

RISING FROM THE ASHES

No matter where you are in the world, there's something quintessentially British about the click-clack sound of woods knocking together around the jack on a bowling green. Throw in sun, majestic views, lots of laughter and banter, plus the fact the club is owned by its members, and you have the recipe for success which is the Valverde Bowling Club.

Situated on a beautiful plot tucked quietly behind the Don Camillo Restaurant opposite the JardimVista garden centre on the road south from Almancil, Valverde BC is something of a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Almost three years ago in March 2007, the lights went out suddenly and unexpectedly at the Vale do Lobo BC leaving its members frustrated and without a means of continuing the sport — and company — they so enjoyed.

“We didn't know what to do,” Valverde club secretary Jan McGlynn admitted. “The one thing we knew was we wanted to stick together and continue bowling, so we started exploring alternatives and new opportunities.” Understandably, the bowlers sought new clubs to affiliate themselves to and keep active. But behind the scenes, a core group of ex-Vale do Lobo bowlers worked tirelessly to find a longterm solution which would reunite the majority at a new club. “We didn't want it to be a club like the others,” Jan continued. “We wanted our club to be unique; not only had it had to be owned by its members, but also managed and funded by the bowlers themselves.”

Out of the blue, the bowlers were offered a 10-year lease on a large plot behind the Don Camillo Restaurant at Valverde and immediately the long task of legalising the site, and planning and laying the green began. A committee was formed to handle the ever-growing project and 21 founder members raised around 90,000 euros to make the plan reality. In November 2008 the lease was signed, Valverde Bowling Club was born and work began. The eight-rink championship-size green was completed in March 2009 and, with sighs of relief, members played their first game, very gently on the new turf, on May 22. That day was amazing,” club chairman Gordon Linford explained. “To see the fruits of our endeavours become reality was very special for everyone involved. We have a growing membership, but also visitors who turn up, pay on the day and play. For 10 euros, guests can hire a set of bowls and play 21 ends. Plus we cater for all levels and age groups. Valverde is run by its members, for its members and guests. Every cent and euro which is raised by the club is reinvested by the club on the club. We're not here to make a profit; we're here to make Valverde the best, most relaxed and successful club on the Algarve.”

There's no question the club, which attracted 64 bowlers to its Inaugural Open Day on October 18, is heading for success. Membership has already exceeded 50, and more than a dozen touring teams from all four home nations in the UK have committed to playing at the club in 2010. “We're expecting that number to grow,” club captain Gui Gomes, said. “We've teams, including some from Bognor Regis, Harrogate, Leamington Spa and Glasgow, coming to our club already and we know, with our facilities and friendly welcome, more will follow.”

Of course, not only does the club have its fantastic green — with stunning views from its terrace over Almancil towards the mountains in the north — but there are separate changing rooms for men and women, a reception, and all the facilities of the restaurant. “We've worked hard, but there's more to be done,” Jan continued. “We recently planted oleander round the green which will soon grow to soften the area and screen us a bit. We're happy with what we've achieved, but we're certainly not complacent.”

Sponsors — including Celebrations owner Lorna Marshall; Bowen technique consultant Gareth Bulloch, who is sponsoring the Spring Open Pairs on March 3; and Almancil insurers David Hills, who is sponsoring the Valverde Open Anniversary Competition on October — have also boosted the club. The club also has two teams — the Vulcans and the Vikings — in the Algarve Bowling League which stretches from Parque da Floresta in the west, to Pedras da Rainha at Cabanas, in the east.

There's no denying the Valverde BC is a club with bags of get-up-and-go. Yet, despite all the energy which is encapsulated by its members — as cries of “that's marvellous” and “that's our bowl and the jack's just a foot behind it” echo across the green — there's a wonderful relaxed feeling to the club. And it's a club set for more success.

For more details of the Valverde Bowling Club click on www.valverdebc.co.uk.