

To the Manor borne

Six more Regional Finals of the Volkswagen Masters have been closely fought out over some of the finest courses in Britain, often in tricky weather conditions. Those who won now have the luxury of heading to the UK Final at Celtic Manor, host of the 2010 Ryder Cup

It has been a busy month for the Volkswagen Masters 2007 with six more Regional Finals taking place, bringing forth 18 more UK Finalists. The Finals have visited some of the finest courses in England, Scotland and Wales. Players have battled it out to seal a place in the UK Final, which will be held at Celtic Manor on the 2010 Ryder Cup course. The three winners from the UK Final will represent the nation at the World Final at the Arabella Resort in South Africa.

WESTERN GAILES JUNE 11

A short conversation with Henry, the starter at Western Gailes, and you will understand how passionately the members feel about their beloved links. After playing the course and seeing the stunning views, it is easy to see why they feel so strongly. The course runs on a narrow strip of land between the railway and the sea.

The signature par-3 7th runs parallel with the ocean and is protected by six bunkers,

which surround the green. It represents everything that is great about the course: stunning views accompanied by a stern test of links golf.

For the Volkswagen Regional Final the rough was thick and the fairways were narrow and, despite a beautiful, calm day, competitors were given an extremely tough test. The course was playing so tough that no one was able to break par and those who refused to give up were rewarded with a place near the top of the leaderboard.

Winner of Group A was Bill McMahon who, playing off seven, shot an impressive round of nett 71. McMahon was the only player to shoot level par. Group B was won by Ian Dodds from East Renfrewshire Golf Club. He plays off a handicap of 13. A round of nett 76 was good enough to win, which highlighted how difficult the course was playing. The 13-handicapper was shocked to have sealed a place in the final, particularly after struggling late on. "The back

nine got a bit messy, mainly because I was wayward with the driver, but I was able to hold it together," said Dodds. Finally, Group C was won by Stewart Shearer who is also from East Renfrewshire Golf Club. The 21-handicapper plotted his way around the course brilliantly.

GULLANE JUNE 13

Gullane is one of those special places where the course acts as the centrepiece of the town. Gullane lives and breathes golf, and when you witness the breathtaking views from the 7th tee it is easy to see why. Everywhere you look there is a golf hole, whether it be Muirfield behind or the three great Gullane courses in front. It is an incredible sight.

Each hole on Gullane No. 1 is different and, as the third Volkswagen Regional Final got under way, competitors were faced with a strong wind that made the challenge even tougher. >>



A hole lot of fun: Michael Hedges loved the London Club after a hole-in-one



Saunton: a classic links layout

Tough test: Gullane No.1

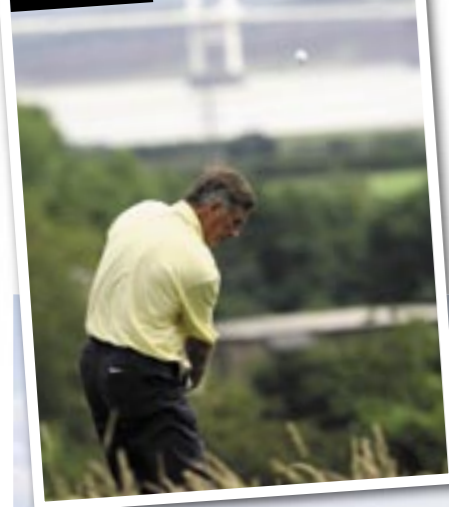
Words: Paul O'Hagan Photography: Philip Mingo



After continuing their impressive selection of top courses, organisers Taylor Alison maintained their professional approach and got everyone round despite the tough conditions.

Considering the difficulties, the scoring was extremely good. Group A was close all day until Tom Paterson came in late on to post a terrific nett 68. The 6-handicapper from Crail GC played some fine golf to seal his place in the UK Final. "I love links golf and feel my game is well suited to it," he said. Group B was won by John Foley from The Glen Golf Club in North Berwick, who carded a nett 71 off 14. Peter Lennon was victorious in group C with a nett 73. The 19-handicapper is a member at Alyth Golf Club and had never played Gullane No. 1 before.

St Pierre saw some impressive scoring



ASHRIDGE JUNE 18

Despite being only 40 miles from central London, Ashridge is a serene escape situated in an area of outstanding beauty on the edge of the Chiltern Hills. On a wet June morning Volkswagen Masters competitors were greeted by grazing deer and beautiful countryside.

With the Home Counties Regional Final being held a day after the Ashridge Club Championship, the course was in immaculate condition and provided a tricky test. There were a number of heavy showers throughout the day but competitors carded some impressive scores, none more so than 5-handicapper Dave Roberts. The Group A competitor guaranteed his place in the UK Final with a striking round of nett 66. "I didn't drive the ball well, but I had a very good day on and around the greens which really helped," he said.

Group B was also won with an impressive nett score in the 60s. Hadley Wood member Michael Cunnane shot a nett 69 playing off a handicap of 18. Group C provided the 2007 Volkswagen Masters with its first female winner. A nett 75 to the ladies' par of 74 gave victory to Pat Smithie from Woburn. "I was a bit nervous today because I have never competed in an event like this before but I played a nice steady round," she explained afterwards.

"I started with a 10 on the first but kept going. But I am so surprised to have won"

MARRIOTT ST PIERRE JUNE 22

The Welsh Regional Final of the Volkswagen Masters 2007 was held at the beautiful Marriott St Pierre where the scoring was as admirable as the setting.

Forty-eight competitors from Wales and the Bristol area, were presented with the frustrating prospect of sporadic showers but dealt with the weather conditions brilliantly. The parkland course was in stunning condition and provided competitors with a great opportunity for low scoring.

It was St Pierre member John Moody who took this opportunity with an impressive nett 65 off a handicap of four. Moody played superbly, coming home after a difficult start to his round. "I had a disastrous start, I topped it off the first and made 7 but I played really well on the back nine where I was five-under par," he said.

Group B was won with a nett score of 72 by 18-handicapper Ross Hazel. The Neath Golf Club member secured his place in the UK Final with a solid performance.

Group C was won by 23-handicapper Karl Blackford, who shot a round of nett 74. The Celtic Manor member will feel at home when the UK Final is played in September at his home club, on the course that will host the 2010 Ryder Cup.



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The London Club winners overcame an intimidating challenge in the form of the magnificent Heritage Course

Water is an ever-present threat at the London Club



avoid the thick rough and tricky greens with a hole-in-one at the 191-yard 17th.

SAUNTON JUNE 29

With strong winds in North Devon, the West Course at Saunton provided a stern test, but some great golf was on display in the seventh Regional Final. There are very few golf courses which can take the breath away like Saunton. The views from the clubhouse are magnificent and leave you itching to get out and play one of the two fantastic courses here. The enormous dunes dominate the skyline and provide the perfect setting for a classic links layout.

The Volkswagen Masters Regional Final took place on the West Course where accuracy takes precedent over long hitting and good course management is vital to low scoring. A strong wind blew across on many holes and made birdies rare and many players struggled to post a score. There were, however, two terrific scores, which themselves blew away the competition.

The first came from 9-handicapper Hugh Burton from Downes Crediton Golf Club to win Group A. Group B was won with an incredible score by Dartmouth member Roger Mawson. The 10-handicapper shot a brilliant round of nett 66 to win his group by a massive eight shots. "I hit the ball pretty straight and kept out of trouble today. That's one of the best rounds I have played in a long time," he said.

It was a good day for Downes Crediton GC as Group C was also won by a member of the club – Richard Gallagher, who shot a nett 76 off a handicap of 24.

LONDON GOLF CLUB JUNE 27

The Volkswagen Masters 2007 arrived at the London Club just three days after Sam Torrance became Bendinat London Seniors Masters Champion there. With the thick rough still in full force and the greens in beautiful condition, the Heritage Course proved a tricky test for all players. Intimidation is a common theme throughout the course as slopes leading to cavernous bunkers, deep rough and water are often in clear view while the fairways remain tucked away behind the punishing hazards.

With the rough so thick, keeping the ball in play was imperative to low scoring. It was no surprise that intelligent, accurate golf was rewarded as 2-handicapper Laurence Collier plotted his way round the course expertly. The Royal Eastbourne member shot a round of nett

69 to secure his place in the UK Final. "I didn't hit my driver at all today in order to keep it out of the rough," said Collier.

It would have been easy to admit defeat in such conditions but players were rewarded for focusing on accuracy. Group B was won by 11-handicapper Scott Benson. The Old Thorns member shot a nett 73 to win on a count back from London Golf Club member Robert Taylor.

The Group C winner was a shell-shocked London Golf Club member Peter Ruffoni. The 24-handicapper shot a nett 74 to take Group C by four shots. After a nightmare start, Ruffoni fought on to take the win. "I started with a 10 on the first but kept on going, but I am so surprised to have won," he said. Meanwhile Royal Cinque Ports member Michael Hedges proved that there is more than one way to