



Royal Manchester Golf Links ~ A Course Coronation

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After the golf course boom of the late 1990's, the mid-Atlantic area has seen a significant drop in the number of new public courses being opened. Trends show more closing their doors than opening their fairways. That's why when a new course opens, *The Golf Guide* likes to be, in the words of James Bond, "on top of the situation." I use the 007 reference because the new course we examine today more resembles one you'd find across the pond than a stateside layout. Royal Manchester Golf Links near York, Pennsylvania, is a slice of English leather spread over a rolling plateau high above the banks of the Susquehanna River. This wonderful public facility rolled out the carpet in late June of this year.



The opening culminated an agonizingly long 10 years of name and management changes and delays. Years ago, Pennsylvania Power and Light (PP&L) sought to build a course on a bluff overlooking its nearby Brunner Island Power Plant. Local golfers waited with anticipation as a couple of companies contracted by PP&L tried to open the course,

known then as Phoenix Golf Links, but they failed. Urban legend has it that black ash from the plant was used for the bunkers instead of sand. The project was barely on life support until Rasperry Golf Management was hired by PP&L for a final push. With Rasperry's previous success and insight, the Royal Manchester project could come to fruition. The management team first tapped architect Tim Freeland to finish what had been started. Much of the designer's success is directly bonded to Rasperry. He assisted Gary Player in creating Rasperry Falls in Leesburg, Virginia, and then went solo for the first time with Old Hickory in Woodbridge, Virginia. With the golf architect on their team, Rasperry Management concentrated on the infrastructure. A



beautiful, functional clubhouse now enhances the property's entrance welcoming players to a pleasing golf experience.

As opposed to an established facility, I play my first game at a relatively new golf course using a different set of criteria. Based on my previous experiences, Royal Manchester delivers high marks on many levels for a recent opening. I found the course extremely playable, and the conditions considering the recent desert-like weather were above average. Most golfers will find Royal Manchester's links design to be very player-friendly. An abundance of holes that move right to left is also a plus for the average player. Most of the large greens are accessible with a bump and run shot, a signature for traditional English courses like St. Andrews and Turnberry. The other noticeable trait of the course is the tall fescue grassed mounds that line a majority of the holes. The ample bluegrass fairways took a bit of a hit with the summer sizzle but overall were in outstanding condition. The front nine at Royal Manchester opens with a straight away par 4, a design feature I admire in a course because it's one of the easier holes and gives players an opportunity to start on a good note. The par 3 second hole provides us a glimpse of the designer's characteristic touches. Freeland's huge green complex traits and clever bunkering are evident here. A chunk of the championship tees 6962 yards length is found on the par 5 third, a sweeping dogleg right of almost 600 yards that plays to one of the highest points on the property. Three other tee boxes are properly situated with the forward tees playing just over 5000 yards. You'll find a short par 4 on both nines at Royal Manchester. The seventh is under 350 yards from the white tees, and a long baller can reach the green with favorable wind

