

CLUB OF THE MONTH ›

BATHURST GOLF CLUB

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FROM heroes and legends – to crooks and contraband... Bathurst Golf Club has seen the lot over the years.

And why not? It's the third-oldest golf club in the state.

And the good news is, it's still growing as Bathurst has 'bucked the trend' and is one of the rare golf clubs in this country that has continued to grow its' membership in recent years.

And with water at such a premium these days, the efforts of the golf club next to Bathurst Gaol to "arrest" this have not gone un-noticed in the golf world.

After shelling out thousands for town water over the years, Bathurst bit the bullet and put down three bores around the course in a bold move to try and alleviate the cost of water each year.

The results have thrilled both Golf NSW and the Bathurst Council and it was probably hardly surprising that Bathurst Golf Club suddenly found itself on the podium receiving the coveted Country Club of the Year title at the recent NSW Golf Industry Awards, edging out clubs such as Coffs Harbour, Coonabarabran, Nelson Bay and even Lord Howe Island, who were all finalists.

Yet Bathurst has continued to put its hand up to host some of Golf NSW's premier events in recent years.

The NSW Senior and Mid Amateur Championships are two such events while the Bathurst Open, which is a NSW Open qualifying event, is held there as well.

Bathurst is also the host of the largest Jack Newton Junior Golf Masters held outside of metropolitan Sydney.

Yet what sets Bathurst apart from so many other golf clubs these days is that the golf club continues to show a year-on-year membership growth and has done so since 2013.

These days it sits proudly as one of the fastest-growing golf clubs in a state which boasts more golf clubs than any state in Australia.

There's a history there too as Bathurst was established in 1894 and has long been regarded as one of country NSW's finest layouts.

And after being a loyal servant of the club for 21 years, the last 11 as general manager, no one has enjoyed watching the club flourish more than its hard-working general manager Brad Constable.

"I'm happy to report we've had a bit of rain up here – not a lot and we could use some more, but it's better than nothing," said Constable.

"We can only harvest a certain amount of water and this is an area of Bathurst that doesn't really lend itself to bores.

"But on a given six-month stretch we're probably saving anything up to \$25,000 or \$26,000 that's for sure.

"A lot of country clubs have some form of water available and some even have a council that gives them water, but we don't have that here.

"Mind you, we do have a good relationship with Bathurst Council, it's just that they are much more steadfast on their water pricing.

"It's certainly a constant battle but the club and the council are happy that we are making every effort to do something about it."

Constable says the membership growth was really the catalyst for the club receiving the Country Club of the Year award.

"We've had something like a 15 per cent membership growth over the past five years and there were only a couple of other clubs which could boast anything like that," says Constable.

"I know there were quite a few other things factored in as well – but it was certainly a nice reward for our efforts."

So why has Bathurst beaten the odds in attracting more and more golfers to a club that has been the happy stomping ground of high-profile professionals like Peter O'Malley [European Tour] and Gavin Coles [US PGA Tour] over the years?

"I think Bathurst is pretty-widely known as a friendly club and we have a culture like that which begins in the office and emanates right down through to the pro shop and even the green staff," said Constable.

"If you rock up here for a game of golf I think most people would say they find it pretty welcoming, which is a good start.

"We've also tried to offer a number of different membership options as well.

"One of the things that did help us focus on that October to March period when you get a lot of the sportspeople – I'm talking about the footballers and the soccer players, to join and play.

"We're a pretty dyed-in-the-wool sporting town here and sometimes you just have to focus on that particular market.

"I know a lot of clubs are quite steadfast in their membership categories – join for a year or don't join at all.

"But our attitude is, well, six months' membership is better than no membership at all.

"Golf has changed a lot and those old traditions have pretty-much changed and I put our continued growth down to the culture, the membership flexibility, and most importantly the staff as well.

"We've a gift-of-the-gab professional and our Operations Manager is a fantastic public relations man. It's that welcoming mat...it's when people walk off the course or out of the club and think back and maybe say 'that wasn't a bad experience'.

"Feeling comfortable when you go there is paramount and I say again, our culture is a big part of why the club does OK.

"In the years I've been here you learn the reasons people can or can't play or join and you have to start thinking out of the box, I'd suggest."

Constable also pointed out that women had been treated as equals with men in their membership for some years although there were still some clubs—and some not that far from Bathurst – that were clinging to the tradition of men-only playing on Saturday.

Bathurst Golf Club has had some interesting aspects added to its history books too.

It was in 1990 it hosted the NSW Open when Ken Trimble hung on to beat local legend Peter O'Malley by a couple of shots.

Don O'Malley, Peter's father, although now into his 80s, still plays off single figures at Bathurst and like his son Peter, now in his 50s, the pair have won multiple club championships there.

They have already left quite a legacy there – with more to come.

Coles now lives in the US and doesn't get back to Bathurst as much as he used to. O'Malley still gets back to see his parents and still loves to have a hit on the course.



"POM has a new lease of life on the seniors tour now," said Constable.

The layout itself has not changed that much over the years.

And the reason for that, says Constable is that Bathurst GC has a clay-granite base and always has an issue with drainage of the bunkers.

"We've worked hard to improve that area," he said.

"The last few years we have focussed on making the course better, rather than changing it.

The current course record is 64, shot by scratch marker Phil Campbell, who used his local knowledge to beat all the pros when they came for a pro-am there a few years ago. He has also been coached by Gavin Coles over the years.

Before that, believe it or not, golfing great Roberto De Vincenzo held the course record of 63, which stood for many years before minor changes to a few holes made the record redundant.

O'Malley (Peter) has also held a few course records there over the years too.

"I've watched people like Dimi Papadatos and going further back a couple of 16-year-olds named Adam Scott and Aaron Baddeley facing off against each other at Bathurst," says Constable.

The pro now is Matthew Barrett, who has been there since 2010 when he came back from Hong Kong to take the job and has had the right attitude there and been a great fit for the club.

The head super is Dave Rogers, who was greenkeeper during 1990 NSW Open when the golf course received that many plaudits at that time that Rogers was hailed as a hero.

"He had that many offers afterwards and went to Corowa from here for 12-14 years and came back here in 2006 and has been here ever since," said Constable.

"So, it has been a local boy made good – one who has been there and done that and come back to Bathurst - and we're proud of him."

And in an era where a lot of country, and even city courses are selling off part of their course for homes and villas, there not

much chance of that happening at Bathurst ...they're next to the Bathurst Gaol.

And yes, Constable admits there have been a few things thrown over the wall at different times in their history.

"There has been the odd piece of contraband going over the wall, because after all, we do border a gaol," says Constable.

"The 11th hole here is a short par-four which is straight away and then doglegs to the left.

"So it's normally a two-iron then a wedge to the green – or you can gamble and go straight over the gaol and try to hit the green.

"A lot of longer hitters have tried it but the gaol is currently adding to their buildings so that may change the way that hole is played for the longer hitters.

"There's been plenty who have hit it into the gaol over the years."

And it hasn't always been just golf balls either!

Bathurst Golf Club

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- 2-3 November - Golf NSW Country Championships

Call the Club for details



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