

### **THE THREE COUNTIES TOUR 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

The ten intrepid tourists arrived in eight cars from Essex, Suffolk, Kent, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Surrey, and Leicester, and soon settled into the comfortable surroundings of the Three Swans Hotel in Market Harborough, which is in south Leicestershire. Sadly John Blackmore was unable to attend due to ill-health, and Kim stayed at home for the birth of his daughter Fliss' first child.

A minor miracle occurred when Alastair was one of the first to arrive on Sunday afternoon, courtesy of being chauffeured from Southend by Brant, together with Dave, who for the second year running had organized an interesting tour to a different part of England. The rest arrived in dribs and drabs, with Jim bringing up the rear by possessing the excellent excuse of having spent the afternoon at Wembley, watching Southend United lose the National League play-off final to Oldham.

We dined at the hotel on Sunday evening, before travelling the short distance to Market Harborough Golf Club. It was during this journey that two facts materialised, firstly that MHGC is in Northamptonshire, giving rise to the name The Three Counties Tour, and secondly the beginning of a hint that Jim is not always the best of drivers to follow. Geoff was steadfastly sticking to Jim's tail when he suddenly found himself in a car wash! The reason was self-evident, in that the Three Swans Hotel boasts three car parks (one for each swan?), and the one that Jim and Geoff had selected in our ignorance was overshadowed by some large trees, which must be the roosting lodgings for hundreds of birds, given the amount of droppings on both of our cars. Geoff got away lightly as his Skoda had only suffered an attack to the rear, but Jim's beautiful Mustang had undergone a full-scale onslaught to the windscreen and bonnet. Neither of us made that mistake again, although Alan D did, and by the end of Tuesday all three of us had paid a visit to the car wash, who with an extra £33 in their pocket must be sponsoring the nests.

Market Harborough is a lovely parkland course, but being quite hilly, both Dave and Geoff were grateful for having the use of a buggy, a buggy which strangely neither of them had booked, and which even more oddly had been paid for in advance by a mysterious benefactor! With glorious views from the higher parts of the course, and with friendly members and staff, we all considered this to be a hidden gem.



As Dave's tour accounting had gone slightly awry, he felt it was only right that the two nearest the pin winners on each day (a par 3 and a short par 4 in two shots) should be handsomely rewarded with a score. The lucky recipients were Alastair (went towards his airfare as he only returned from Thailand on Friday), and Jim (more than covered his car wash expenses). The best score of the day was achieved by Alan W, whose score of 37 points earned him £20, beating the not-at-all-bitter and destitute Geoff on countback.

One of the advantages of a smaller group is that we all dined together, and Monday's choice was a Turkish restaurant. A pleasant meal was enjoyed, together with a few fancy cocktails!

Tuesday saw us making the short drive north to Kibworth Golf Club. Much flatter than Market Harborough, but with many more trees, and a few brooks traversing the fairways that caught out most of us. By far the most interesting feature was the robotic lawn mowers on the fairways, that clearly had a better understanding of GPS than us, as we never saw them plunge into the streams. This attractive course had a higher slope rating than yesterday's, and only two players bettered their previous day's score, one of which was Karl, whose 34 points won the day. Runner-up was John M with 33, and the nearest the pin winners were Alastair (again!) and Alan D.



On the drive home a few of the party visited the nearby historic Foxton Locks, a marvellous staircase of five locks. That evening we discovered the Red Cow, which is





sited immediately opposite the hotel. It's back room was more private, and set apart from some of the other decidedly suspicious characters frequenting the pub. After a route march we found the recommended Indian restaurant, which was enjoyable, unlike the tap room that some of us popped into on the walk home. The Beer House sold a variety of weird ales in quantities ranging from a third of a pint upwards in sixths (ok, not 5/6). As last orders was called as soon as we strolled in, Brant made the executive decision to buy seven pints of a pretty revolting imitation of IPA, whose strange name escapes me. To be fair, it's a traditional drinking house with no home comforts, and with more time we could have sampled some of the twenty or so other interesting beers on offer.

Wednesday was when Jim's ability to take a detour took on a more serious dimension. While the rest of relied on either the A4304 to Lutterworth, or sat nav via a convoluted but scenic route, in order to drive to Ullesthorpe Hotel and Country Club, Jim and Alastair decided to take the Mustang into Leicester city centre! In fairness to Jim, he later proved to us that his sat nav thinks that there is another Ullesthorpe Hotel in Leicester (author's note to Jim, did you actually find it?)

The golf course is perfectly acceptable, if quite tricky in places, with a very good finishing hole over a lake. An owl carved out of tree stump was an unusual feature.



John M claimed top spot with 34 points, making him the leader by 6 points going into the last day. Dave, taking advantage of his now official England Golf handicap, was second with 32. John M also won nearest the pin with a brilliant shot on the par 3 9<sup>th</sup>. The tee is high up on top of an old railway embankment, and the green is 181 yards away over a pond. The pro had told Dave that it would be suitable for a nearest the pin, if slightly challenging. Alan W was a deserved winner of the other £20, finishing 6" from the hole on the 261 yard par 4 16<sup>th</sup>.



Dinner was taken in an Italian restaurant, but a few of the party were feeling somewhat fatigued by a continuous diet of full English breakfasts and rich food at dinner time (nothing whatsoever to do with the alcohol intake).

The final day saw us decamp to St Neot's Golf Club in Cambridgeshire, which Dave had intelligently chosen as it's on the way home. This is a very good parkland course adjacent to the River Great Ouse, with the River Kym flowing through the centre. Unfortunately, the same compliment cannot be given to the utterly soulless clubhouse. However, we were delighted that this year's OSGC captain Steve drove up to join us for our last day.

Having enjoyed good weather for the first three days, we found ourselves donning our waterproofs for much of the last round. The four leaders went out last, and Alan W and Karl witnessed a bizarre first hour when Geoff overtook John M's 6 point lead and was 3 points ahead after 5 holes, having scored 16 points. Then the inevitable happened, the alcohol level dropped, and normal service was resumed. The day was won by Jim with 32, beating Brant on countback. Brant was also nearest the pin in 2, while Alan D was closest to the pin on the difficult 8<sup>th</sup>, crossing the River Kym.

The overall winner was John M with 131 points, 5 clear of Geoff, who had the consolation of winning the par 3 competition, Le Roi des Trois.

The Mr Blobby award for the most blobs went to Jim, who achieved the excellent total of 19, but he will have to wait for his prize as we believe that the "trophy" is in the possession of John B. Runners-up were John A and Alastair on 17 each. John M had the fewest (8).



Talking of John A, he negotiated his way quietly through the four days without doing anything of note. He didn't win anything (not even Mr Blobby), didn't use a buggy that he hadn't booked or paid for, didn't manage to get himself lost, and didn't get his car covered in bird droppings. A perfect tourist.

At the final presentation we all gave many thanks to Dave for organising another very enjoyable tour to a part of England that the rest of us would never have thought of visiting on a golf tour, yet which proved to be richly rewarding.

