

UNDERCOVER

# THE VERDICT ON THE UK'S NEWEST COURSE

## DUMBARNIE LINKS, FIFE

Does this links live up to the sizeable hype? Our visiting fourball went in to find out...

### OUR UNDERCOVER PLAYERS



**MARTIN McLAUGHLAN**

**Age 47 Handicap 18 Lives** Lanarkshire  
**Best golfing moment** Playing the Els Club in Dubai where I birdied the 194-yard par-3 17th. I celebrated with a very expensive pint.



**ROSS FRENCH**

**Age 44 Handicap 13 Lives** Lanarkshire  
**Best golfing moment** Playing out of my skin at Archerfield to qualify for the BMW Amateur Championship finals at the Castle Course, St Andrews.



**EUAN McLEAN**

**Age 44 Handicap 12 Lives** Glasgow  
**Best golfing moment** Played Augusta National the morning after the 2006 Masters – and relieved to break 100 with a round of 96 that will live with me forever.



**ANDREW CARSON**

**Age 50 Handicap 21 Lives** Glasgow  
**Best golfing moment** Beating my far superior mentor on our gross scores within a year of taking up the game. And I was awaiting a hip replacement at the time!

### NEED TO KNOW...

**Opened** May 2020 **Designer** Clive Clark

**Yardage** 5,300 to 7,600 (par 72).

**Green Fees** £94-£235

**Where it is** Dumbarnie Links is set on the north shore of Largo Bay in Fife, just nine miles south of St Andrews.

**Star holes** Every hole impresses, but the scenic par-3 8th is a delightful downhiller measuring just 157 yards from the tips. The par-5 15th is a terrific example of how this course tests strategy, offering two clear options. But be warned: fortune does not always favour the brave!

**Tee times** Reservations are currently being accepted for 2021 on 0800 0851280, or at [www.dumbarnielinks.com](http://www.dumbarnielinks.com)





***'For a brand new course, it's impressive how established it already looks'***

There's been a lot of hype around Dumbarnie, but it fully lived up to my expectations. For a brand new course, it's amazing how established it already looks. The opening hole sets the tone for a dramatic challenge ahead.

Based on our handicaps, starter Davy suggested playing off the white tees (roughly 6,000 yards) and that was good advice. The condition of the whole course was excellent, but especially the greens; they were just terrific – firm and pacy with lots of undulations, but nothing that felt tricked-up or silly.

The biggest compliment I can pay Dumbarnie is that I used every club in my bag. It's one of those courses that really makes you think on every hole, and it's full of risk and reward opportunities, especially off the tee. A couple of the par 3s are on the short side, but they are well defended by bunkers, gorse and the prevailing wind so they still need to be treated with respect.

After making the trip from Glasgow, we spent a good 30 minutes on the manicured range, where staff regularly topped up the supply of balls. Then it was off to the nearby short game area to get a good feel for chipping off tight lies and from bunkers. The practice facilities are right next to the first tee, too.

There are obvious challenges at the moment with Covid-19 delaying construction of the clubhouse. I'm confident it will be top class when it opens and I can't wait to see it finished. But the temporary facilities work well and having a barbecue set up at the back end of summer was a great idea.

It isn't cheap to play here, but it's a stunning course and worth the green fee. I'll be playing here again. It's a great addition to Fife's world-class golf landscape.



Dumbarnie is presented in immaculate condition.



**'There are plenty of elevated tees... which created some spectacular moments'**

You can't fault the course, and it's only going to get harder and better when the gorse starts to thicken. The more sparse, forgiving set-up certainly favoured my game; there will be many balls sacrificed in the future!

There are plenty of elevated tees, which created some spectacular moments when it felt like you were blasting drives out to sea – brilliant fun! The greens were flawless; firm and fast and demanding specific approach shots to avoid leaving a tough putt. Every hole is a challenge and the variety is accentuated by the wind. You can play a 180-yard par 3 with a pitching wedge or a driver, so it's as difficult as the weather dictates.

For me, the only downside was that the range was a wee bit churned up, but in fairness we were playing in the afternoon after a full day's traffic. But there's all the balls you need for a proper warm-up, with a decent short game area and putting green.

Off-course, I loved the Dumbarnie-branded lager and IPA with the message on the can saying "This might help steady the nerves standing over a tricky four footer". The menu is limited at the moment, but the friendly staff made the atmosphere really relaxed. With the clubhouse in the making, I was surprised there wasn't more glass at the front to maximise the cracking views, though I'm sure it will be a top drawer clubhouse when it's built.

I'm quite happy I'm Scottish as there's a special deal of £115 for Scots and £94 for Fife residents. But you're going to pay a premium for golf in these parts and this course is going to be known as a prime destination very soon.



The routing makes spectacular use of the sea views.

## WHITE TEE CARD

HOLE	PAR	YDS
1	4	363
2	5	455
3	4	294
4	4	332
5	4	367
6	3	137
7	5	477
8	3	122
9	4	351
		36 / 2898
10	4	423
11	4	247
12	4	332
13	5	488
14	3	147
15	5	521
16	3	159
17	4	293
18	4	393
		36 / 3003
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>5901</b>



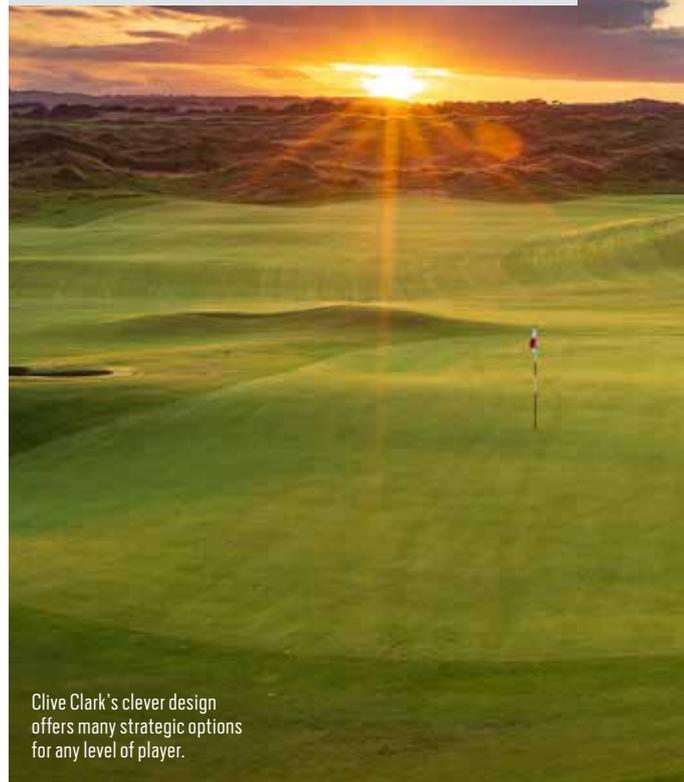
**'Almost every hole teases you with a wealth of risk and reward options'**

To be honest, you'd struggle to find a new course that looks more bedded in already. The conditioning is outstanding in every area and with a few young gorse bushes taking root, it will only get more striking with age. Tees and greens are flawless and designed to make you think from start to finish. Strategy is vital on a course that constantly tempts you to take the Tiger lines off the tee. Almost every hole teases you with a wealth of options with risk-and-reward at the heart of the designer's ethos. Nothing feels repetitive and the delightful par 3s all bring their own unique challenges – and thankfully length isn't one of them.

Everything you need is clustered neatly together within walking distance of the first tee. No buggy rides are required here.

Lockdown has delayed construction of the clubhouse, but the scaffolding is down and already it looks the part. The design is reminiscent of a modern farmhouse conversion and the interior promises to be equally well appointed when it's finished.

With the clubhouse not ready, we took advantage of the temporary tented area with a barbecue offering tasty bacon rolls and burgers from the grill. Drink selection was good too, including their own locally brewed Dumbarnie lager and IPA. In a nutshell, this is a five-star venue on a par with nearby Kingsbarns, St Andrews and the rest. In time, the guys who got here early will brag about getting a round for £115 – or £94 if you're a Fifer.



Clive Clark's clever design offers many strategic options for any level of player.



**'Every hole was unique thanks to the differing design of the greens'**

Wow! Dumbarrie blew me away... you would think the course has been there for decades. It looks ridiculously mature and established for a fresh, brand new course. I was particularly impressed with the positioning of the tees... varied and visually stunning. Every hole was unique thanks to the differing design of the greens, some severely undulating, others two-tier. I even liked that the grass between the green and next tee seemed to naturally lead you along - while the par 3s brought different challenges, thanks to the conditions and elements. Short par 3s could be any club depending on the wind. I also liked the fact that everything was set up in a nice triangle - at one point you have the range, next it's the chipping area and finally the practice green, which is a 10-second walk to the first tee.

But what probably impressed me more than anything was that there was no repetition; every hole feels completely different and has its own characteristics. That's a sign of a special layout.

Off the course, the staff coped very well in such trying circumstances. The burgers were great and it was good to see you had the option of hot and cold drinks halfway around the course. It looks like they're building a spectacular contemporary version of a barn clubhouse and I can't wait to see it when it's done. I'd be willing to pay the £115 to play it again, though I'll wait until the clubhouse is built because I want to enjoy the full experience. It's a breathtaking spot - it felt like going on holiday for the day.



## THE UNDERCOVER VERDICT

Tucked between beloved gems Elie and Lundin Links, and just down the coast from heavyweights like St Andrews, Kingsbarns and Crail, this \$18m venue needed to be special to hold its own. And it is. Possibly even more than we expected.

Our fourball were blown away, and not just by the constant wind which is such a defining part of the experience. The condition; the variety; the strategic design; the location. It all adds up to a stunning layout.

"It's a challenge for any standard of golfer," said Martin. "Once the clubhouse is done and the course matures it will only get better."

Ross agreed. "What I enjoyed about it was that, though it's a tailor-made championship course, it's not overly punishing like a Carnoustie or a Troon. It's not impossibly difficult for a mid-handicapper like me, especially with the variety of tees available."

Playability is a huge factor in Dumbarrie's design, a fact that wasn't lost on Andrew. "Playing here has actually made me a better golfer," he said, "because it tested my course management skills more than ever. I've taken that approach back to my own course."

And Euan summed it up: "There's a lot to love about this place... and that's before you get started on the views and the friendly staff. Dumbarrie is going to steal a lot of limelight from the established stops on Fife's golf trail."

**NEXT  
MONTH**  
Manor House,  
Devon