

Money the Master in this game


It never ceases to amaze me how much money there is in golf. Having said that, I am yet to find it. It's like chasing that ever elusive pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. And then there's Augusta National! Their pot runneth over. They have spent more than \$200 million over the past two years. The most obvious expenditure was made on moving the entrance off Washington road – not far from the famed Magnolia Road entrance for members – to around the corner to Berkman's. Last year one passed through the impressive new entrance gates opposite the new car park, past some upmarket hoardings, the merchandise shop, museum, concession, score board and onto the course cutting over the first hole. This year the hoardings have gone to reveal a driving range that looks like it has been there for years. And there's a new broadcasting facility, which currently houses ESPN daily live broadcasts, numerous bunkers, greens and trees that are at least 60 feet high that were definitely not there two years ago in the flat desolate car park. Congratulations to Trevor Immelman as our best faring South African. I am also amazed at the stupidity of Canadian Scott Gay, jumping into one of the water features after this year's Masters. I guess that 'patron' won't be getting his badge again anytime soon. Our Masters packages for next year will be available in the next issue. Be sure to book early to take advantage of the strong rand and secure your place on a trip of a lifetime.

I had the pleasure of joining a select group for the opening of The Eye of Africa, and what a course. The opening was delayed by over a year and boy was that the right decision. The course is superb. Set on the southern outskirts of Johannesburg the course is neither parklands, links (although they do have a couple of large dams) or bushveld. Dennis Bruyns coined the phrase that it's a 'Highveld Course', and there is no more apt name for this type of course. He also said that it is the best 'opening' course he has ever played and for those of you who know Dennis, he has played a few in his time. The temporary clubhouse is quaint as it is a converted stable.

Houses are selling steadily and new sales of land are also on the up after a short downturn recently. What I liked about the course was the fact that those houses that have been built are not right on the fairways and won't interfere with one's line of sight of the golf course and the amazing views the koppies allow from some of the higher vantage points of the course. So unlike some of the other developments where you can wet your towel in somebody's pool or share breakfast conversation while playing your ball just off the fairway, you have loads of space with ample fairways. Get out there now before the surrounding area becomes developed. And finally, there are still a few places left in our mixed at Champagne Sports Resort this month, so call Marion now on (011) 728 08 04 to book your place.

Yours in golf, Leon

"If there's a golf course in heaven, I hope it's like Augusta National. I just don't want an early tee time."

– Gary Player 

Leon



Norman sparkles with his Eye on Africa



Grant Winter

The Eye of Africa - the first Greg Norman design to be completed in South Africa - is hidden in the hills in the Eikenhof area south of Johannesburg.

The par-72 layout - 6 895m off the tips but considerably shorter and more forgiving off the club tees - is a fabulous one which in a very short space of time will surely be ranked as one of the best courses in South Africa.

It only opened for play in mid-April but it's been a couple of years in the making and the condition is outstanding. The Great White Shark is a former world number one who with all his experience is big in golf course design these days, so it's not surprising that Eye of Africa is pretty special.

Norman and his expert team have endeavoured to seamlessly integrate the course with the natural surroundings, and the holes meander invitingly up and down the rolling terrain. The Shark's trademark design elements include elevated tees, wide fairways, extensive use of bunkering and greens with gentle slopes, and these are all present at Eye of Africa.

The vast majority of golfers enjoy short par-fours and, off the club tees at least, there are four of them here all measuring between 291 metres and 337 metres. A touch tricky, yes, but tantalisingly short. These four holes offer opportunities for the big-hitters to try and find the green with their tee shots, and the shorter or less skilful players to try for pars and even an elusive birdie or two.

The par-fives are for the most part three-shotters for us mere mortals, while the par-three 12th has a kind of upturned saucer-like green where you need to be extra careful you don't roll down the slopes both left and right.

Kind of like Augusta National. The closing three holes are delightful - the 16th a picturesque par-three with a lake on the left and a well-bunkered green, the 17th a strong par-five which - unusually - has a natural rocky outcrop in the middle of the fairway, and the par-four 18th a tiger of a finishing hole with a stream bisecting the fairway.

The greens are bent and, interestingly, the fairways - in a departure from the usual kikuyu - are planted with a cynoden strain called Gulf Green, a drought-resistant indigenous grass providing an extremely smooth surface.

The fairways go dormant in winter requiring minimum water for maintenance during the dry season. Eye of Africa is a joint venture between Medallist, represented by CEO Neil Anderson, and locally, Dr Rui Graca's Pixley World Investments, and their objective is to try and not disturb the peace and harmony of this beautiful part of Gauteng, overlooked by the nearby 1 841-metre Platberg peak, the second highest point in the province. Eye of Africa is committed to uplifting communities in the area and has donated R30 000 and provided palisade fencing for the nearby Elethu Themba Public School. ☐

Overall Experience: You can't help loving it. The course, the peaceful surroundings, the Stables Coffee Shop - they're all special.

Course Conditioning: Absolutely outstanding, especially since it only opened in mid-April of this year.

Playability: Eye of Africa scores highly in this respect because the fairways are generously wide, although if you're a mile off-line you're in chest-high veld grass. Also, there are no hidden dangers. The course has been so designed that on most holes you can see from the tee exactly where the trouble is, and it's your job to avoid it. The greens run true without too much slope and that's a plus for playability.

Birdies: It's a great course, in peaceful, natural surroundings, although when the full complement of 2 000-odd residences is in place this may change. The clubhouse is still to be built, but the old, intimate, character-filled Stable Coffee Shop (which also serves stronger liquids) is a very good substitute. There is a well-maintained driving range and putting green.

Bogeys: The idea is to have a carts-only course. The official line is that it's too hilly to walk, and that distances between the greens and the next tee are often considerable. What nonsense, I say. As human beings, we desperately need to walk more. It's good for our bodies and our souls.

Green fees: This is basically a members' only facility although affiliated weekday guests pay R275 and it's R330 at weekends. For non-affiliated guests it's R385 and R495. A subscription for a member is R9 000 a year (cheaper for juniors, 18-24s and seniors), and once this is paid there are no green fees.

Contact details: Corporate days are encouraged and these can be arranged through Dave Usendorff on 082 9047311. The website is www.eyeofafrica.co.za.

Directions: 17km south of the Johannesburg CBD. Drive south along the M1 and then the R82. Turn left near the Lido Hotel onto the R550, and keep going east until you see the Eye of Africa signpost to the right. ☐

