





Scott MacCallum visited Greetham Valley and met Adrian Porter, who together with his team, makes an army of ants look slovenly

THE CLUB WHICH NEVER SLEEPS

There can be few greenkeeping teams which operates quite as efficiently as Adrian Porter's at Greetham Valley Golf Club, near Oakham, in England's smallest county, Rutland.

A bold statement one might think, and I am more than happy to be proved wrong, but when you consider that Adi's team of nine manage two 18 hole courses, a par-3 course, a driving range, a bowling green, help at the club's newly built 4x4 course, oh and, operate a contracting division which manages fine turf for anything from other golf clubs, state-ly homes to private dwellings as well as maintaining local bowling greens and football pitches you might get my drift.

"We are a young team and there is a real go-getting atmosphere around the place. There is as much work out there for them if they want it and if they work the hours they'll get good money," said Adi.

The average hours the guys put in in the summer is around 50-55 a week and Adi himself doesn't leave until the jobs are done and regularly works 6.30am to 6.30pm.

It is an up and at 'em approach which is epitomised by a club which only celebrated its 10th birthday in April. To mark the occasion they held a competition for members, friends and supporters over both the Lake and Valley courses which acted as more than just a thank you to every-one who had helped make the club

successful but a true marker as to just how far Greetham Valley has come over the past decade.

Amid all the tributes to the Hinch family, without whose vision and drive the complex would still be a sheep and arable farm, was a very public and heartfelt thanks to Adi and his team for making dreams a reality.

"They are great that way. I am always invited to competitions which the club holds and they never fail to credit the staff for the work they do while the members often go up to staff while out on the course and

complimenting them on the condition of the course," said Adi.

Adi joined the club from Crocketts Manor G&CC, in Henley-in-Arden, in 1995 after the Hinch family led by Frank but with superb support from his wife, Hazel, son Robert and his wife, Dee, decided that the introduction of a professional Course Manager was vital if the club was to fulfil its potential.

"For the first three years they tried to run it by themselves with some farming friends but before I came they had begun to lose members to neighbouring clubs," explained Adi.

"It didn't look like a golf course. Every fairway was cut from tee to green with no definition. They knew something wasn't quite right and Robert - who is now the Club's Managing Director - was getting ear-ache whenever he went into the clubhouse."

An advert soon went into Greenkeeper International and Adi was appointed.

"It was a bigger development, closer to my home, and as soon as I walked round the course I knew it was a job I wanted. I felt I could really make a name for myself at Greetham Valley."

At that stage they had just finished the construction of the nine holes to turn it into a 27 hole complex, plus the par-3 course, and were at the stage where they were still seeding greens and turfing areas.

There was no mention in specific



Adrian Porter: Head Greenkeeper at Greetham Valley Golf Club

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Machinery Inventory

- 1 Jacobsen Mk IV
- 1 Jacobsen Mk V
- 2 Toro Sidewinders
- 1 Toro 580D
- 5 Toro 1000
- 3 Toro Workmen
- 1 Ransomes 30S
- 1 Articulator 425D
- 2 Kubota ST30
- 1 T.Y.M Tractor
- 1 New Holland 65T
- 1 Antonio Carraro
- 1 Toro Sand Pro
- 1 Greens Iron
- 1 Groundsman Aerator
- 1 Verti Drain 1.45m
- 1 Verti Drain 2.5m
- 1 Sisis Fairway Slitter
- 1 Risboro Turf Slitter
- 1 Sisis Auto Rotorake
- 1 Sisis Tru Level Brush
- 1 Gambetti Sprayer 600 lt
- 1 Wilmot Sprayer 1000 lt
- 1 Sanderson Loader
- 2 Toro Topdressers
- 1 Amazone Groundkeeper
- 2 Vicon Spreaders
- 1 Kilworth Burryvator (stoneburrier)
- 1 Kubota 3 Tonne Mini Digger
- 1 Man Lorry
- 2 Ifor Williams Trailers
- 1 Kawasaki Mule

terms of what Greatham Valley would eventually become but Adi was given an inkling at his interview.

"Even then they said they didn't like to sit back and always wanted to make changes and improvements."

From that moment Adi has enjoyed a superb relationship with the Hinch family, who have always accommodated his requests for new machinery and additional staff.

After Adi's arrival Greatham Valley ran as a 27 hole complex for around two years before the decision was made to add a further nine holes and create two distinct 18 hole courses.

"We bought more land adjacent to

the existing course which gave us room for another four holes but we had to find additional space for the other five holes. This involved moving the par-3 course across the road," he explained.

"We seeded the greens on the new par-3 course while the old one was still open and got them in play before building the new five holes. There was no disruption to the members and there was always a course for them to play while the work was going on."

That's not to say the entire job went seamlessly as turning 27 holes into two 18s can be a logistical nightmare.

"All the holes had changed and it was absolute bedlam for a while. It was also confusing for my staff as well as the members because what was the 3rd on the Valley course became the 3rd on the Lakes. Even now I'll tell someone to go and cut the 27th green when I really mean the 17th," he revealed, while adding that it also meant all the course literature and stroke indexes had to be amended to cope.

The story behind who designed the new holes is also one worth telling.

The initial 18 holes were designed by Dave Wishart, of the STRI, who'd been brought in at the start to assist the Hinch family in the transition from farm to golf but the remainder of the holes have been designed by Ben Stephens.



You know... Ben Stephens.

Surely you must have heard of Ben Stephens.

Well don't go thumbing through the Institute of Golf Course Architects' Directory for Ben's name because you won't find it.

Ben was a junior member at Greatham Valley and a single figure golfer, who is now studying to be an architect - not the golf sort - at university.

"He sat down one day and off his own bat drew an extension to the original 18 holes. He showed it to Frank, who thought it was fantastic and we all sat down together, did a few modifications and went with it," said Adi.

"Ben combines his drawing skills as an architect with his golf knowledge and works from that. He can look at a piece of land, design a hole, draw it within a very short space of time, then go to his computer and draw it properly. As an example our 13th hole on the Lakes course was a bland par-5 but we got Ben in and he redesigned the hole with a meandering ditch and some banking on the left and it looks fantastic.

"I sit down with him when he's done his initial drawings and discuss





it from a maintenance or health and safety perspective and he takes these on board and comes back the next day with the revised drawings."

Ben, who also happens to have hearing and speech difficulties, studies the work of the great architects like Robert Trent Jones and Alistair McKenzie, and has already designed another nine hole pitch and putt course Manton, on Rutland Water for another client.

"To achieve what he has done is amazing, it really is, particularly with his disability, and I admire him so much for it. I also admire the fact that someone was prepared to take a chance on him."

It is indeed an example of the unusual way things are done, and done successfully, at Greetham Valley.

Another is the entrepreneurial spirit in which the club seeks out other work to augment the budget.

"Frank and Robert's idea was that I would go around local bowling clubs telling them who I was and what we could do for their bowling green. Frank was a keen bowler and felt that the quality of greens could be a lot higher," explained Adi.

"So one day Robert and I made

appointments with a series of local clubs, explained the services we could do for them together with a price list and since then we have looked after between six and eight on a regular basis and they have seen great improvement in the quality of their surfaces."

That service then grew beyond purely bowling greens to anyone who wishes to construct or maintain a fine turf area. A few years ago they even built and looked after the indoor turf green that was laid for a Jimmy Tarbuck, golf inspired, quiz show.

"We don't do landscaping but anything to do with fine turf and we've worked at stately homes and built a sunken lawn to greens quality. We also do a great many football pitches and contract work for other golf clubs," he explained, before adding that he'd already done a job that morning before my arrival.

To make it all possible they ensure that they have the machinery to do the task and double up on some so that they can still do work on their own patch when a piece of kit is on the road.

"We've got a seven and a half tonne flatbed lorry, all logged up, to trans-

port the kit around and have two verti drains as well as more than one top dresser.

"The money we make offsets my expenses and makes my figures look good at the end of the day," said Adi, who explained that the work was done under the name of another company, Greetham Valley Turf Care.

Now you would think that with so much going on, and with a staff of only nine, labour saving methods would be employed on the two courses, and par-3 course, to make it all possible. But you'd be wrong.

Greens are always hand mown - a total walking distance for the 45 holes of 22 miles - and are cut six days a week while they do not have the luxury of a fully automated irrigation system.

"We use travelling irrigators on the fairways. Since I've been here we've put in irrigation points at the sides of fairways but we didn't bother with pop-ups because we were continually tweaking fairways and they would be in the wrong place.

"It is very labour intensive and we spend a lot of time with hose pipes in the summer especially as with only four inches of topsoil over limestone,

which is very free draining, the fairways and even the rough dries out quickly," said Adi, adding that he has to cope with the high alkalinity of the course.

So what next for Greetham Valley?

Well, other than the recently opened 4x4 course, there are plans afoot to build a 35 room hotel on site to provide more facilities for visiting company and society guests while Adi is hopefully of attracting a mini professional tour event which he hopes would be televised.

"The Hinch's know of my desire to attract a televised event to the course and are happy to pay the fee for that to happen and the course is pretty close to being ready for such an event," he said, adding that it would probably be on a composite course to stretch over 7,000 yards.

Speaking to Adi, you get the impression of a young man who is well in control of the fast moving, dynamic job which he now holds.

"I couldn't imagine doing what I am doing now when I started. I knew Greetham Valley would go to 27 holes and that would be a big step for me but even now, being in charge at such a big complex, I still can't believe how quickly it has happened."