

All roads lead to Sharjah

IT'S been a tough couple of years for Sharjah Golf & Shooting Club with the work being carried out to widen the flyover by National Paints leading to long tailbacks, which has, unsurprisingly, kept many golfers from making the trip to play the immaculate 9-hole floodlit Peter Harradine design.

But H.E Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Thani, the Club's Managing Director, knew that things had to get worse before they could get better, and now with the roadworks finally complete the journey time has been reduced significantly and the future looks very bright indeed.



Worldwide Golf: One of the drawbacks for golfing visitors from Dubai and elsewhere has been the traffic problem. Do you think the new road will make a difference and attract more golfers to Sharjah G&SC?

When the plans for the new flyover by National Paints were announced in 2011 we were delighted. It's the best possible thing for the club in the long run, however, we knew we were in for a tough couple years while the work was being carried out. Work began in January 2012 and while 2012 wasn't a bad year for the club and its users 2013, almost inevitably, was. Access to the club via National Paints at peak times has been terrible for the past 18 months. This, however, is not only behind us, the journey has been dramatically improved from that in 2011 as a result of the original three lanes being increased to six in each direction and the removal of all cloverleaf junctions which added further to the congestion. Golfers now have the option of using the 311 or 611 and maintaining a minimum speed of 80 kilometres per hours at all times with the journey time from the Burj Khalifa rarely exceeding 35 minutes. We appreciate all those who have remained loyal to us through this difficult period and of course look forward to welcoming back those that understandably haven't visited us for quite a while.

WWG: Since the golf course opened in 2008 it has captured the market for society golf, which is a popular and vital part of the golf scene in the Middle East. How did this happen and how pleased are you with the progress and success of the golf leagues?

We have been extremely popular with Golf Societies since the day we opened. This is no doubt a result of a number of things; our location, being immediately off Mohammed Bin Ziyad Road and only 4 minutes from the Dubai border, the friendly and personable service for groups of any size, availability at weekends (SGSC is pay and play at weekends), the courses renowned value for money, which is further complimented by its



condition and the playability. The support we've had from societies has truly wonderful.

In reaction to the obvious interest in our facility from Golf Societies Martin (SGSC Director of Golf) created the very unique Golf Society League concept. The event was an instant hit and has been oversubscribed since day one. The societies clearly enjoy pitting themselves against each other in Matchplay format and appreciate the recognition their presence in the league gives their society. I think the success is a combination of all these factors and we were delighted that the event was acknowledged as The Best Amateur Golf Event in the Middle East at the 2013 MEGA Golf Awards.

WWG: Is the Shooting Club and the Golf Club a good fit in catering for two totally different sports?

We cater for far more than two sports. In addition to the golf and the shooting we also have tennis courts, an outdoor basketball court and four astro turf 5 a side football pitches. All of these facilities host high profile, and very popular, annual events. With the addition of paintball, archery, three gyms (mixed, ladies and cross fit), a 4.5 kilometre cross county running track and the Altitude Spa our facility appeals to a massive spectrum of people and does so seamlessly, although I know Martin does get annoyed when the odd stray paintball or football finds its way onto the outskirts of the golf course. Good job they are harmless and fortunately it doesn't happen very often!

WWG: Peter Harradine's design at Sharjah G&SC has been complimented by many golfers in the region. Do you think his layout has worked well for the success of the club?

Personally I'm not a golfer but I find myself in the company of them fairly regularly. From what I hear our course offers golfers what they want – a

fair test, presented in excellent condition, and a good chance of playing to or below their handicap. I understand there are a lot of very difficult courses here in the UAE and while our course is still a challenge I've been told it's very fair and playable. As for its layout contributing to the success of the club – no doubt. We enjoy a lot of repeat business and to have 300 members and 250 loyalty pass holders at a 9 hole course underlines how much they must enjoy the course and our events calendar.

WWG: Putting in the floodlights must have been a huge benefit to the club. How did it affect the popularity of the club?

To be honest I doubt the golf course would have been viable without the floodlights. Any facility needs to offer its clients 'something different' and the combination of our diverse facilities and the golf course floodlights, I believe, gives us just that. Our golfing members and guests enjoy play until 11.30 at night offering them nearly 2,000 additional playing hours per year. Other unsung benefits are our state of the art lighting system which is arguably the best in Dubai and the Northern Emirates. Also Peter's (Harradine) decision to use paspallum grass which has stood up exceptionally well to the additional wear and tear. This strain of grass seems to have handled the additional playing hours better than the traditional seasonal grasses used at some other floodlit facilities.

WWG: Sharjah G&SC has become renowned for its hospitality and friendly, relaxed atmosphere. What do you put this down to?

To be fair we are a 9 hole facility meaning a capacity of 56 golfers per shotgun. When you are dealing with numbers of that size, instead of 100 or 200+ as they do at 18 or more hole facilities it gives you a better opportunity to be personable. Most of the staff know our regular or long term clients by name and they do us proud in making everyone



WWG: What is on the horizon and next on the agenda for Sharjah G&SC?

We will definitely always strive to improve and add to what we have. The 2020 Expo has and will continue to inject fresh blood into the community and SGSC appeals to and focuses on residents and newcomers. However, in the more immediate term, we need to focus on bringing the golfers back to SGSC, particularly during the week. Our Race To Sharjah campaign will hopefully achieve that. The campaign will be of high profile across numerous print mediums and throughout October 2014 any golfer will pay a very nominal fee for 9 or 18 holes Sunday to Thursday – no catch. Furthermore – for every game they play they will be entered into a draw to win one of three free one year Golf Country Memberships, one of three return economy tickets to Kuala Lumpur courtesy of Malaysian Airlines as well as complimentary Northern Emirates Winter Loyalty Passes, golf lessons and much, MUCH more. Exciting times for us and indeed the golfers of the UAE!

feel welcome. We never wanted to create an overly exclusive or elitist environment. Everyone is equally welcome here. Oh, as long as they follow the dress code! I was once got told I couldn't play my own course by the staff because I wasn't in the correct golfing attire. We all still joke about that...

WWG: The club is much more than just a golf and shooting club. With its indoor and outdoor paintball games; Signature Spa for men and women; three state of the art gyms for men and women; two restaurants; conference centre and recreational facilities it attracts a wide range of members and guests. Is this something that pleases you and are you looking at any further additions?

Naturally. Each activity has, and will be added entirely on its own merits. But what has evolved, even if somewhat accidentally, from the gradual expansion of the club, is a first class team building facility. We cater regularly for corporate events, stag parties and birthdays every week. The guests participate in anything from one to four or five of the different activities throughout the course of the day. Last year we had a group of 380 visit the club. That number was a challenge even for a facility our size but they all left very happy having had a day they'll never forget. As for future additions.... well you'll just have to wait and see!

WWG: It's very difficult to make a 9-hole course a popular track to play but played as 18 holes with its variety of tee boxes, water features, challenging bunkers and undulations there are many golfers eager to

take on the tough but fair test of the par 72, 7,300 yards layout. Do you believe the course works as a 9-hole facility or would you prefer to see it as an 18-hole course?

The strength of our membership and the amount of repeat business certainly suggests we've managed to make the course popular! I do however understand and respect that a proper round of golf will always be over 18 holes and that's why, as you've said, we have so much variation in our tees. However, it's a commonly growing belief that more 9 hole courses should be built. People have more pressure on their time these days meaning 9 holes in two hours is a lot more feasible than 18 in four hours – especially at night. Jack Nicklaus is campaigning for more 9 hole courses in the United States as he believes it will attract more people to the game, including youngsters and older people. A future reality probably is that more and more people will only have time and possibly money to play 9 holes, which I guess suits us.



AED 60 FOR 9-HOLES or AED 110 FOR 18 HOLES midweek throughout October.

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