



# Celebrity groundsman

Not another TV reality show, but a chance for Lancashire CCC's head groundsman, Peter Marron, to pass on his skills in the most unlikely of settings. **CHRIS BIDDLE reports**



Peter Marron on board

TOUGH call really. Renovating the out-field at Old Trafford on a cold, damp November day in Manchester - or trimming a manicured lawn on the deck of one of the world's newest and largest cruise ships as it sails the waters of the Caribbean?

That was the option presented to Lancashire CCC's long-serving head groundsman, Peter Marron recently - and to nobody's surprise, he chose the latter!

Built in Germany, the 122,000 tonne Celebrity Solstice, is the latest ship to join the Celebrity Cruises fleet, making its maiden voyage out of Fort Lauderdale on 23 November.

The ship can accommodate over 2,850 guests and as the cruise market becomes more and more competitive, operators are looking for those extra special fea-

tures that will sway passengers.

In the case of the Celebrity Solstice, it is The Lawn Club, a grass area spanning 2,130 square metres where guests can relax, sip drinks and get the feel of real grass beneath their feet.

The ship even has an 'on-board lawn-keeper', Eugene Creencia.

"When I first heard there was a lawn onboard a cruise ship I thought it was a complete wind up, and was something that Freddie Flintoff had set up" says Peter, "but then I found out that I was being asked to go out to Florida to assist in planning the on-going maintenance I became more interested!".

Larger than eight tennis courts, the Lawn Club onboard Celebrity Solstice was developed by design firm Wilson Butler Architects (Boston, Massachusetts), plus a team of landscape architects and irrigation specialists who worked alongside turf and soil scientists from the University of Florida.

The grass area incorporates a fully automated drip irrigation system that is over four miles long, a 20 cubic metre retention tank to collect runoff water from the green roof and is grown on porous light-

weight growing media three and a half inches deep made from heat expanded calcium clay.

The lawn is also designed to withstand wind speeds up to 120mph.

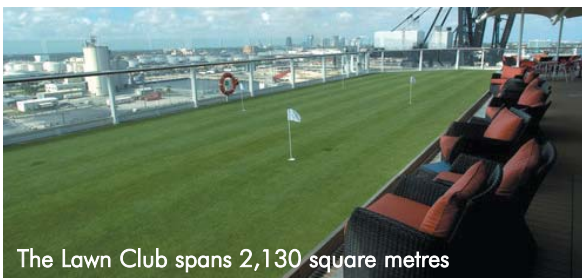
Most of the grass is pre-grown soil-free cold season turf from Austria of *Agrostis stolonifera* L93, and only mineral and organic products are used to feed the lawn - no pesticides.

The surprise consultancy with Celebrity Cruises coincided with Peter Marron's decision to quit as head groundsman at Old Trafford. He had been at the club for over 30 years, and in charge for 25 years.

Chief executive Jim Cumbes paid tribute to the man he called "one of the very best groundsmen in the business" and the Club has announced that he will continue to work with the County on a consultancy basis, overseeing major projects including the proposed turning of the square.

His replacement as head groundsman is Matthew Merchant (34) who has been part of the Old Trafford groundstaff since he left school in 1990.

He said, "Pete took me on from school 18 years ago, and I'm extremely lucky to have had someone of his calibre to learn from. It really is an honour and dream come true."



The Lawn Club spans 2,130 square metres