



# Top of the Class



Valderrama: continental Europe's number one

Bucking the economic trend, golf in Europe has largely fared relatively well in recent times with an array of new developments and upgrades. To compile the *Golf Monthly* Top 50, we looked far and wide in order to feature golf from as broad a geographical spectrum as possible. This list represents no fewer than 16 countries and there are encouraging signs that this number will grow. In turn, this means there is an enormous variety of golf on offer ranging from links, via parkland courses, to new stadium layouts. There is something for everyone...

## 1 VALDERRAMA SPAIN

6,356m, par 71 – €300-€320

Robert Trent Jones Snr

Originally named Sotogrande New, this Robert Trent Jones Senior design is often likened to Augusta. It is known around the world both as host of the dramatic 1997 Ryder Cup and for its regular staging of the Volvo Masters. Seve Ballesteros and Kyle Phillips have both made changes, and the par-5 17th, protected by a pond and closely shaven run-off area, remains admired and feared. The course is always in immaculate condition and sets the bar to which all others aspire.

## 2 LES BORDES FRANCE

6,409m, par 72 – members & guests only

Robert von Hagge

Now one of the most private destinations in Europe, this is a fabulous – but extremely tough – course in the Loire Valley some 90 minutes south of Paris. The brainchild of Baron Bich, of Bic pen fame, it was carved from lush woodland just 25 years ago. It has more than its fair share of water hazards, which seep into the golfer's consciousness on the majority of holes. This is a visual and photogenic masterpiece that requires clout, in every sense.

## 3 MORFONTAINE FRANCE

Grande, 5,985m, par 70 – members & guests only

Tom Simpson

Benefiting from recent modifications by the en vogue Kyle Phillips of the 1927 Tom Simpson design, the Grande course is not long, but it does demand accuracy and a strategic approach to large, undulating greens. Thirty miles to the north of Paris, the club will celebrate its centenary year in 2013. In many ways, little has changed since its first year and there is a great sense of history and tradition, as well as peace and seclusion in this magnificent area of France.



PGA Catalunya: has the Pyrenees as a back drop

excellent test of golf. The resulting dunes manage to mask the surrounding industry and provide a perfect place for spectators and there is a real feeling of playing a links course, which comes as a surprise when you are so close to Paris. The course is also at the heart of the French bid to host the Ryder Cup in 2018.

**6 NOORDWIJKSE NETHERLANDS**

6,317m, par 72 – €120

**Paul de Jong and Frank Pennink**

Continental Europe's North Sea coast enjoys a terrific heritage of top-flight, old-school golf, much of it courtesy of Harry Colt. Ironically, whilst the great man designed the original course here, it was destroyed during World War Two. Its replacement was completed only 40 years ago, but seems much older and is a classic, dunesy links with the variation of a handful of holes running through trees.

**7 CHANTILLY FRANCE**

Vineuil, 6,399m, par 71 – €100-€110

**Tom Simpson**

With its pavilion-style clubhouse oozing history, a visit to this centurion is a real step back in time. It is said to have a British feel about it and some even consider it as the French version of St Andrews. The course donated its original three closing holes to the club's Longeres course when it was extended to 18, but it remains a parkland gem with heavily contoured greens and absolutely superb conditioning.

**8 ROYAL ZOUTE BELGIUM**

6,172m, par 72 – €95

**Harry Colt**

This was Colt's first foray overseas, designed whilst he was secretary at Sunningdale. Despite the ravages of war, his hand is still very much in evidence, especially in the bunkering. The greens are fast and true, and although seemingly generous, the fairways have humps and bumps that can sometimes play mischievous tricks. As at Lytham, this gently undulating links is separated from the sea by houses.

**9 KENNEMER NETHERLANDS**

6,283m, par 72 – €120

**Harry Colt & Frank Pennink**

This is one of Harry Colt's very best courses, running as it does through towering dunes. Frank Pennink added nine holes and the three loops are pretty much as good as one another.

**10 SC BERLIN GERMANY**

Faldo, 6,486m, par 72 – €70-€90

**Nick Faldo**

Featuring bold use of sand including many pot bunkers, the Faldo course reflects just the attention to detail you would expect from its designer. According to Sir Nick: "Presented with a windswept, sandy tract of land, my intention was to create a classic links reminiscent of Scotland's Muirfield and Carnoustie." This is very much a golfer's golf course.



Golf National: France's Ryder Cup hopeful

**4 PGA CATALUNYA SPAIN**

Stadium, 6,588m, par 72 – €80-€120

**Angel Gallardo & Neil Coles**

Designed specifically to host professional events, this is effectively Europe's equivalent of the TPC at Sawgrass. It has hosted the Spanish Open twice and it is easy to be beguiled by the stunning setting with the Pyrenees on the horizon. However, concentration is vital as the beauty is matched by the difficulty. Pine trees, heather, strategic bunkers and water are attractive to the eye, but also potentially damaging to your scorecard.

**5 GOLF NATIONAL FRANCE**

Albatross, 6,689m, par 72 – €80-€120

**Hubert Chesneau & Robert von Hagge**

Not blessed with a naturally attractive setting, a great deal of heaven and earth was moved during the creation of this nonetheless



SC Berlin: a classic links in Germany

## EUROPE'S TOP 50



Bro Hof Slott: an absolute monster

### **11 BRO HOF SLOTT** SWEDEN

Stadium, 7,365m, par 72 – €110-€200

**Robert Trent Jones Jnr**

The beneficiary of an enormous budget, this is a spectacular tournament-style course. According to its designer: "Everything is big at Bro Hof. The holes are longer, the greens are bigger, the course has more water and the bunkers are large." And he is right! Stretching to an outrageous 8,000 yards from the back, the tees used by mortal golfers offer a fascinating challenge.

### **12 ROYAL HAGUE** NETHERLANDS

6,142m, par 73 – €100

**Harry Colt**

Although the oldest club in the country, its course is a little more recent and is yet another Colt masterpiece. Running through dreamy dunes, it is one of the finest of traditional links.

### **13 HALMSTAD** SWEDEN

North, 6,317m, par 72 – €68-€80

**Rafael Skold & Nils Sundblom**

Despite running right by the sea,

dense pine and birch mean that it is never visible from the gently undulating course. A fine new clubhouse was built for the 2007 Solheim Cup.

### **14 BARSEBÄCK** SWEDEN

Masters, 6,395m, par 72 – €85

**Ture Bruce**

There is real variety here;



Play seaside golf at Praia D'El Rey

first it is almost parkland, then a few holes out by the beach, and finally ever-thicker woodland for a most demanding finish.

### **15 SPERONE** FRANCE

6,106m, par 72 – €60-€95

**Robert Trent Jones Snr**

This Corsican golfing estate with luxury villas runs up hill and down valley, along ragged cliff tops, and looking out over golden beaches to the shimmering azure sea.

### **16 EL SALER** SPAIN

6,355m, par 72 – €95-€105

**Javier Arana**

A sublime mix of links and woodland, the course features local plants such as umbrella pines, juniper, thyme and cat's claw. When first opened, it was rated as the best in continental Europe.

### **17 LÜBKER** DENMARK

Sky & Sand, 6,476m, par 72 – €40-€80

**Robert Trent Jones Jnr**

Still very young, this is already recognised as the best course in



Lübker: Denmark's finest

Denmark. There are five long and five short holes, as well as a third loop of nine on this sprawling 500-acre site.

### **18 MONTE REI** PORTUGAL

North, 6,567m, par 72 – €135-€190

**Jack Nicklaus**

The Golden Bear does not bestow 'signature' status lightly and this relative newcomer is full of 'wow' factor with hole after hole of top-quality golf in every department.

### **19 SOTOGRANDE** SPAIN

Old, 6,224m, par 72 – €160

**Robert Trent Jones Snr**

This is the first Trent Jones course in Europe and it paved the way for the Costa del Sol to become the continent's first golfing Mecca. It remains at the top of its game.

### **20 PRAIA D'EL REY** PORTUGAL

6,449m, par 73 – €75-€125

**Cabell Robinson**

Designed by the renowned American golf architect, Cabell B.Robinson, this is a fine mix

of linky, seaside golf and holes that are a little more parkland in nature. The course has some great sea views and the wind can certainly make life interesting.

## EUROPE'S TOP 50

### **21 HAMBURGER** GERMANY

Falkenstein, 5,864m, par 71 – €80

**Harry Colt, Alison & Morrison**

Recent remodelling by David Krause has changed the course a little from the traditional Colt bunkering, but this remains a very fine course running through undulating woodland on free-draining soil.

### **22 BIELLA** ITALY

6,497m, par 73 – €70-€110

**John Morrison**

This is a rare example of a top-drawer and beautiful course designed in the 1950s. There is a dramatic backcloth of the Alps as well as streams, ponds and rocky outcrops.

### **23 OCEANICO OLD** PORTUGAL

6,254m, par 73 – €88-€119

**Frank Pennink**

Despite some excellent



Oceanico Old has a strong design

newcomers to the area, the original Vilamoura course remains its best. It is one of those tracks where the whole is significantly more than its constituent parts; there are only a few standout holes, but there is a strong design throughout.

### **24 FALSTERBO** SWEDEN

6,080m, par 71 – €45-€90

**Gunnar Bauer**

On the country's south-western tip, this remote, natural, unspoilt and little-changed links has a stunning setting and is almost completely surrounded by the sea.

### **25 PRINCE DE** PROVENCE

FRANCE 5,660m, par 72,

members & guests only

**Robert Trent Jones Snr & Jnr**

In the 1970s, Trent Jones Senior stumbled across and bought this tract of rocky land in the hills to the east of Marseille. Together with his elder son, he built his 'dream course'.

### **26 OITAVOS DUNES** PORTUGAL

6,303m, par 71 – €150

**Arthur Hills**

The ride really begins as you emerge onto the higher ground.



Oitavos Dunes is highly entertaining

Hole after hole of sandy, undulating, hugely entertaining golf culminates in as tough an 18th as you will find.

### **27 TROIA** PORTUGAL

6,317m, par 72 – €60-€70

**Robert Trent Jones Snr**

This unique and most individual of courses was established 30 years ago on a wild and relatively remote sandbar an hour or so to the south of Lisbon.

### **28 ROYAL PARK** ITALY

6,566m, par 72 – €96-€144

**Robert Trent Jones Snr**

Formerly known as 'I Roveri' (the Oaks), the host of this year's Italian Open is set in a former hunting estate, now conservation area – a kind of golfing poacher turned greenkeeper.

### **29 SANTANDER** SPAIN

6,856m, par 72 – €110-€165

**Rees Jones**

A huge construction project, with more than 1.5 million cubic metres of earth moved during its development, there is also an aquatic system with water flowing continually in a closed circuit that forms a fascinating series of lakes and rivers.

### **30 ROYAL BELGIUM** - RAVENSTEIN

BELGIUM

Old, 6,041m, par 72 – €100

**Seymour Dunn & Tom Simpson**

This royal and rolling course is based on the outskirts of the city of Brussels and runs through magnificent woodland. With the King as the club's president, attention to detail is to the fore.



Falsterbro: a natural, unspoilt and little-changed links

## EUROPE'S TOP 50

### **31 CASTELCONTURBIA** ITALY

**Chestnuts/Pines, 6,230m, par 72 – €78-€105 Robert Trent Jones Snr**  
In glorious countryside 20 miles from Milan, this tough course features large greens that are difficult to read.

### **32 SAN LORENZO** PORTUGAL

**6,238m, par 72 – €165 Joe Lee**  
Opened in 1998, this dramatic course flirts with beach, sea, river and marsh and is considered by many to be the most exciting in the Algarve.

### **33 VILLA D'ESTE** ITALY

**5,732m, par 69 – €85-€120 Peter Gannon**  
Don't be fooled by this course's length. There are six short holes that combine with a couple of monster par 5s to make this a proper, but at the same time, hugely enjoyable, test.

### **34 FONTAINEBLEAU** FRANCE

**6,037m, par 72 – €80-€100 Tom Simpson**  
This superb and historic tree-lined course located near the town on ancient imperial hunting ground is on springy turf and has the unusual feature of outcrops of sandstone rock that come into play.



### **35 UTRECHT DE PAN** NETHERLANDS

**6,082m, par 72 – €100 Harry Colt**  
The Dutch Royal Family are members of this beautiful and undulating inland links.

### **36 SEIGNOSSE** FRANCE

**6,129m, par 72 – €40-€74 Robert von Hagge**  
Tight and with some tricky doglegs and intrusive ponds, this course is easy on the eye but tough on the golf.

### **37 HILVERSOMSCHÉ** NETHERLANDS

**6,136m, par 72 – €100-€130 Harry Colt**  
Despite, or perhaps because of, recent changes by the ubiquitous Kyle Phillips, this remains a hugely impressive, tree-lined classic.

### **38 ULLNA** SWEDEN

**6,130m, par 72 – €85-€170 Sven Tumba**  
This is a hugely enjoyable, water-strewn course on the lake shore about a 15-minute drive from Stockholm.

### **39 MIKLAGARD** NORWAY

**6,707m, par 72 – €115 Robert Trent Jones Jnr**  
In the words of its architect, "This is a big, brash course, as impressive as its Norwegian Viking history."

### **40 NAVARINO** DUNES GREECE

**6,177m, par 72 – €95 Bernhard Langer**  
This spectacular course on the unspoilt, historic and idyllic western coast of the mainland is a real gem.

## KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

**How a father and his two sons have conquered the world of course design**

The head of golf course designs' royal family, Robert Trent Jones Snr has designed or redesigned around 500 golf courses in 40 US states and 35 countries including the number one ranked course here on our list of continental Europe – Valderrama. Jones Snr believed golf should be a no-risk no-reward game, a theory that is reflected on all of his courses. He placed greens and hazards in positions that encouraged strategy on the part of the player and his innovative use of bunkers, liberal placement of water hazards and artistic landscape design made the golfing experience not only challenging, but beautiful. His son Jones Jnr is responsible for the design or remodel of over 250 golf courses in his career including the number 11th ranked Bro Hof Slott (Stadium) in Sweden. Jones Jnr's mission is to honour the cultural, geographical and historical aspects of the land while providing alternate lines of play to challenge the golfer. Rees Jones, the youngest son, is responsible for the design of over 100 courses in his career and the 29th ranked Santander Spain course. Rees Jones is most well known for his use of environmentally friendly techniques in his course design. Every member of the Jones family has pushed the envelope of design and mixed with the beauty of the surroundings they strive to maintain it is clear why the Jones courses are the gold standard of golf course design and make up 13 of Europe's top 50 courses.



Navarino Dunes: crafted by the masterful Bernhard Langer



Lykia Links: pot bunkers in Turkey

**41 KYTÄJA**  
FINLAND

South-East, 6,369m, par 71 – €70  
**Thomas McBroom**  
Tremendous variety, huge bunkers, panoramic views and a huge lake which is in play on several holes – a really great place to have some fun golf.

**42 DOMAINE IMPÉRIAL**  
SWITZERLAND

6,339m, par 72 – €155  
**Pete Dye**  
This rare European excursion for the normally flamboyant Pete Dye enjoys a glorious setting on the shores of Lake Geneva.

**43 SEDDINER SEE**  
GERMANY

South, 6,486m, par 72 – €80-€90  
**Robert Trent Jones Jnr**  
Very much an American style course, there is an abundance of wildlife and in summer the flowers explode with colour. Great course maintenance guarantees enjoyable golf round after round.

**44 LAS BRISAS**  
SPAIN

6,130m, par 72 – €165  
**Robert Trent Jones Snr**  
The trees lining the course come from all over the world, as have the professionals who have triumphed here, including Jack Nicklaus and Nick Faldo.

**45 ABAMA**  
SPAIN

6,271m, par 72 – €90-€200  
**Dave Thomas**  
On a hillside in Tenerife with spectacular views out to sea, this resort course features lakes and a waterfall. Great fun for all levels of golfer.

**46 MURHOF -**  
STEIERMÄRKISCHER  
AUSTRIA

6,326m, par 72 – €62-€75  
**Bernhard von Limburger**  
Bordered on three sides by the river, this pristine, parkland course is in a lovely, picturesque tree-lined valley.

**47 CORNELIA**  
TURKEY

Gaius/Tiberius, 6,324m, par 72 – €75-€108  
**Nick Faldo**  
In the centre of an impressive

stretch of golf, this narrow, sandy, pine-clad layout has a third nine that is arguably just as good.

**48 PROSPER**  
CZECH REP

6,625m, par 72 – €70-€92  
**Miguel Angel Jiménez**  
Home of the Czech Open, this course is in a beautiful valley surrounded by mountains.

**49 LYKIA LINKS**  
TURKEY

6,925m, par 72 – €75-€110  
**Perry Dye**  
This is a Scottish-style pot-bunkered links right on the beach running through some magnificent, man-made dunes.

**50 FURNAS**  
PORTUGAL

6,232m, par 72 – €80  
**Philip Mackenzie Ross**  
This beautiful, undiscovered and hugely enjoyable parkland haven is on the unspoilt island of San Miguel in the Azores.

THE AXIS OF POWER

Here are the countries featured in the top 50 with the number courses they have

AUSTRIA	1
BELGIUM	2
CZECH REP	1
DENMARK	1
FINLAND	1
FRANCE	8
GERMANY	3
GREECE	1
ITALY	4
NETHERLANDS	5
NORWAY	1
PORTUGAL	7
SPAIN	7
SWEDEN	5
SWITZERLAND	1
TURKEY	2



French connection: Les Bordes is the top-ranked course (2nd) in France's impressive portfolio



Abama has great views of Tenerife

GM