



The third round was played at Lindrick



Scores begin to filter through at Lindrick



Ready for the off



Trouble at Ganton



The final day

TRIPLE ALLIANCE

The inaugural staging of The Lexus Yorkshire Challenge over the county's three Ryder Cup courses proved a huge success, as two Golf Monthly teams discovered

Words Jeremy Ellwood | Photography Kevin Murray, Geoff Ellis

What would you do if your home county boasted three separate Ryder Cup venues? Make a song and dance about it, you would think, given the event's now-global status. That's just the conclusion Moortown, Ganton and Lindrick Golf Clubs came to in late 2012 when they met to discuss Ryder Cup visitor packages for the 1929, 1949 and 1957 host venues.

In fact, Yorkshire proved such a happy hunting ground for the home side that you

wonder why a return to the white rose county was never mooted when America was cleaning up in the 1960s and '70s. Moortown was the first course to host the Ryder Cup this side of The Pond with GB&I victorious; Ganton saw the inimitable Ben Hogan captain his US side to a close victory; and Lindrick earned its place in Ryder Cup folklore by witnessing GB&I's final victory, and the last by the home side for 28 years.

But the fruits of that meeting went way beyond the original brief, eventually

spawning 'The Lexus Yorkshire Challenge', a prestigious fourball betterball Stableford event to be played over all three courses on consecutive days. Sounds great on paper, but would people actually sign up for a grand three-day event with all the 21st century's demands on both time and purse-strings? You bet they would! As word got round, all 86 spots were filled in weeks, with 100 more pairs waiting hopefully on a reserve list.

With *Golf Monthly* the official media partner of an event also generously

supported by headline sponsor Lexus plus Ping, Titleist, Glenbrae, ProQuip and SkyCaddie, it fell to staff photographer Kevin Murray and me to make up the magazine's two allotted pairs along with two members of the GM website forum. Mike Connelly, a 12-handicapper from Hallamshire in Sheffield, forced himself into the squad with this sales pitch: "Decked out head to toe in bright pink, with matching Bubba pink G20, I'll be a three- and four-point golfing machine. Team GM will experience witty conversation and a gritty will to win, combined with catwalk on-course style which my wife says makes me look a pratt!"

Brian Willerton, a 5-handicapper from Cleveland, went for this: "I've played for 45 years yet am still only a youthful and good-looking 54. My handicap is 5.5, albeit achieved with the cunning and guile of a sneaky short game. I am an excessively cuddly athlete... read, the build of a Russian shot putter." Sold! They were both in, Mike partnering me, and Brian with Kevin.

And so we met at Ganton near Scarborough on Wednesday September 11 for round one, along with 84 other pairs. Conditions were changeable, with sunshine in limited supply, and steady rain settling in, but that didn't dampen the spirits of anyone we encountered, even the poor

gentlemen I nearly killed when flushing one unexpectedly onto the green on the short par-4 14th. My apologies were brushed away good-naturedly, summing up the mood of the whole event. Competitive, yes – but also friendly and played in the right spirit.

IN THE HUNT

Shaken at nearly taking another man's life, I feebly missed the eagle putt (that's my story anyway), but at day's end Mike and I had a six-point cushion over Brian and Kevin in our private match, despite an unusual blob on the last. Those who have played Ganton may recall that the entrance road crossing the fairway is actually out of bounds... so not the best place to top your approach 50 yards rather than 170! But it was still a great day at one of England's finest clubs, blessed with a clubhouse steeped in history and character, and a course good enough to also host the Amateur Championship three times and the Walker Cup once.

Despite a testing day round a tough course – the bunkers rival Woodhall Spa's for severity – our 37 points was only good enough for 17th place, with seven pairs in the forties and two tied out front on 42 – Messrs Redfern and

Shepherd, and Messrs Harper and Lumsdon. As we retired to our digs, Mike and I resolved not to make too much of our early lead over dinner, but sadly were unable to keep our word. It was a delightful evening, though, full of banter, self-deprecation, reflections on the round just played and anticipation of the one to come next day at Moortown on the outskirts of Leeds, another wonderful Yorkshire course, with much clearing and bunker work improving it beyond all measure since my last visit.

It looked a picture in what would prove our best weather day, and we all felt it seemed more scorable than Ganton. But there were only five scores in the 40s here with Messrs Pargeter and Harrison leading the way on 43. Brian and Kevin rallied well with 38, but Mike and I pipped them by

one thanks to a spot of immense good fortune on the last, a suitably demanding par 4 that doglegs right towards watching eyes on the clubhouse terrace.

Mike's thinned bunker shot was hurtling comfortably out of bounds until it struck a handily placed Lexus banner and rebounded on to the edge of the green, from where





GM forerunners Brian Willerton and Mike Connelly by Moortown's 18th

he shamelessly two-putted for two points. Brian and Kevin graciously shook our hands and congratulated us on our good fortune... at least that's the way I'd like to remember it!

All the way round there had been much banter about the Thursday night scoreboard, with pairs going out in leaderboard order at Lindrick on the final day. Every three-pointer was greeted with cheers at the thought of an extra 10 minutes for breakfast before the hour and a half's drive south to the Nottinghamshire border. In the end, Brian and Kevin were relieved to earn an 11.10 start while Mike and I, on the fringes of contention, weren't off until 2.00. We

"Mike raised his game to bag us seven points over the next two holes, but the effort seemed to drain us of our power"

thought briefly about travelling down together to cheer them on their way... but only briefly. Our 76-point tally was only four off the lead held by Redfern and Shepherd who had tacked a 38-point Moortown return onto their opening-day 42.

Friday dawned brighter and breezier making for some tough tests early on around a Lindrick course that has hosted scores of other top events, among them the Curtis Cup and the Weetabix Ladies British Open. As the day progressed, the weather deteriorated, but Mike and I were still vaguely in the hunt as we checked the 'live' scoreboard by the 11th green. Spurred on, Mike raised his game to

bag us seven points over the next two holes, but the effort seemed to drain us Samson-like of our power and we unravelled on 14 and 15 to shoot ourselves out of it, before finishing well for a final day 36 and a share of 7th place, seven points short of victory.

THE WINNERS' CIRCLE

In the end, local knowledge proved critical, with home pair Ian Clarke and Jamie Harrison racking up 42 Lindrick points to edge it by one from overnight leaders Redfern and Shepherd, before collecting the beautiful trophy in their home clubhouse. Despite players coming from as far afield as Scotland, Bedford, Tewkesbury and Sussex, Yorkshire clubs dominated the podium, but encouragingly, the six daily prizes at each venue went to 18 different winners, proving there was much to play for even if the overall competition had drifted beyond reach.

It was an excellent inaugural staging with competitors heaping praise on the venues and organisation. Next year, things will be ramped up another level, with all three courses being used on all three days, allowing well over 200 pairs to take part. And with Lexus committing to expand their association after this year's success, everything looks rosy (white, of course) for the Lexus Yorkshire Challenge.

All that remains this year is to congratulate Ian Clarke and Jamie Harrison, who produced the most consistent golf over the three days, and who will no doubt be on hand to defend their well-earned title next year. **GM**

● If you'd like to be part of the action from September 10-12, 2014, make sure to register soon at entries@yorkshirechallenge.co.uk as the event is already filling up fast.



THE WINNERS

Six prizes (from Ping, ProQuip, SkyCaddie, Glenbrae and Titleist) were available at each course, with The Lexus Yorkshire Challenge Trophy being awarded to the pair with the best aggregate score across all three venues.

Day 1 - Ganton

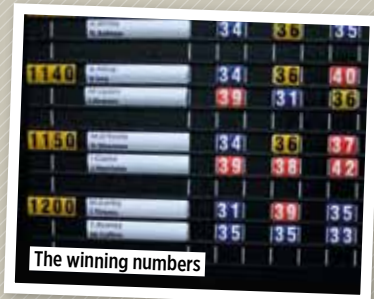
1st - Fran Redfern (Lindrick, 5) & Jamie Shepherd (Lindrick, Scr) - 42 points

Day 2 - Moortown

1st - Lee Pargeter (Renaissance, 2) & Scott Harrison (Moortown, 4) - 43 points

Day 3 - Lindrick

1st - Steven Shaw (Sitwell Park, 22) & Ross Atkinson (Bondhay, 15) - 44 points



Lexus Yorkshire Challenge Trophy

Champions - Ian Clarke (Lindrick, Scr) & Jamie Harrison (Rotherham, +1) - 119 points (39, 38, 42)

Runners up Fran Redfern (Lindrick, 5) & Jamie Shepherd (Lindrick, Scr) - 118 points (42, 38, 38)

3rd place Steven Shaw (Sitwell Park, 22) & Ross Atkinson (Bondhay, 15) - 116 points (38, 34, 44)

● For your chance to win one of the fabulous Ping 'Lexus Yorkshire Challenge' cart bags presented to the winning pairs on each of the three days, log on to golf-monthly.co.uk/competitions

