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JANUARY 2015 R34.90

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**GET
POWER
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ACCURACY**



LORENA OCHOA / LIFETIME AMMIES
GARY PLAYER / TITCH MOORE / LANGEBAAN

COTM

COURSE OF THE MONTH

Langebaan Country Estate | Western Cape

BLENDING IN

Langebaan has long been considered the playground of the Cape's rich and famous. The water-sports capital of the Western Cape also has a championship golf course to entice the holidaymaker.



At just 328m, Langebaan's par-four 10th plays around the dam, and is a great risk and reward hole. Bigger hitters will go over the edge of the dam to leave a short approach in.

The West Coast – or Weskus, as the locals call it – is the rugged, mostly unspoiled coastline that stretches north from Cape Town. Once considered the poor cousin of SA’s coastal regions, the area – with its many bays and limited development – has become one of the fastest-growing regions in the country.

It’s also a favourite spot for Capetonians on holiday, with Langebaan – and its famous lagoon in particular – drawing huge numbers of visitors, especially during the holiday seasons.

Until 2006, the one glaring omission from the activity list of the West Coast was a championship golf course, with the nearest one being Atlantic Beach, about an hour’s drive south of Langebaan. The original Langebaan course, designed by Bill Kerr, had gone through some tough times prior to that, and the course and adjoining land were purchased by Frank Robarts. Langebaan Country Estate was launched in 2003 and the course underwent a facelift and redesign soon after that. In 2007, the developers unveiled a new-look Langebaan golf course that drew rave reviews from the outset.

Today the estate is a success story, with plans in place to open further phases of development, including a 54-room hotel and a retirement village.

Langebaan Country Estate lies between the Langebaan Lagoon and the West Coast National Park, within an area known as the West Coast Biosphere Reserve – one of only a handful of biospheres in South Africa. Special management of the sensitive environment is required here and this is reflected both on and around the golf course.

The golf course’s out-of-bounds areas – and there are a lot of them – are considered environmentally sensitive and may not be entered

into, while those wishing to build here must first have a ‘search and rescue’ conducted on their plot of land, where indigenous plants are removed and transplanted to other parts of the estate. In a refreshing change from many golfing estates, only 25 percent of the estate is made up of plots and only 50 percent of each plot may be covered by buildings.

At the launch of Langebaan Country Estate, CEO Craig Scott spoke of the need for the estate to respect the environment: “Langebaan is a very special place. It is for people who want to become one with nature and want to play an active role in the community by getting involved in the conservation of the environment. Our slogan is ‘Live it. Love it’. This sums up Langebaan – it gets under your skin and you become passionate about the area, its people and what it stands for.”

The 18-hole Langebaan golf course is a Black Knight design, meaning the layout has the influence of Gary Player, without having the great man’s signature on the plans. Regardless, Player would no doubt be pleased with the result, particularly the balance between playability for the average ammie and the test that is offered to the professionals off the tips. The course has hosted some significant events, including the Vodacom Origins of Golf event in 2013 – won by Jean Hugo – and the 2012 Nedbank SA Disabled Open. The Origins event is scheduled for a return to Langebaan later this year too.

For the weekend ammie, the course presents a good test of not only one’s golfing ability but, equally importantly, one’s course management skills. Since out-of-bounds areas flank most holes – often on both sides of the fairway – each tee shot presents something of a risk-and-reward opportunity. The longer hitters may well be tempted



1



2



3

by the chances to leave themselves short approach shots, while the conservative golfer who prefers to plot his way around the course should be able to steer clear of danger.

The presence of out-of-bounds areas can easily lead to tee-box jitters, especially when the wind is up, but in reality the fairways at Langebaan are very generous, meaning that you’d need to hit a rank poor shot to be reloading on the box. It is best to put those white stakes out of your mind when negotiating this very playable

1 In keeping with the estate’s environmental approach, the course is treated with effluent water – and the hardy paspalum greens run true. **2** Houses rarely come into play, but there is out of bounds on most holes at Langebaan. **3** After a slow start, Langebaan Country Estate is now a success story, with more phases set to open.

layout, although that’s easier said than done.

Although the course is not particularly long, at just a fraction over 6 000 metres, the coastal winds can transform tame holes into beasts – with the opening hole a perfect example of this. In the absence of wind, the 358-metre par four holds few terrors and will leave the first-time visitor wondering how it is worthy of its rating as the toughest hole on the course. Yet when the prevailing wind arrives, it howls straight into you and can turn this uphill stroke-1 into a rather sobering

FACT FILE

GETTING THERE: From Cape Town, head north on the R27 (West Coast Road) for approximately 100km. Turn left towards the town of Langebaan and continue for about 8km. The entrance to Langebaan Country Estate will be on your left-hand side.

COURSE DESIGNER: Black Knight Group (2007)

CEO: Craig Scott

GENERAL MANAGER: Riette Laas

GOLF DIRECTOR: Bob Parry

COURSE SUPERINTENDENT:

Klasie van Eyssen

GOLF PROFESSIONAL: Max Birkenhead

GREENFEES: Affiliated R270, non-affiliated R395, junior affiliated R100

GOLF CART HIRE: R250/cart

CONTACT: Tel: 022 772 2112

WEBSITE:

www.langebaan-estate.co.za

LIKES:

- Close to Cape Town – just over an hour’s drive north of the city.
- The course is very playable, even for the high-handicapped golfer.
- The full golf offering – championship course, mashie course, driving range and putt-putt.

DISLIKES:

- The out-of-bounds areas on each hole create a little bit of a ‘corridor golf’ feel.



ABOVE The modern clubhouse at Langebaan is geared to be family friendly.

opener where par is a score to be celebrated.

A striking feature of the course is the collection of large waste bunkers that come into play on holes near the clubhouse. The bright white 'sand' contrasts with the green playing areas to good effect, while the water features add another strong visual element.

For those after powerful vistas, the views from the elevated 6th green and 7th tee over the Langebaan Lagoon are hard to beat and add substance to the argument that the opening nine is the more eye-catching of the two loops. At over 400 metres, the par-four 9th hole provides a strong finish to the opening nine.

The back nine is the newer of the nines and one can sense that it is starting to grow into itself rather well, with the young trees adjacent to the fairways beginning to fill out and, in so doing, adding extra definition to the holes.

The par-five 18th hole is a testing finishing hole, despite measuring only 414 metres. A straight drive

will see you dumping the ball into the water hazard, so players are left with the option of laying up with a fairway wood or attempting to find a slither of fairway out to the right with their driver. Either option should leave the player with a shot into the green and a chance to cap off their round with a birdie.

It's clear that Langebaan Country Estate has worked hard to establish a family friendly environment – and with great success. There are a number of outdoor activities on site, such as a swimming pool, bowling green, mountain-biking trails, running and cycling routes – and of course the estate is not far from the Langebaan lagoon, beaches and restaurants.

A good portion of the units here are second homes, so the estate picks up over weekends and during school holidays. The golf suites and lodges – with their many stay-and-play specials – make for an attractive weekend destination for golfers looking to get out of Cape Town and I can think of few better spots

for those setting up a golf tour.

Friday nights are pizza nights at the clubhouse and these evenings have been known to get rather festive as the sun goes down over this beautiful West Coast course.

Aside from the 18-hole championship course, golfers can also tee it up on Langebaan's mashie course, an 18-hole pitch-and-putt layout that offers a great stepping-stone for beginners or children to get into the sport. The original front nine is short enough to negotiate with just a wedge and a putter, while the new back nine will test out some of the longer clubs in your bag. There's also the option of lessons with the local golf professional on the driving range to consider or the putt-putt course for the kids to master.

It is widely accepted that golf needs to become more family focussed if it is to stem its steady decline in participation and it's clear that Langebaan Country Estate's myriad offerings keep it one step ahead of its peers in this regard. **CG**