This has been a dream season. Everyone who has won The Race to Dubai before me has been World Number One - it would not be fair if I didn’t try to follow them”

Henrik Stenson
For as he targeted becoming the 42nd European Tour Number One he was well aware that not one of the players before him had failed to win a tournament during The European Tour season in which they earned that coveted honour. Stenson, however, ensured that his name would make no such annoying invasion into the record books as he completed a remarkable victory march in the season-ending DP World Tour Championship, Dubai by drilling a phenomenal 260 yards three wood to within eight inches at the 18th where the spectators in the packed grandstand provided a vociferous, heart-felt reception for the amicable Swede.

What the victory also cemented was a very special slice of golfing history as by winning the DP World Tour Championship, Dubai and The Race to Dubai Stenson completed an astonishing 'double-double' having won the Tour Championship and FedExCup on American soil exactly 56 days earlier. Stenson’s success, following a well-documented tumble outside of the world’s leading 200, enabled him to follow in the footsteps of the first four winners of The Race to Dubai – Lee Westwood, Martin Kaymer, Luke Donald and Rory McIlroy – and his peers graciously acknowledged that, quite simply, he was on another planet in the second half of 2013 when his rise to Number One was ignited by finishing tied third in the Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open then runner-up in The 142nd Open Championship.

"Everyone goes through ups and downs,” said Stenson. “It had a couple of slumps, a bit deeper than you would like to see, but if you keep fighting and keep your belief then anything is possible.”

The man from Gothenburg, who now lives in Florida, had relocated at the start of the new Millennium to Dubai – “I’ve got my family here this week and great support from a lot of friends from living here for ten years” - so there could hardly have been a more appropriate place for him to celebrate the closure of such a stellar season than in the United Arab Emirates. Stenson recognised, of course, that this was no foregone conclusion with Justin Rose, Graeme McDowell and the ebullient Ian Poulter all snapping at his heels in The Race to Dubai. Not that he actually saw much of them in the lead-up to the action unfolding.

E electing, wisely, to rest his injured wrist, Stenson stayed away from the course. What he missed was the potential distraction of McDowell, Poulter and Rose naturally talking up their own prospects, all excited by the possibility of finishing Number One, although such was his focus when he eventually teed off that one sensed that not even the Red Arrows could divert his attention from the task at hand.

The British Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team – the official name of the Red Arrows led by Squadron Leader Jim Turner – provided a unique salute to the 56 strong field with a spectacular fly-past timed to emblazon the skies in red, white and blue – maybe it should have been blue and yellow - with Rose and Stenson minutes away from starting their first rounds.

This further enhanced a truly enterprising entertainment programme for the fans with the DP World Tour Championship becoming a sporting and social spectacular and Jumeirah Golf Estates the centre of the global golfing spotlight with something to interest everyone in the Championship Village, including popular bands The Maplejacks and Suburban Voodoo playing live each night.

The special relationship between The European Tour and Dubai was underlined at the
start of the week when David Howell, Brett Rumford, Peter Uihlein and Rose simultaneously struck shots from the impressive teaching bays to officially open the new state-of-the-art European Tour Performance Institute (ETPI) at Jumeirah Golf Estates which recently became part of European Tour Property’s expanding network of world class Destination Venues. Yusef Kailim, General Manager, Jumeirah Golf Estates, performed the Opening Ceremony jointly with George O’Grady, Chief Executive of The European Tour, and commented: “This marks another important milestone for the on-going development at Jumeirah Golf Estates and in addition to recently gaining European Tour Destination status we are delighted to be further enhancing our relationship with The European Tour.”

Then The European Tour announced that The Race to Dubai had been extended through to the 2017 season with the next edition once again concluding with the season-ending finale at Jumeirah Golf Estates. O’Grady said: “Thanks to the leadership and vision of DP World, the tremendous contribution of everyone at Jumeirah Golf Estates, and the continued commitment of our partners, the future of The Race to Dubai is exceptionally positive. This is the perfect venue to finish our year. The climate is excellent, the facilities superb and the welcome from everyone in Dubai is simply outstanding.”

Nearly 55,000 spectators over the four days were rewarded with golf of the highest calibre from Day One which ended not with any one of the Race to Dubai protagonists leading – that honour went to Spaniard Alejandro Cañizares with an excellent 66 – although they all made their presence felt. Stenson’s 68, despite a three putt at the 18th, was a statement of intent. Poulter, oozing confidence, aggressively seeking birdies at every hole, viewed his 69 as a good rather than a great round of 64 with which he moved one ahead of Cañizares. Victor Dubuisson, buoyed by his winning performance the previous Sunday, charged into contention with a 66 although Stenson, naturally enough, had his eyes on Rose and Poulter, who shot 67 and 68 respectively, when he said: “They are chasing me as hard as they can so I better keep by head down, my foot down and maintain the momentum.”

In fact Poulter caught Stenson at one stage during a hugely impressive third round of 66 but the Swede responded with four birdies in the last five holes for a 67. Poulter was confident he was still firmly in the hunt and if that was not enough then Stenson also had that other matter of winning the tournament on his mind as Dubuisson remained in the form of his life. The Frenchman notched 11 birdies in a 64 to close to within one of the leader.

Stenson knew that to become the Emperor of Europe he could show no mercy on the final day. Splendid nine iron approaches brought birdies at the first and third, a wedge to within inches another at the fifth and with a two putt birdie at the seventh he was out in 32. Dubuisson gallantly birdied both of his first seven holes then dropped a shot at the eighth. The Frenchman was still a threat as was Poulter who, despite a three putt at the first, predictably attacked the course. Seven birdies brought a second successive 66 on the weekend but he was still compelled to accept second place as Dubuisson bravely birdied the last to take third place on his own. Joost Luiten sealed his own personal best season with fourth place and the quality of the field was emphasised with Donald, Molloy and Westwood sharing fifth place.

That left Stenson standing over that eight inch putt on the 18th green following birdies at the 12th, where in the blustery conditions he hit an absolutely fabulous ‘baby’ five iron from 173 yards to 18 inches, and 14th. So to a season-ending tap-in eagle, a closing 64 a record 25 under par winning score of 263 and a comprehensive six shot victory. He had missed only four greens and five fairways in 72 holes on the immaculate 7,675 yards Earth Course. Many great names have won the Harry Vardon Trophy – now awarded annually to the winner of The Race to Dubai – but probably no player has brought the curtain down on a season with such a commanding performance than the 71st recipient of this famous trophy.

For Henrik Stenson had taken care of business and written his name in the record books for all time with a 14th victory on the DP World Tour Championship, Dubai, the 71st recipient of this famous trophy. The Red Arrows...