

# How the Ryder Cup was won

Celtic Manor's Jim McKenzie talks exclusively with Scott MacCallum about the finest greenkeeping achievement of modern times

**Jim McKenzie was in the middle of the worst day of his professional life. It was Sunday morning and The Ryder Cup, the event he'd been dreaming about and praying for since 1996, was in the middle of its second long rain delay.**

Play wasn't going to finish that day and there was a prospect of the match not going the full distance for the first time in its illustrious history.

"I was in need of a lift so went down to the hotel and had a chat with Debbie, my wife, which cheered me up a bit and on the way back I came out of the lift and bumped into Colin Montgomerie. He said, 'Come with me,' and we sat in a corner and had a coffee," revealed Jim.

"Colin said, 'The bottom line is this. We're currently two points down and if we don't play today all the matches out there will be declared halved, and we're up on all six of them at the moment. If that happens we'll go into the Singles still two points down and we're not traditionally strong in the Singles. If we can get all the matches completed this afternoon it gives us a chance,'" recalled Jim.

With that message ringing in his ears Jim returned to his men – 65 of his own Celtic Manor staff and 71 volunteer greenkeepers – and urged them to lift their tired bodies once again for yet another monumental effort.

"I told them that I'd just spoken to Colin and that he's asked that if there was any way we could get play going we could go down in history as the first greenkeeping crew to help win the Ryder Cup,"

And that is exactly what happened. The crew worked tirelessly to make the saturated course playable for an afternoon start and the players did their bit by turning their overnight leads into five and a half points out of six.

"If we hadn't pulled it off on Sunday we would have gone into the Singles two points down and we

ing event in the world and no stone had been left unturned in ensuring a successful Cup.

However, the pressures on the worldwide golfing calendar had pushed the match into October for only the second time in its history and the South Wales weather can be notoriously fickle. And so it was.

"We had 55% of our monthly rainfall in two days – about two inches," said Jim, who did say that a Wales Open of a few years ago had endured three inches of rain and finished within half an hour of its scheduled time.

**"Colin asked if there was any way we could get play going, we could go down in history as the first greenkeeping crew to help win the Ryder Cup"**

**Jim McKenzie**

would probably have got no more than nine points, instead of the magic 14.5.

"The shift that the guys put in on that Sunday afternoon, and the Saturday night before, was absolutely astonishing – outrageous! And that Sunday afternoon turned out to be the greatest day in the history of European golf," said Jim, who is not one given to hyperbole.

Weather conditions were always the one nagging doubt about the 2010 Ryder Cup. The venue was custom built to cope with the demands of the third biggest sport-

Ironically, if the match had been played a week before or a week after there wouldn't have been any problems at all as the weather was just fine.

"When the volunteers arrived on the Saturday before the course was looking better than it had ever done," he recalled.

"However, we had 13 mil during Wednesday practice and could see things getting worse, but on Thursday we got fresh information from the on-site meteorologist that it wasn't just going to be wet on Friday it was going to be appallingly wet."

The European Tour had invited Gerry Byrne, Superintendent at the K Club, venue for the 2006 match, as well as Scott Fenwick, Superintendent at Gleneagles, venue for the 2014 match, as guests and, earlier in the week, Gerry had offered his successor one piece of advice.

"Gerry said that he didn't think we had enough chip bark in stock. I said, surely not we've got loads here, but Gerry was right and on Thursday night I was getting lorry loads brought in - £25,000 worth, thanks to Inscapes, the Bridgend-based contractor, who managed to source it from all over the place."

That night was probably the first time that the 130 strong army of green staff discovered what the week was to have in store for them.

"The work that the boys put in on the Friday had to be seen to be believed. Sir Terry Matthews actually came down to tell the guys that they had probably saved the Ryder Cup, and I told them that they had put the matches back on track."

Jim McKenzie

"We were up all Thursday night managing the arrival of the lorries. It wasn't quite the start to the Ryder Cup that I'd envisaged. I'd always pictured myself standing of the 1st tee for the first game," said Jim, who is now the only man in history to have managed a course for a Monday finish of a Ryder Cup.

"The work that the boys put in on the Friday had to be seen to be believed. Sir Terry Matthews actually came down to tell the guys that they had probably saved the Ryder Cup, and I told them that they had put the matches back on track.

"Blow me, if it wasn't to get worse on that Sunday!"

A month beforehand Jim was actually concerned that he'd dragooned too many volunteers and that he might struggle to find sufficient work to keep them occupied.

"We then had a night of really

bad rainfall which demolished a lot of the bunkers and I realised that I didn't have too many after all. As it turned out I couldn't have survived with even one fewer."

With multi tee starts at various times during the week deploying resources was not straightforward and Jim split his crew into 10 smaller teams who attacked the course quickly and efficiently all at the same time - each armed with squeegees, roller mops, pumps and bunker rakes.

All this time other crew members, including Jim's son, 14 year-old Elliott, and wife, Debbie, were out throwing chip bark and pushing water off fairways.

The galleries had not been allowed on to the site on the Sunday morning, some staying in their cars from 6am to noon,

to allow the clear-up work to take place.

"When they were on site they were using the cart paths which meant that we couldn't get around the site," explained Jim.

The delayed Monday finish meant those volunteer crew members with flights booked, work or family commitments had to leave, although amazingly around 55 of the 71 were able to extend their stay.

"Those who had to go were gutted to have missed Monday, and I was gutted for them, but everyone rallied round. Complete Weed Control, as a prime example. Alan Abel, one of the franchise owners in the area, cancelled all his work on the Monday and brought his staff in and they worked with the gardeners and threw on chip bark for us early in the morning," said Jim, who saw fog delay the start of the Monday for five minutes.

"I was wondering what was coming next - snow!"

The volunteers had come from far and wide and drawn from a 300 strong list of applicants.

"They were from Spain, Denmark, Switzerland, America, Holland, as well as the home nations and a significant proportion from the local area. They were all easy to motivate because they all wanted to be there. I've had emails from many of them saying that it was the greatest week of their lives."

Those who watched Jim closely during the week commented on how calm and assured he was during what was undoubtedly the most stress filled period of his life.

"There were places I could go when I was a bit down or when I wanted to punch the wall, but

there were a lot of people who were a calming influence, Guys like Billy McMillan, Russell Anderson, Angus McLeod, Robert Johnstone and Steve Chappell, the South Wales Section Secretary, who was superb. He actually organised 10 caravans for the crew and provided them complete with rooming lists, which was such a help to Nicola, who was handling our administration."

Another great source of support was Chris Kennedy, and his partner, Jill.

"Chris is the most experienced tournament host in our industry and his contribution in terms of encouragement and how to deal with the politics associated with situations like this was invaluable and could not have come from anybody else."

So having missed the opening tee shots on the Friday how much of the Ryder Cup did Jim actually witness live?

### Ryder Cup Memories

"The extreme weather would test the best. What a team effort from everyone involved everyone pulled together it's not the golf I will remember but the team preparing the venue because they proved that anything and everything is possible. Well done Jim and his team you were amazing."  
**Billy McMillan**

"Sunday, pouring with rain, message from Monty - "If the fourballs and foursomes don't get finished Europe would go into the singles two points down, so not pressure at all! The team worked brilliantly, pulled together by the atrocious weather; it would not have been played without the fantastic efforts of dedicated greenkeepers."  
**Chris Sealey**

By day and night: The team of greenkeepers work through the night, and below, the same hole in the day...

BOTTOM: A team briefing

"I saw three shots all week and two of them were putts," he laughed, adding that he had watched Graeme McDowell's heroics on the 16th and attempted to get to the 17th only be thwarted by the massive galleries.

Instead he headed for the 18th green to join in the celebrations where he got news he'd been waiting for.

"I was told that there was room in the seating area of the Closing Ceremony for us all which was amazing.

"As we walked to the seating area from the 18th green there must have been 20,000 people all cheering and clapping the crew. There were young greenkeepers in tears. Then when we were taken into the closing ceremony we were given a standing ovation. It was an absolutely extraordinary moment for our industry," said Jim, who added that a fulsome tribute was also paid to the team

by Colin Montgomerie during the ceremony.

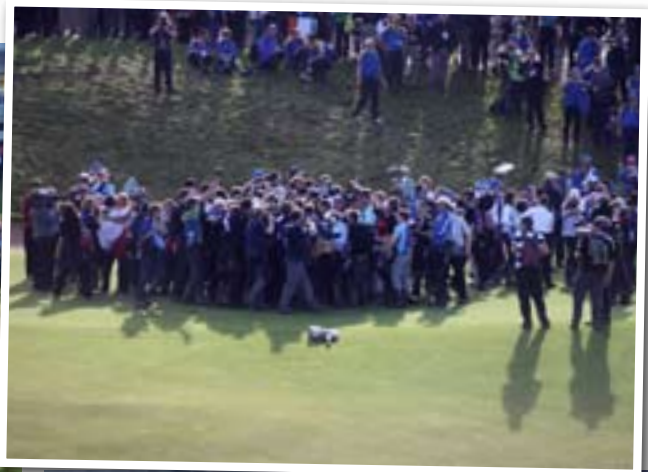
If the greenkeeping crew drew justified accolades, so did the 2010 golf course for handling everything that was thrown at it.

"I've been assessing the damage and everything inside the ropes, tees, fairways, greens is bone dry. We're really pleased with it. Even the spectator crossing points are absolutely fine, not a mark on them, which is testament to all the top dressing, drainage and sand bagging that we've done.

"But, it's the areas outside of the ropes which had taken the hit. We had a third of a million people walking on it over six days and it just acted like a big rotovator. I must admit, I've never seen anything like it.

"The police gave me a framed photograph taken from a helicopter on Friday and it looks like a desert course. Just stripes of green and everything else mud."





With the course scheduled to host the Wales Open in May, next year and the last of the structures not due to leave site until December 6 time is tight and although the Roman Road Course, has hosted the Wales Open before and could do so again, there is pressure for the 2010 course to put its best foot forward again.

“It’s going to be a combination of seeding, turfing, harrowing and rolling. No rest for the wicked, I’m afraid.”

So, a week on from that famous Monday, what were Jim’s reflections?

“The greatest highs and the greatest lows of my entire life, all in the space of four days. Friday morning and Sunday morning were extraordinary lows, and Monday afternoon, when it was all over and the guys were getting that ovation, was the greatest high of my career.”

He also had nothing but praise for his crew.

“They were working from 5am to 8pm a lot of the time in the cold and wet. We tried to keep them warm and we fed them well, but there was a lot of down time waiting for the rain to stop. It was actually very humbling to watch.”

And how close did the Ryder Cup come to not finishing with all 28 points accounted for and, possibly, a different result?

“Probably a couple of hours, possibly just an hour, because if we’d started any later on the Sunday we wouldn’t have had Saturday completed and if we hadn’t finished there was no guarantee that we would have finished on Monday.”

A lot has been written and a lot has been said about the 2010 Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor Resort but no man, outside of Captains and players, experienced it in quite the same way as Jim McKenzie.

**Ryder Cup Memories**

“Jim McKenzie being followed down the 18th by his 140 greenkeepers. It was at the start of the Closing Ceremony. Jim appeared and the greenkeepers saw him and joined the procession. We were escorted into the VIP area. We were all being cheered by the enormous crowd who recognised that we were the greensstaff. The noise was incredible and will live with me forever.”

**Angus Macleod**

“Watching the final putt on 17 from behind the crowd on the big screen, turning to walk back to the sheds and spotting Jim (McKenzie) doing his impersonation of Ski Sunday, sliding down the viewing bank to the left, and then walking with him down 18. Watching the weight of the golf world lift off his shoulders was superb.”

**Colin Webber**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Ryder cup crowds follow the action; photographers surround the winner; sky view, and three course pics showing the state of the course after the tournament





EAGLE

Eagle designs  
and delivers  
quality golf  
club collateral

t +44 (0)1883 344244  
f +44 (0)1883 341777  
e info@eagle.uk.com  
www.eagle.uk.com

A seed box that...



...will make a difference



## THE GRASS GRABBER RANGE

### THE NEW G6 MODEL

A more affordable equipment wash water system to bring you in line with current disposable groundwater regulations and save your club money now.

Product package includes - commissioning, delivery, installation & three years consumables



- 1) Take out grass, stones and balls
- 2) Take out oil, diesel, petrol and grease
- 3) Remove pesticides

**Result? Clean Recycleable Water**

• 30 day money back guarantee

Call Nick or Dave now to discuss your wash water system requirements on:

**01925 758099**

Or in the first instance visit:

**www.grassgrabber.com**

# What a week

Peter Holmstrom has always dreamed of helping Europe win **the Ryder Cup**. Ideally this would be during a tournament played in front of a packed home crowd in Wales. It just so happens that some dreams do come true. Peter picks up the story...

**“I have been working with Jim McKenzie, the Course Manager at Celtic Manor for over four years through my role as a Technical Sales Regional Manager with Countrywide. As a result, Jim invited me to join the 70 strong greenkeeping Support Team for the duration of the Ryder Cup. I knew it would be a special occasion and a high point in my career, but I didn’t anticipate just how memorable the whole event would be, for the players, the staff, the spectators and for Wales itself.”**

Peter is a proud Welshman, Newport born and bred, and whose links with Celtic Manor go back many years:

“I am so fond of the resort anyway. I remember when construction at Celtic Manor first started, as a teenager I watched as the resort gradually took shape, and at 16 years of age I first worked at Celtic Manor as part of my schools work experience scheme.

To be invited to return to the resort 15 years later as part of a specialist team of greenkeepers was a huge honour, plus I am a massive Ryder Cup fan!”

The Support Team was divided into teams comprising of five members, and each member was allocated specific roles, including

cutting tees, bunker care, replacing divots, course maintenance and assisting with cutting greens and fairways when required. It’s not only the course itself that needs attention, but the putting and chipping green practice areas and VIP enclosures.

The team was due to work from Monday, September 27, through; preparation and practice days, the tournament itself starting on Friday October 1 and finally for the first time ever, Monday, October 4.

Peter was aware that the biggest challenge would be the weather, “If it’s wet then moving moisture off the course becomes key. The course has been prepared for the worst, for example, on the chipping and putting green practice area, which has limited irrigation, I have worked with Celtic Manor in the build up to the event by supplying a maximum moisture retention material through a 4mm screened peat and sand mixture dressed into the grass sward. Although we know how disruptive the weather might be, no one anticipated the impact the rain would eventually have on the tournament”

Peter was asked by Countrywide if he would capture his time at Celtic Manor in a daily blog to appear on the Countrywide website.

Here follows a selection of the best of that blog...



ABOVE: That’s me, mopping one of the greens, and BELOW: on a mower.



## Mon 27 – Thur 30 Sep

Each day we would start work before 5am, arriving at the greenkeeping service compound to be greeted by Jim McKenzie and to be given our respective jobs. We would work until lunchtime, and then following some free time, do our jobs for the afternoon. 12 – 15 hour days were not unusual.

I was delegated the task of being in the special maintenance group for the week which means that I support the fairway cutting crew, possibly raking bunkers during the matches and any other special maintenance to be carried out on the course.

During my allocated time off, I was lucky enough to meet some golfing superstars. On the first day I went to watch Ian Poulter practice, he was accompanied by Darren Clarke, who bizarrely gave me a driver during a golf tournament 17 years ago. I reminded him of this, "Can you use it," he asked, to which I said, "No, it's too stiff."

"That's why I gave it to you in the first place," he replied!

On the Wednesday the rain came, 15mm fell in four hours. With both teams out on the course practicing the rain came down heavier and puddles were starting to form on the greens, I joined up with three other greenkeepers to remove water from various putting greens.

On Thursday, walking from the 8th to the 9th tee, I had the opportunity of a lifetime. Would I be brave enough to ask Tiger Woods for his autograph, I did and he obliged. I have his signature on the back of my identification card, and a beaming smile from ear to ear.

After lunch we were allocated the job of placing wood chip bark onto the course for players and spectators to get easier access around the wetter areas of the golf club. In convoy we headed out in club cars loaded with chip. We stopped to watch the Opening Ceremony, including the raising of the flags, introduction of the players, all accompanied by Katherine Jenkins singing.

Following this we headed out with more chip bark until it got dark, completing a 15 hour shift. Exhausted, I arrived back at the yard to see another 29 tonnes of wood chip being delivered!

### Fri 1 Oct - day one of the Ryder Cup

My day began again at 5am. 45,000 spectators were on their way; heading to what would be a trying and testing day for everyone concerned.

The rain was pouring down, so only a few of us had jobs. I was to sit and wait for my call. The matches started on time but the rain was getting harder. The shout came and my colleague and I ran from our sheds to the 1st green to push the water off.

We got there just in time to see Jeff Overton, (USA team), hole his putt from off the green. As that was the last match, we headed out to the 5th to squeegee the fairway

clear of water. The weather was getting worse and we were facing a losing battle.

The second match arrived but play was suspended. We tried to clear the course at midday but to no avail.

The rain just came harder. The final shout came at 3.15 - we were to try again. I left with my "pump team" to clear water from the bunkers and push water off the greens and fairways - it was hard work. Finally, seven and a half hours later, play resumed.

It took us until nearly 7.30 to clear the rest of the course. It was a huge effort and I cannot believe, after seeing the pictures on the TV, what an achievement it was. We had a final briefing from Jim McKenzie. He was fresh from the Media Centre where an American journalist had commented that no other greenkeeping team in the world could have achieved what we had.

I have to mention my colleagues for together working so hard to pull off that miracle.

Also to the crowd who stayed throughout the day and kept us all motivated, encouraging us every time we cleared a green, a bunker or a fairway by giving us the loudest cheers, and to the gang of American Vikings who sang to us all on the 6th fairway!

### Sun 3 Oct - European golf's (and greenkeeping's) finest day

Rain was falling hard again and all the talk was about how the course had never been this flooded - would this be the first Ryder Cup to be cancelled?

Overnight Europe were leading in all six matches but if play did not start by 18.43 all matches would be deemed a half and Europe would be two points down going into the singles matches.

The weather broke and at 10.30 we hit the course hole by hole pushing water off greens and fairways, pumping water out of the bunkers and raking up all the washed down sand (that evening I watched myself raking a bunker on the 18th fairway on the news!).

We all worked so hard and were absolutely shattered by the end but somehow we managed to get play started by 1.20pm - a day that would go on to be remembered as European golf's finest day!



ABOVE: Our convoy.

### Mon Oct 4 - The final day

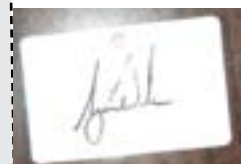
As this was the final day, everything was to be cut and presented perfectly, and despite the rainfall of the last five days, the course was immaculate.

With our work finally completed we were able to go out and watch as Europe reclaimed the Ryder Cup by a single point. We watched as the players celebrated with countless thousands of fans. As a team, we walked down the 17th fairway, crossed the bridge to the 18th green where we gathered to make our way to the closing ceremony and trophy presentation. As we walked toward the ceremony the fans recognised who we were and a clap quickly turned into a huge standing ovation.

I have never been so proud in my life. As a team, we were getting the recognition that was rightly deserved for our unbelievable achievements in making this Ryder Cup playable, for our part in the success of the European team and for raising the profile of greenkeepers and turf professionals worldwide.

This was the tournament where a small team of skilled greenkeepers became one of the most respected groups of people within the golfing world.

BELOW: Recognise this man? It's amazing how close you get to the stars!



ABOVE: Tiger's autograph

BELOW: Some of the team

To read Peters blog in full go to: [www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk/celticmanorblog](http://www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk/celticmanorblog)



# Golf of the highest standard



Spectacular surroundings inspired the players in the 2010 BIGGA National Championship, sponsored by Kubota and Charterhouse



**Faced with the challenge of two of the finest inland courses in England, BIGGA's best golfers rose to the challenge, and the scores they posted over The Berkshire's illustrious Blue and Red courses were extremely impressive.**

To illustrate, one handicapper John McLoughlin, of Grange Park Golf Club, in Liverpool, had to reload on the 1st on day one, had a treacherous par-3 and ran up a 5, though he played the next 17 holes in five under par for a superb 68. Despite playing the Red Course in a very respectable four over par 76 his 144 total was only good enough for third overall.

Eventual winner, Paul Frith, thought he had too much to do when a third of the way round on the second day. He was one over par playing with John, who was one under at the time.

"I reckoned I was around six shots behind but had a strong back nine, as I'd had on the opening day, and John started to drop a few shots

and I just made it," said Paul, who was Leicestershire County Captain from 1998-2001.

The scratch man who played off +2 for around six years had previously won a host of events in the Midland area including a stellar year in '93 when he won the County Championship, Amateur Championship, and County Open in a field which included pros but he sees his latest win as one of his best.

"There was a very good field with some low handicappers in it and being a National title it means a lot to me," said Paul who just edged +2 man, Laurie Tremlett, on a card play-off.

Paul was familiar with the two courses having played in The Berkshire Trophy about five or six times.

"I made the cut every time and my best finish was 11th," he said.

"I would hope to come back and defend the title next year at West Lincs Golf Club. I've not played the course before but I've heard some good reports about it.

John McPherson had more reason than most to celebrate the biggest win of his golfing career when he lifted the BIGGA Challenge Cup for Best Nett.

Twelve months before he had been competing well at Burnham and Berrow Golf Club but fell foul of a scorecard error and was disqualified from the over-all event.

His playing partner had marked him down for a 4 at the 8th when he'd actually taken 5



ABOVE: From left to right, Nick Darking, John McPherson, Paul Frith and Colin Hood. LEFT: John McLoughlin. BELOW: Laurie Tremlett

**"There was a very good field with some low handicappers in it and being a National title it means a lot to me"**

**Paul Frith, Challenge Trophy Winner**









LEFT: Darren Mitchell receives the BIGGA Challenge Bowl. ABOVE: The Berkshire Course Manager, Ian Morrison, with Paul Worster

and unfortunately he hadn't noticed when he came to sign his card.

"That was very disappointing but made me all the more hungry to do well this year at The Berkshire," explained 16 handicapper John, who works at Richmond Golf Club.

"I drove really well on the first round and then it was my putting that was great on the second," said John, who shot nett rounds of 67 and 68.

John moved south two and a half years ago having worked, and learned his golf, at Callander Golf Club, in Perthshire.

"I've paid my own entry fee both last year and this and I'll certainly be looking to defend my title next year. It really is a wonderful event and I really enjoy playing in it," he said.

John finished three shots clear of 5 handicapper, Ed Ainsworth, who followed up a solid nett 72 on the

**"I've paid my own entry fee both last year and this and I'll be looking to defend my title next year. It's a wonderful event - I really enjoyed it"**  
**John McPherson, Challenge Cup Winner**

opening day with a spectacular nett 66 on the second.

Paul Davey was third with a nett 142.

Alistair Higgs clinched the Day 2 Stableford with 39 points and Darren Mitchell, won the Affiliate Prize.

The Regional Cup, played for on the opening day was won by the South East with a score of 274.

The event was well supported by sponsors Kubota and Charterhouse with Colin Hood, from the former, and Nick Darking and Richard Heywood, from the latter, on hand

to offer support to the players.

Another feature of this year's Championship was the opportunity to win a £20,000 Mini Clubman car, courtesy of Rigby Taylor.

The car was on offer for a hole-in-one at one hole on each of the two days but unfortunately, despite some gallant efforts no-one drove off in it.

BIGGA would like to thank Kubota and Charterhouse for their title sponsorship as well as hole sponsors – Toro, Burden's Golf and Turf, Pinseeker, Irritech, Tacit, Irrigation Control and Headland Amenity.

## National Championship Results

### BIGGA CHALLENGE TROPHY (Best Gross)

1. Paul Frith, 143 (Card Play-off)
2. Laurie Tremlett, 143
3. John McLoughlin 144

### BIGGA CHALLENGE CUP (Best Nett)

1. John McPherson (16) 167-135
2. Ed Ainsworth (5) 148-138
3. Paul Davey (4) 150-142

### BIGGA CHALLENGE PLATE (Day 2 Stableford)

Alistair Higgs, 39 pts

### BIGGA CHALLENGE BOWL (Affiliate Prize)

Darren Mitchell, 158.

### BIGGA REGIONAL CUP (Day 1 Four Best Regional Nett Scores)

1. South East, 274 – John McPherson, Nick Brewster, Antony Kirwan and Simon Wells
2. Northern, 289 – John McLoughlin, Ed Ainsworth, Christopher Hardwick and Rhys Butler

### DAILY HANDICAP PRIZES

#### Day 1

- +2-5 Nick Brewster
- 6-12 Antony Kirwan
- 13-24 Simon Wells

#### Day 2

- +2-5 John Keenaghan
- 6-12 Steve Gunner
- 13-24 Stewart Rogers

### SPECIAL PRIZES

#### Day 1

- Nearest the Pin Gary Burgess
- Longest Drive Andrew De Welt

#### Day 2

- Nearest the Pin Tim Morgan
- Longest Drive David Simpson

*The Hole-in-One Prize of a Mini Clubman car sponsored by Rigby Taylor on the Blue Course (10th hole) and Red Course (16th hole) went unclaimed.*