

PATH TO GLORY

The first of the Regional Finals of the Volkswagen Masters, held at Liphook in Hampshire, set an impressive standard



REGIONAL FINALS, MAY 31 2007, LIPHOOK GOLF CLUB, HAMPSHIRE

↙ The Volkswagen Masters 2007 Regional Finals got under way in fine style at Liphook Golf Club in Hampshire. The setting could not have been better to mark the beginning of the series, as golfers of varying handicaps competed for three places in the UK Final.

Liphook, one of the outstanding heathland courses in Britain, combines a true test of golf with a real sense of golfing tradition (see page 160). As the first event in the 2007 Volkswagen Masters, Liphook gave an indication of the impressive standard of courses that will hold Regional Finals this year.

Storms had been forecast for the day but the weather held and the course was in perfect condition for the event. Playing from the back tees and with some extremely tough pin positions, the competitors were given a true test of golf. The 202-yard par-3 opener gave the players a serious introduction to the classic layout.

The strength of this year's Volkswagen Masters field was highlighted by the appearance and eventual victory of England A Squad member Sam Hutsby. The field included a blend of male and female golfers of various handicaps – highlighting the fact that the Volkswagen Masters is a tournament for all standards of player.

Walking the course, it was easy to see the entrants were finding the immaculate, sloping greens extremely tough and three and even four-putts were a regular occurrence. There were, however, moments of magic early on, with Tony Briggs holing a 7-wood for a rare birdie at the par-5 5th.

As at every Regional Final, competitors were split into three handicap categories with a winner from each progressing to the UK Final at Celtic Manor. The format consisted of 18 holes of medal play, which meant concentration was required



Making an escape from Liphook's tough bunkers



The Jettas were on hand to support the day

“The Volkswagen Masters is a tournament for all standards of player”

Words: Paul O'Hagan Photography: Philip Mingo



To the Manor born? Our national finalists are!



Liphook demanded accurate play and good course management skills



Group A winner Sam Hutsby is a member of the England A Squad



Liphook is ranked at 50 in Golf Monthly's Top 120 courses

“The greens were extremely tough and three and four-putts were a regular occurrence”



Nigel Plimmer analyses another swing

throughout the round. Group A consisted of players with a handicap of 9.4 or below. As it was a full handicap allowance competition, +3 handicapper Hutsby knew he would have to shoot low in order to be in with a chance. Last year's Spanish Amateur champion was impressive from the start, birdieing the difficult 1st. He followed this up with four more birdies and looked in control at three under par on the 18th tee. The 18-year-old hit the par 5 in two but then four-putted for a bogey 6. His round of 68 for a nett 71 was good enough for a one-shot victory and a place in the UK Final.

“I didn't think I would win to be honest, but I'm delighted. I have never been to Celtic Manor before but I've heard really good things about it. The final will be one of the last events of the year and hopefully I can get a good result and be off to sunny South Africa,” said Hutsby who is coached by Golf Monthly Top 25 Coach Gary Smith.

“I only got the invite yesterday and was delighted to receive it. I have been a member here for three months, it's one of the best courses in the county and is in the best condition this time of year.”

Throughout the day the 18th hole proved to be as difficult as it is beautiful. A number of players with good scores developing dropped shots at the par 5. The roller coaster hole begins with a blind tee shot into a valley and the second requires accuracy back

up the slope. If players do manage to find the green in regulation or less there is no guarantee of par with a treacherous ridge running across it. With the pin placed precariously at the top of the ridge, a two-putt was a fine achievement to close.

Group B featured players with handicaps between 9.5 and 18.4. It was won by Andrew Newbon, who registered a nett 69, the lowest score of the day. Newbon, who is a member at nearby Old Thorns, began the competition well with 39 gross on the front nine. But he too thought he had missed his opportunity on the tricky final hole.

“I felt like I played really well today but struggled on the fast greens. I got nervous on the last hole and took a 7 after being just short of the green in two. I thought I had blown my chance but am delighted to have won,” he said. “This is a fantastic golf course which was in fantastic condition and I look forward to competing in the final.”

Finally Group C, for players with handicaps of 18.5 and above was won by Shane Smith from Waterlooville Golf Club. A solid round of two nines of 45 gave the 20-handicapper victory.

“I have played here once before and today the course was in absolutely fantastic condition. The day has been extremely well organised and I can't wait for the final,” said Smith after his win.

After their rounds competitors were treated to tuition from Golf Monthly Top 25

Coach Neil Plimmer. Using a Vector launch monitor Neil gave a short swing analysis and offered tips on how players could tweak their games. The Mid Sussex head professional will be attending every regional round to offer his expertise to competitors.

The three winners at Liphook will compete in a two-day UK Final at Celtic Manor against every other regional winner. Players who progress to the UK Final will be able to experience the wonderful set-up at the resort which resulted in the venue being chosen as the first in Wales to ever hold the Ryder Cup.

Those who make it through to the UK

Final will compete for a place in the World Final, which will be played at the incredible five-star Arabella resort in South Africa for the second year running. Golfers from all over the world will then compete to become Masters Champion 2007.

For more information on the Volkswagen Masters, telephone 01483 263180, email golfmasters@volkswagen.co.uk or visit volkswagen.co.uk/company/masters. A report of every regional round can be found at golf-monthly.com/volkswagenmasters 48 hours after each event. For information about the Jetta, go to www.volkswagen.co.uk/jetta.



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