

MAKING AN ENJOYABLE ROUND OF GOLF A 'SHAW' THING

If it's good enough for the North West's top European Tour professional Nick Dougherty then it's definitely good enough for us. PAUL CHAPPLE reports on Shaw Hill Hotel, Golf and Country Club's idyllic complex.

SOMETIMES you just know you're about to play a real gem of a course before you even make it into the car park.

That was certainly the case for me on what was my first trip to Shaw Hill Hotel, Golf and Country Club, in Chorley, Lancashire.

Having five minutes earlier been stuck in the hustle and bustle of M6 commuter traffic, the contrast once I arrived at the 192-acre complex was stark and very much of a relief.

Apart from the beautiful houses on the lane in, the neatness of the place was something that struck me instantly.

The wonderful Georgian hotel, now lovingly owned and managed by the Stokes family, is a breathtaking sight and one which dominates the landscape as you make your way round this undulating and challenging par 72 woodland course.

The course is steeped in history, which is demonstrated on the first hole with the placement of a memorial monument dating back to 1820. Elsewhere on the site is a 1722 working farm and the area used to be a venue for Point-to-Point races in the late 1800's. Visiting Shaw Hill really does feel like you are stepping back in time.

The first hole is a relatively straightforward one. At 257 yards the bigger hitters will fancy their chances of making the putting surface in one, but the green is well protected by three bunkers at the front and one deep-faced trap at the back.

The picturesque second is the first of four par threes. This downhill beauty has a lovely mix of trees running down either

side and a hat-trick of sand traps around the green.

The uphill third really does require good course management to avoid the mature trees on this dog-leg right test. Again steep faced bunkers protect the entrance to the green.

At the 478-yard fourth you get chance to really open the shoulders for the first time on the undulating par five that slopes downhill to a pond and ditch before climbing up again to a raised putting surface. Keep it straight here and a par five should ensue.

Hole five is a lovely challenge, provided you don't meet a watery grave in the concealed pond on this 331-yard par four. It was here that one of the club's members, playing in a friendly fourball, described how he never gets bored of playing the course.

The sixth's a flat par three with a couple more sand traps to avoid at the front while the tree-lined seventh dog-legs

right and has a ditch to avoid down the right hand side.

Stroke index one, and definitely my favourite hole, was the par four eighth. First you need to drive over the stone walled ditch which runs adjacent to the hole all the way down the right side. Closer to the green is a pond and more bunkers.

The par five ninth slopes from right to left with Out of Bounds on the left. Again a pond has to be avoided with the second shot before the fairway rises up to the putting surface some 525 yards from the tee.

It's a quite a walk from the ninth green to the 10th tee but the plus side is that you once again get to stroll past the eighth tee to admire the hole's beauty (and also replay in your mind how you should have played it!!)

Like the previous hole, the 10th is a par five. This will represent a birdie chance for some as it's wide open.

Hole 11 is an intriguing par four where positioning off the tee is key. The 337-yard test is narrow and dog-legs left. Avoid the four steep faced bunkers on the elbow of the dog-leg and you'll be fine.

The 12th is rare in that it's a par three with no bunkers. The pin position can make this quite straightforward if at the front of the green, or very difficult if at

“Sitting like a crown above a stunning 18-hole championship golf course, Shaw Hill's magnificent Georgian exterior is matched only by the beauty of the many original features, and lavish furnishings inside the building.”

the back left side.

Holes 13, 14 and 15 are three lovely challenges while the 16th is the shortest hole on the 6,283-yard course at 143 yards.

The final par five at the 17th is another chance to be aggressive off the tee. With internal Out of Bounds on the left, the line is definitely up the right before you take on another pond with either your second or third shot to another raised green.

The finale certainly is grand. Not just for the backdrop of the aforementioned hall. A ditch and pond need to be avoided from the tee then it's uphill to the two-tiered green that's surrounded by colourful flowers, oh and three more large bunkers.

Whatever you do, don't rush straight off afterwards. The Vardon lounge in the hotel is great place to eat and drink with its fine cuisine, extensive wine cellar, delightful atmosphere and glittering chandeliers.

There's even a fabulous leisure complex with an 18-metre swimming pool, steam room, sauna, Jacuzzi, sunbed, hi-tech gym, aerobics centre, spa, hairdressers and beauty salon - everything you could ever wish for to keep you fit, healthy and feeling great. As if the golf itself wasn't enough.



The stunning Vardon lounge.



Relax in the jacuzzi or enjoy a swim after your round at Shaw Hill.



The gorgeous Shaw Hill course is set in the grounds of the magnificent Georgian ball.