

STOKE PARK



Stoke Park Re-Opens Masterpiece Front Nine

The recently re-opened first nine holes at Stoke Park Country Club, Spa & Hotel – the historic Colt course – have been heralded by club members as “brilliant”, “fantastic” and “the best feature of the club”.

Golf club members had exclusive early access

to the nine holes, which have undergone major bunker renovation during the winter months. Although the shape and size of the bunkers have changed, the renowned strategic positioning remains, and members hailed the effect the changes had made, not just to the challenge of



Left: The par 3 third hole has recently been transformed by the addition of new bunkers.

difference. These are a different class – if you're in a bunker now, you're penalised; and that's the way golf should be played.

“It's made a massive difference to the sixth and eighth holes. Visually, the sixth is brilliant and on eight, it's changed the hole completely. It's a more strategic course now. You have to really think about how you're going to play each hole and each shot.”

His sentiments were echoed by other members, including Russell Hardwick, who plays off a handicap of 26.

He added: “I really enjoyed the front nine, it looks fantastic. Certainly hole eight is challenging. It's very playable. The course has been enhanced, no question about it, and I prefer it now.”

Twelve-handicapper Vince Murphy concurred, adding: “I think the changes are absolutely fantastic. The eighth is stunning – you can't see the green for the second shot so you have to do it all by yardage, which is brilliant. The way it's all finished off, with the grass on top of the bunkers is excellent. It certainly enhances the course. It's become a different golf course, far better than it was previously and I'm quite excited about the work to be carried out on the remaining 18.”

David Pitt, an 18-handicapper, said: “It's excellent, it feels like a new nine. It's very exciting.”

And 20-handicapper Allan Gibbons added: “I think it's transformed the front nine – it looks brilliant. I think the changes make eight a fantastic hole.”

Andy Smith, who plays off a 21 handicap, opined: “I think it has turned what used to be the worst feature of the club into one of the best. The bunkers used to let down the course, really. But now they are outstanding. The eighth used to be a fairly benign hole, but it's now a real test and makes the closing three holes of the front nine really challenging and difficult.”

Lady members at the club were also enthusiastic

the course, but also to its playability.

Club captain John Sweeney said: “I think the changes on the course are magnificent. The bunkers will play a lot harder, but when the work on 10 to 18 is carried out next winter it will take the whole course to a new level. It's not just an aesthetic thing; that's good, but it's the quality – and depth – of the bunkering that makes the real



Above: The bunkers have been carefully designed to provide perfect drainage, ideal playing conditions but also a real threat to the golfer. The fact that they are a visual treat is an added bonus.

about the changes to the bunkers. Jill Dodds, a 12-handicapper, said: "I think it looks much better and the sand is a fantastic improvement. Overall I think the changes have improved the course massively – more difficult but also more enjoyable."

And Judy Fitch, who plays off 17, added: "It looks very pleasing to the eye and it's incredibly challenging. The ninth is particularly difficult when you're coming up and driving through the two new bunkers on the bridge of the hill. There are subtle changes but it's just a case of getting used to a new course. Overall, it's very positive." Lady captain Julie Cunnah, who plays off 27, said: "It looks beautiful. The position of the bunkers and the rough means we all have to hone our course-management skills. I'm thinking carefully about what club to use to avoid trouble. Aesthetically, each hole has improved; the course is challenging

but fair if you think it through – it's a good mental workout too. I'm already excited about the transformation of 10 to 18 next year."

The work on the opening nine Colt holes was part of a seven-figure facelift of Stoke Park's 27 holes, which were created by the legendary – and eponymous – designer Harry Colt in 1908. Golf Features Editor, Colin Jenkins was also amongst a lucky few journalists invited to sample the new layout. He added:

"It is, and has always been a real pleasure to visit Stoke Park. The three loops of nine are always in remarkable condition. It is also fair to say that they were not a terrifically difficult challenge for the better golfer. The new layout is a completely different experience to the previous course. In the past, the longer hitters could safely 'whale away' off the tee and normally manage to get their next on or close to the green from the rough. The course now plays to a far more intelligent golfer and hitting the fairways is the only way to score well. The tee shots are now so much more rewarding, as they have been designed to give all players options on their route



Above: The par-3 seventh was the inspiration for the 12th at Augusta. With its newly revamped bunkers the similarity continues

to the green, but the optimum line must be closely followed if you are not to drop shots. Perhaps best of all though, is the visual impact of the new work. Stuart and Alex have done an outstanding job of getting the bunkers to sit so well and to frame the fairways and greens in such great style. It is daring and bold and a design masterpiece, worthy of Harry Colt himself."

One of the best ways to experience the re-opened course is with Stoke Park's exclusive Harry Colt break, which includes one night's B&B accommodation in a Superior Room; a three-course dinner in the three AA rosette Humphry's fine dining restaurant; and 18 holes of golf per person, which costs from £309.

Stoke Park Country Club, Spa & Hotel is one of just two five-AA Red Star golf clubs in England and the historic land on which it stands is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. It was awarded the accolade of 'Ultimate Members Club' at the annual 59club Service Excellence Awards last year.

The historic course played host to the PGA Matchplay in 1910 and, even more famously, the golf match between Sean Connery's James Bond and Auric Goldfinger, in the 1964 film, *Goldfinger*. It also has a thriving golf club with around 800 active members.

To book the Harry Colt golf break, enquire about a corporate golf day with an exclusive hole-in-one opportunity, or for more general information on the club, please call 01753 717171, or email reservations@stokepark.com.
www.stokepark.com