro Network 8000 irrigation system that utilises almost 3000 sprinklers. Jaime told me that the system was very user friendly and that he was more than happy with it.

One thing that I was very surprised about was how relaxed all the staff were considering that it was such a major event. When I mentioned this to Jaime Olano he simply said that the staff at Valderrama dealt with these type of events on a regular basis and to them it was not really anything out of the ordinary. He said that he trusted his staff and knew that they were more than capable of carrying out their specific tasks to the high standards required.

All too soon it was time for me to leave Valderrama and return to the UK. I had had a very enjoyable week and had learned a great deal. Visiting a course during a major event is something that I would definitely advise others to do if the opportunity arises.

Finally, I would like to give my thanks Mr Ortiz Patino for giving me this opportunity and Jaime Olano and all his staff for helping me and making my visit such an enjoyable one.

