

Fireworks fly – but fight fizzles out ...

THE LONDON TROPHY

By Michael Hill

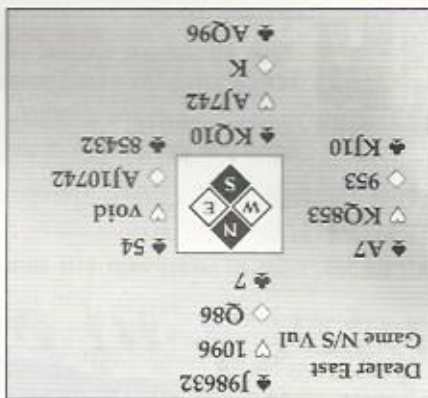
THE London Trophy, organised by the London County CBA and sponsored by Capital and Regional Properties plc, continues to go from strength to strength. It has long been the most successful regional bridge event in the country and yet entries continue to rise. A total of 334 teams competed in 91-92.

There can be no doubt that the continuing success of this event is due in no small part to the tireless efforts of Freddie Delta-Porta, whose idea it was, and Cecil Leighton, who runs it. Each year, they spend many hours reminding past entrants to re-enter and finding new clubs to approach. Entry is open to bridge-playing members of sports, social and business clubs, but not to bridge clubs. The rules limit the presence of established high-standard players, whilst bidding and card-play must be "simple system", as would apply to rubber bridge.

After eight rounds of knock-out matches played at the participants' own venues, four teams assembled on 31st May to contest the finals of the main event and the "Plate" (for those eliminated from the main event in the first round). Curiously enough, this was the first time the final had been staged at a weekend. The Venue was TGR's, the immaculate new rubber bridge club overlooking Hyde Park. The manager, Irving Rose, was on hand to chat to participants and to see that all went well.

The line-up for the finals was: Trophy: West Hill Hill Golf Club versus Segas 5. Plate: Dyrham Park Golf and Country Club versus RAC 1. Extra space was added by the presence in the Dyrham Park team of Martin Barber, chairman of the event's sponsors, Capital and Regional Properties plc. Was this to be the sponsors' day in more ways than one?

Such space as there was for spectators -



TGR's is a select establishment rather than a large one - was fully occupied as play began on the dot of 3pm. The audience did not have long to wait for excitement; this was board 2 (below left) With Segas North-South, this was the auction:

No	No	No
West	North	East
No	No	No
NT	NT	NT
10	10	10
DBL	DBL	DBL

The lead of a top spade would have held declarer to 5 tricks but South, not unreasonably, led a heart, and declarer scrambled 7 tricks. Things were different at the other table:

No	No	No
West	North	East
No	No	No
NT	NT	NT
10	10	10
DBL	DBL	DBL

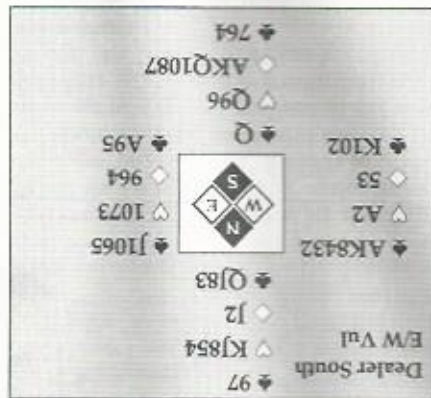
The 03 was led and East put in the 10. Declarer needed no more help and cross-ruffed his way to 8 tricks, there Strangely enough, as the cards lie, there are always 8 tricks on any lead. Nevertheless, West Hill gained 10 points on this deal when they might easily have lost 600.

The fireworks were reserved for the Plate. These were the two auctions on the same hand:

50	No	50
West	North	East
No	No	No
NT	NT	NT
10	10	10
DBL	DBL	DBL

Against 5, East underled the 0A and declarer cross-ruffed for 10 tricks. Having doubled 50, South led the 0K and East chose to use the entry to finesse in diamonds. He had to lose another trump as well as a spade and the 0A, so that was 300 and a useful swing of 400 to Dyrham Park.

Over-stretching on part-score hands was not limited to the Plate. This was At all four tables, South opened 10 and, in the Plate, both Wests over-called 10. The RAC West was left to play there but, at the other table, RAC South re-opened with 20. West tried 20 and



North and East both supported their partners at the 3-level, ending the auction. Both declarers made the obvious 9 tricks for a flat board. The Trophy finalists were made of much sterner stuff. Over the opening 10, both Wests bid 20 and both Norths found a forcing 30 (!).

The continuation: 30 - 40 - 40 back to North was both predictable and rapid. West Hill's North still wasn't finished; he found a bid of 50 and NOBODY DOUBLED! The Segas North passed 40 and it was now almost automatic for South to bid 50 and, at this table, West did find a double. Both Easts led a spade, and both Wests switched to clubs. Declarer won the third club and played a trump. West Hill's West took his ace immediately, and declarer soon claimed the rest.

For Segas, Cyril Farron looked further into the hand. He held up the ace for one round, then forced dummy with a spade. Had declarer not held the 0J, he would have been locked in dummy and in danger of suffering a promotion of the 010. Alas, the cards lay well for declarer, and another potential brilliancy was still-born.

These two hands were fair / typical of the run of the cards and, at half-time, West Hill led by 1790 in the Trophy, and Dyrham Park led by 1880 in the Plate. Segas and RAC would have to work hard over the remaining 12 boards. However, as is so often the case, as many things went wrong as right for the struggling teams and, overall, the second half was relatively flat in both events. It had become a good day for golf clubs - and sponsors.