



The Mashie Members' Club gives discerning golfers flexible access to the best golf courses in the UK with many more benefits." So says the official website for Mashie Golf, a new concept in golf membership that I was tasked with finding out more about at one of its 30+ annual members' main events at Remedy Oak Golf Club in Dorset.

Despite the inclement weather, those we met were smiling on through it all and savouring the atmosphere and camaraderie that are the hallmarks of a Mashie main event. A glance at the schedule for 2019 reveals a mouthwatering line-up of golf courses old and new, the majority of which grace *Golf Monthly's* Top 100 and Next 100 lists. Who couldn't love a schedule that includes Woburn, Little Aston, Sunningdale, Swinley Forest, New Zealand, Stoke Park and many more, all in the space of a few months?

But what is Mashie Golf, and how did it come into being? Who better to ask than managing director and founder, Nick Hovey, with whom I chatted as the Mashie members began to make their way towards Remedy Oak's 1st tee, praying (unsuccessfully as it transpired) for the rain to hold off.



Words **Jeremy Ellwood** · Photography **Kevin Murray, Mashie Golf**

The future of golf club membership?

GM heads to Remedy Oak to learn about a new style of membership pioneered by Mashie Golf



Foxhills is one of the clubs on the rotation

A change of scene

It all stems from a desire to escape the corporate rat race and find a way to make a living in golf clothing initially. "I've been in the golf industry for 12 years," Hovey tells me. "Before this I ran a golf apparel company for eight years called UKKO. I worked at a law firm for about ten years in the City and got bored, so in 2008 I just went with my passion. I loved golf and I love clothing – it was as simple as that."

I note the use of the word "ran" with regard to UKKO, so quiz him a little more about that venture. "It was a stupid move," Hovey smiles ruefully. "I had no experience in either clothing or golf. It was tough, and in the first few years I learned a few harsh lessons, but you learn the hard way." Despite this, his appetite had been whetted. "It was also fun," he goes on. "I was doing something I was passionate about, and when that's the case you're not as worried about making mistakes!"

The wheels had been set in motion for a new career in golf, and it was when he set about selling that previous business that the Mashie concept began to evolve, as one of the prospective buyers, who didn't actually proceed, asked

Hovey to start a golf clothing company for him. "I said I could do it," Hovey

explains, "but that it was tough. Unless you've got seriously deep pockets, you can't compete with Under Armour and those guys, so we needed to come up with a USP. I'd always had this vision of creating a members' only clothing brand, where you bought into a brand and if you saw somebody else



in that clothing, you'd know they were part of that brand." And so Mashie Golf apparel was born, and a successful initiative it has proved, too, with many members buying into the concept.

Different by design

How, then, did Mashie progress from a clothing brand into a members' golf club offering a very different model to the traditional one? "It switched when we had a new investor come in," says Hovey. "He was very experienced in

"There are a lot of people who don't have a huge amount of time but do have disposable income"

multiple businesses and wanted to bring in a subscription model so there was regular cashflow. He came in with that concept and we had this idea of a members' club, and we put the two together."

You may have read about golf's shifting membership dynamic in this publication and elsewhere, and there's no doubt that things are changing, with cost relative to available time being one deterrent to a traditional membership, along with the rise of the nomadic golfers, who feel they're not going to play enough to justify a membership fee and like the idea of playing different courses. Mashie Golf kind of addresses both, while also

treading new ground, for Hovey firmly believes that money itself is not always the obstacle.

"I believe we're creating a new market," he tells me. "I've got two young kids, I've got a business, I don't have a lot of time... but I do love playing good golf courses. I knew there were a lot of guys out there like me living in London or other cities, who don't have a huge amount of time but do have disposable income. When they play golf, they want to play a nice course. If you play ten times a year, you

can't justify the cost of membership at a normal course, so I was thinking, can we create a club for these people?"

The answer appears to be yes, with many Mashie clothing club members embracing the golf membership too, and others seeing the appeal of choosing to spend their disposable income on this style of membership over a traditional model. That said, many do both, as I discovered when chatting to some Remedy Oak participants. I ask Hovey if that was how he'd seen it panning out. "It wasn't our intention," he admits. "We were thinking more nomadic golfers initially, but about 80 per cent of our members are members of clubs too. They're members of Mashie because they want to play lots of nice courses, but that doesn't stop them being a member of a course local to them as well."



The need for flexibility

This is interesting to me because I have long felt that it is not cost, per se, that is golf membership's biggest obstacle, but cost relative to perceived value. You only have to look at the hordes now cycling around on very expensive bikes on a Sunday morning dressed head to toe in Lycra to sense that many people do still have money to spend. And there are still plenty, it would seem, happy to spend whatever it takes to enjoy the best golfing experiences, which perhaps explains the success of Mashie Golf.

The fact this new style of membership appears to be working in tandem with existing models may go some way to explaining why more than 70 very nice golf

clubs have chosen to partner with Mashie. That said, Mashie has used the strapline 'the future of golf membership', so I ask Hovey for his wider thoughts on the issue. "I think the British golf industry needs to look a little bit more at the American market," he replies. "Clubs need to be more flexible with their members. Too many clubs don't have affiliate clubs, so you can't then have the flexibility of playing different places. That's what we're trying to harness."

On top of the events and the clothing, Mashie members also enjoy discounted green fees at all partner clubs, plus the chance to hold an official handicap via one of Mashie's affiliated clubs. The membership fee is £1,000 a year,

with £750 of that providing the member with £500 credit to be used against entry fees for events and £250 worth of clothing credit so they can kit themselves out in Mashie gear. Corporate memberships have proved extremely popular too, but Hovey is eager for the events not to become too large-scale. "I want to get away from the idea of a corporate golf day," he tells me. "We are a members' club so we want our members to get to know each other, and you can't do that on a day with 80 people."

As the rain begins to fall more steadily, our conversation draws to a close as Hovey is eager to get out and help raise the spirits of his somewhat soggy members and guests as they reach the sanctuary of the halfway house. Before he goes, I ask for his thoughts as to why Mashie has proved so successful. "I would say the first reason is it's unique," he replies. "We offer a rounded service, with our events at the core of it. Everyone loves our events and we play some great courses. But members can also get an official handicap through our affiliated clubs, plus discounts on green fees at a lot of great courses, so they can play where and when they want. If you're not a member of a club, you can be a member of Mashie and feel like you are. Even if you are, you can get the benefits of both."



WHAT THEY SAY...

We caught up with some of the Remedy Oak competitors to get their thoughts on Mashie Golf...

JOHN PIGOTT

I see Mashie Golf as complementing my club membership. I'm fortunate in the role I have as a self-employed financial advisor, as my diary is my own. I play regular golf at my home club and use Mashie as a mechanism to invite clients as a thank you. But today I've brought three personal friends, so I mix and match. For me, it's the perfect complement to golf at my home club.



KEVIN BUCK

What I enjoy about it is the modern way they do things. They're thinking about us, so we play good courses, it's set up well for us and there aren't loads of people. I've been a member of a club, but with children I just can't justify the expense. It's playing the same course all the time, and if I can only play 12-15 times a year, golf's a bit of an event anyway so I want to make the most of it.



HENRY MARTIN

It's mostly the main events for me, but I try and play new courses too. The main benefit for me is getting to play new courses and seeing new people – the people I've met I generally get on really well with. My friend Colin uses Mashie because he wants the membership and the handicap but he doesn't have the time to commit to a traditional club, so this is a better alternative for him.

