

AT THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE

If deals can be done on the golf course so can customer service, says Eddie Bullock, Captain of the PGA. Our correspondent Phil Sampson packed up his buggy and headed to Goodwood to find out more for this exclusive *Scene Scania* interview



Let’s get one thing straight from the start: I’m not a golfer. I did try – for quite some time, actually – but simply failed to get the hang of it. Not my fault, of course; a rubbish set of clubs, poor instruction, too much precious weekend time away from home and a stuffy club all played their part in putting me off...

Eddie Bullock sits back and smiles a knowing smile. I’m not the first person to whinge to him about how the game got the better of them. But he hears me out in true gentlemanly fashion before coming back with a reply that takes me somewhat by surprise. Especially as Eddie is the current Captain of the Professional Golfers’ Association.

“When you say ‘stuffy clubs’, I know exactly you mean,” he says. “And it’s a great pity. I believe in the UK we generally provide poor customer service at golf clubs. There are some good ones, but not nearly enough. In my book, there’s no room for poor customer service.”

Controversial, or what? This man is – I’ll say it once again – the current Captain of the Professional Golfers’ Association. Surely his role is to promote the sport (or is it a pastime?) and all that goes with it?

“Yes and no,” says Eddie. “The role is most certainly an ambassadorial one, a figurehead for our 7,500 members if you like, but you’ll never find me defending poor customer service as part of that. There’s been far too much of it in the past, and if golf is to continue to flourish in the UK we have to do things differently. I’m afraid the days of the private members’ club and the snooty attitude that often accompanies it are numbered.

“Look, the point is we need to get people playing more golf and more people playing golf. So if someone currently plays once a week, how can we get them to play twice? In terms of the youngsters

out there, we’re simply not responding to them; they are just not embracing the game. They think it’s fuddy-duddy with too many rules and old fashioned dress regulations. There’s too many obstacles, too many clubs are out of touch.

“Change is coming, but not as quickly as it should. Golf is not the conservative game it once was. I believe some clubs are

values, and we must have a great respect for our history. But we have to blend in our old traditions with new ways. That is the way forward.”

Eddie Bullock began formulating his interest in golf at the tender age of 12-years-old. His forthright views on customer service developed a little later, but have their roots in his early days:

“My first golfing experience was caddying, which I quickly realised paid better than a paper round!” explains Eddie. “What’s more, if you did a good job, there was every chance of getting a decent tip, so doing the best you could was the natural thing to do.

“Eventually, one of my clients gave me a half-set of clubs. I was already interested in the game – I’m naturally competitive – and the half-set allowed me to progress rapidly. We lived in Selby, North Yorkshire, at the time and I joined the local club where I quickly advanced to County standard. From there I went on to compete in international events

“I did that for five years, working as a chauffeur in the winter to subsidise my golf in summer. Eventually, I decided to turn pro. I did a four year apprenticeship at Roundhay Golf Club in Leeds, working in the shop and teaching. But I still wanted to play competitively, which I did in locally, regionally and at National Tour events, which in 1971 became the PGA European Tour.

“The Tour was my university of life. Here I gained knowledge, wisdom and a little money.

“For my next move, I decided I needed to be nearer London. So I sought a job further south and in 1977 was appointed to the position of Professional at the Bedford & County Golf Club. There I had 600 members to look after, which I initially did in the ‘traditional’ way as a retailer and a teacher.

“After a while, it became clear to me



According to Eddie Bullock, golf at Goodwood is different to many other clubs – the somewhat eccentric ‘Woody’ buggies being just one example!

in denial of that, they need to think about customer service and be more flexible.”

By now, I could sense honourable Club Secretaries up and down the land choking on their tiffin. These were harsh words indeed, were they not?

“I’m not for one minute suggesting we throw the baby out with the bath water,” replies Eddie. “I’m a great believer in

Alex Hay

Alex Hay, who passed away earlier this year aged 78, was not only Eddie Bullock’s predecessor at Woburn Golf and Country Club but was also a former professional golfer and the owner of the gentle Scottish voice which partnered Peter Alliss’s in the BBC TV golf commentary box for more than a quarter of a century from 1978 to 2004.

Keen to share his golfing experiences with the widest possible audience, Alex was also a regular speaker at Scania golf

events, entertaining guests with his unique blend of experience, insight and humour.

Many years ago, Alex granted Scene Scania an audience. Among the questions we asked him then was, what would be your single most important tip for any aspiring golfer? His reply, to perfect the Vardon grip. Get that right, said Alex, and everything else will follow – it’s as simple as that!

Survived by his wife Ann and two sons, Alex Hay will long be fondly remembered by the UK golfing fraternity and all those at Scania who knew him.

that we could be providing a better service, so I began voicing my opinion about how we could change things to become more involved with the members. In addition to my regular duties, I took over the organising of competitions, something unheard of at the time as the three principal functions of a golf club – the Secretary, the Pro and the Greenkeepers – normally operated in entirely separate orbits.

“This pioneering stance led to me being somewhat ostracised. Secretaries and Pros from other clubs wouldn’t even speak to me at first. But over time, things changed and the club’s concept shifted from traditional to modern with a new structure, a new clubhouse, more young members and the creation of family-friendly environment. We even succeeded in attracting a national tournament.

“The late Alex Hay, (see panel, above), with whom I had worked at his Stowe School Summer Golf Academy, saw my success at Bedford and paved the way for me to be appointed to his role at Woburn Golf Club when he retired in 1998. That was quite a change, at a stroke I went from a one course/600 member club to one with two courses, a third under construction and 1,000-plus members! Also, Woburn

was commercially-driven, which meant delivering first-class customer service was a necessity.

“At Woburn, every aspect of the operation – golf, food and beverage and so on and so forth – had to be run in a wholly professional manner. Nothing less than the best would do. Every single member of staff was properly briefed, encouraged to go the extra mile and give people a smile – that’s as important as

anything in customer service terms. Our aim was to deliver a quality service from the locker room to the course to the bar. It was a brilliant experience for me, a dream come true, and one which gave me the opportunity to put my customer service beliefs into action.

“After nine years at Woburn I decided I to go freelance, helping other clubs develop their own approach to customer service as a consultant. Today, I sit on the board of The Golf Foundation, a charitable trust, and work with Bournemouth University as General Counsel and Advisor for its Golf Management courses. I’m also a board member at Goodwood, a relatively new venture, which for me represents all that is best about golf today.

“For example, at Goodwood we don’t

“Nothing less than the best would do”





Eddie's perfect drive

It's fantasy golf time, for when we met Eddie Bullock we couldn't resist asking him if he were to drive from John O'Groats to Land's End, which TOP TEN GOLF COURSES would he stop to play along the way? Displaying all the diplomatic qualities which no doubt helped secure his appointment as Captain of the PGA, he listed 12, two over par, so to speak...

ROYAL DORNOCH

A full 200 miles north of Edinburgh, Royal Dornoch is located midway between Inverness and Wick. Playing there has been described as a pilgrimage, such is the beauty and challenge of this isolated setting. Says Eddie, "Royal Dornoch would be my first stop because of the natural topography and the fact that you always get a great welcome in Scotland – I always love going there!"

BOAT OF GARTEN

Seventy miles to the south of Royal Dornoch lies Boat of Garten, the second course Eddie would visit. Designed by renowned course architect James Braid, 'The Boat' runs alongside the River Spey. "It's such a wonderful place if you catch it at the right time of year," says Eddie. "I played there in June 2010, you could still see snow on the peaks of the Cairngorms far away."

THE OLD COURSE AT ST ANDREWS

Famed for its variable conditions – flat calm one day, raging gale the next – the Old Course of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews is where the game was first played more than 600 years ago. That's why it is known as the Home of Golf, making it an unmissable stop for Eddie: "The total history of it; all the greats have played there except one – Ben Hogan. The more you play the Old Course, the more you respect it."



MUIRFIELD

Only 20 miles as the crow flies but 75 by road, Muirfield sits just across the Firth of Forth from St Andrews. Home to the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, the course is generally considered the best test on the Open rota. That's because it's laid out in two concentric rings of nine holes, meaning the wind conditions are ever-changing. "The setting and the thought that Jack Nicklaus, my hero, won the Open there in 1966 makes it special for me," says Eddie. And, it seems, for Nicklaus too – he went on to name his course in Ohio, Muirfield Village"

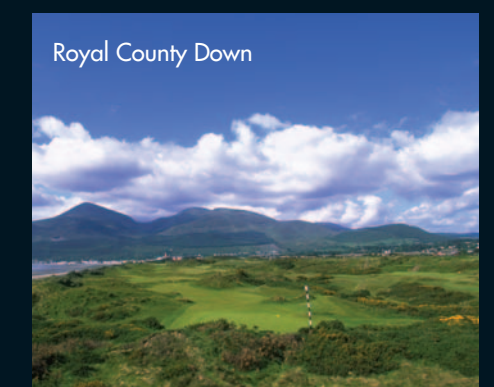
ROYAL COUNTY DOWN

At this point, Eddie would choose to leave the mainland for a trip to one of Northern Ireland's greatest courses. According to the guide books, the appeal of Royal County Down: 'is in combining the stunning aesthetics with the most exacting of challenges'. Eddie agrees: "I'd have to make a side excursion to Royal County

Down to see the Mountains of Morne as they sprawl down to the course, it's a wonderful sight."

ROYAL BIRKDALE

"I just think this is a golf course which really tests you – the links course that has everything. You have to have every shot in the bag or you're in trouble!" says Eddie. That view would surely be supported by top player Lee Westwood, who strongly criticised the steep slopes of the revised two-tier 17th green ahead of the 2008 Open.





Hunstanton

ALWOODLEY

Back to the mainland and south to Yorkshire’s industrial belt, Eddie’s next course would be Alwoodley, which ranks as one of the top 50 championship courses in the UK and Ireland and regularly hosts national tournaments. “The original design was by Dr Alistair McKenzie, who had influence at Augusta. The course is on the outskirts of Leeds and I always enjoyed playing there in my formative years,” comments Eddie.

HUNSTANTON

Situated on the north west Norfolk coast, Hunstanton is regarded as one of the country’s hidden gems, with the club’s own website claiming you can play there on seven consecutive days and feel you’ve

played a different course each time. For Eddie though, it is consistency which sets Hunstanton apart: “The greens are consistently the fastest I have played in the country – they’re something special. If you’re ever going to be tested on the green on a breezy day it has to be Hunstanton!”

THE DUKE’S COURSE AT WOBURN

Nestled deep in the heart of Buckinghamshire, Woburn Golf Club is among the country’s elite. For the past 35 years the club has hosted some of Europe’s top tournaments and today boasts leading golfer Ian Poulter as its Touring Professional. “What can I say about Woburn and the Duke’s Course that hasn’t been said before?” asks

Eddie. “Set in beautiful surroundings, this is simply a magnificent club and a beautiful, challenging woodland and heathland course.”



Woburn

THE BERKSHIRE

Continuing his journey south, Eddie arrives next at The Berkshire, near Ascot. Designed by Herbert Fowler, the club’s Red Course has been challenging golfers since 1928. More recently, this testing course has been updated with new back tees on the 4th, 11th and 17th. “The Red Course here is a difficult choice with six par 3s, six par 5s and six par 4s, a unique experience,” says Eddie. “But while the golf may be hard, in terms of atmosphere and ambience The Berkshire is a great place to visit – and they do an excellent lunch!

GOODWOOD

Fifty miles due south of The Berkshire, Goodwood is conveniently located for anyone visiting Britain’s central southern coastal area. Despite former players including the Prince of Wales (who would later become King Edward VIII) and the Duke of York (later King George VI), Goodwood today prides itself on its family-friendly relaxed atmosphere. “I think this is one terrific golf course,” says Eddie. “Compared to others on the Downs the views are sensational. The James Braid Course is an excellent example of how to blend the old with the new.”

TREVOSE

Trevose Golf Club, Eddie’s final stop, is located on the north Cornish coast overlooking Constantine Bay and the Atlantic Ocean beyond. The club’s highly regarded Championship Course hosted the Brabazon Trophy in 2008 and is set to stage the McGregor Trophy in 2012. It is also one of Eddie’s favourite UK courses: “The view looking out over the Cornish coast is always inspiring,” he says. “And the mystique on a windy day definitely sets the stall out for a challenge. What’s more, I particularly like visiting Trevose because the hospitality here really is excellent!”



Goodwood