



Norman's Eye of Africa could be best course in Gauteng



GRANT
WINTER

IF MY numbers are right, Greg Norman's Eye of Africa golf course which opened for play just eight days ago, is the 81st course to be completed in Gauteng.

And, I venture to add, it just might be the best. Actually, let me re-phrase that before I get banned from the region's other top clubs for giving too much credit to an Aussie, and to a golf course tested to date by just a few dozen players. Let me rather say that fabulous Gauteng layouts like Royal Johannesburg East, Glendower, CCJs Woodmead, The River Club and Gary Players Blair Atholl have suddenly got some serious competition.

I was privileged enough this past week to play this brand new 18-hole layout situated 17km south (yes, the "unfashionable" south) of the Johannesburg CBD, and I am already addicted to it.

The par-72 course of 6 895m is set among rolling hills in the area known as Elkenhof, and bordered by the beautiful 1 841m Platberg peak which Kent Gush – who is the sales agent – says is the second highest point in Gauteng.

Sales agent? Yes, this is another upmarket residential estate combining golf with the "perfect" lifestyle. There are 1 200 freehold stands and hundreds more sectional title units to be purchased on a

677ha piece of ground (which is big for a golf estate). And the usual plans are in place to foster a sense of community with a village green and a community hall.

It all sounds wonderful but as a golf reporter, I was interested primarily in the course. Norman and his Great White Shark design team have tried their best to blend all 18 holes into the natural surroundings and they've certainly done a good job.

Most of the holes are enclosed by the hills and (barring your own double-bogeys) there's a sense of peace and tranquility as you play your round. At times you feel as though you're a million miles away from

the Joburg CBD, not just 17km.

A former world No 1 knows something about golf and the Shark has created a layout with plenty of appeal. His design trademarks include elevated tees so you can see your way ahead, plenty of bunkering (but no hidden traps), gentle slopes on the bentgrass greens, and unusually wide fairways.

The course is already in stunning condition and I think its greatest appeal is its playability. If you're off-form, you won't lose a dozen balls and get all grumpy.

If you're on your game you'll make some birdies because it rewards good shots and the greens are so pure that your putts

will hold their line.

Eye of Africa is a major challenge off the tips but if you just love short par-4s, as most golfers do, there's four of them between 291m and 337m off the club markers. That means the gorillas can have a crack at the green, and shorter hitters, or less skilful players, will feel that a par or a birdie is a distinct possibility. And isn't that what we're all looking for as golfers?

It is going to be primarily a members only facility although affiliated guests can expect to pay R275 on weekdays and R330 at weekends. Not too bad for this gem of a layout hidden in the southern hills of Gauteng.

