

PICTURE PERFECT: A view from the 10th tee looking back towards Steyn City golf course's award-winning clubhouse.



Jack's Steyn City golf course – 'Licensed to Thrill'

GRANT WINTER

THE fabulous new Steyn City golf course is the first in South Africa to have its greens and tees seeded with a new strain of Bentgrass known as 007.

So, like one of the James Bond movies, is it 'Licensed to Kill'? Well, the par-4 18th – a mammoth 471m off the back markers, with water fronting the green – could certainly do you in if you aren't playing smart golf.

But 'Licensed to Thrill' might be a far more appropriate way to describe this Jack Nicklaus championship design, situated just north of Johannesburg, and which was launched to the media earlier this week.

The golf course will, surely, in

the not-too-distant future, because it's so special, be mentioned in the same breath as the likes of Leopard Creek and The Links at Fancourt which year in and year out vie for the top two spots in Golf Digest's South African course rankings.

And for me, and I'm sure this was the case for my media colleagues, it was a thrill this week to play the course which, although still brand new and part of the monumental R6-billion Steyn City development is already in pristine condition. Like Augusta National, you'll struggle to find a blade of grass out of place. It is situated on the site of an old quarry and sits on both sides of the Jukskei River which flows through the estate.

The 'Thrill' factor is evident

right from the word go as the opening hole is a risk-and-reward par-4 where the tee-shot must cross the river and the player must decide how much of the dreaded drink to take on. The braver the drive, the closer to the green will the approach shot be.

While all 18 holes are exceptional, the stretch from the seventh to the 10th – as golf general manager Ken Payet points out – could be seen as Steyn City's version of an Amen Corner. The par-4 seventh is a modest 359m off the club tees and because it swoops dramatically downhill, the big hitters can have a crack at the green. The eighth is a demanding par-4 running alongside the river, No 9 an intimidating par-3 over water (with the award-winning

clubhouse behind the green) which gets the pulse rate racing, and the 10th a classic par-5.

Although the course is a tiger off the back markers, the various tee choices enable any level of golfer to find it user-friendly.

And with the 007 Bentgrass on the tees (good enough to putt on, incidentally) and greens, and with the fairways and rough planted with cool season fescue/rye grass, a year-round green and lush playing surface is guaranteed.

Steyn City is the realisation of insurance mogul Douw Steyn's dream to build a self-contained lifestyle resort where residents can live, work and play, and children roam freely in park-like green belts. And with his long-time business

associate and friend Giuseppe Plumari (Steyn City's CEO and a latecomer to golf who plays with passion and – judging by the media launch – sinks 50-foot putts) a vision has come to life.

Apart from golf, the 800 hectare multi-billion rand estate will feature high-end housing (there will eventually be close to 10 000 residential units) and a host of outdoor activities, as well as schools, shopping centres and even a hospital.

Steyn has chosen to live on the estate himself, and you can't miss his R250m Romanesque villa not far from the clubhouse. Construction began on the course in 2009, and it will be officially opened in March next year to coincide with the launch of the first residential phase.