

Colourful Poulter dusts cobwebs to win Singapore Open, Bhullar 14th

Coming back after a six-week lay-off, Ian Poulter 'shrugged off the cobwebs' and ensured his trip to the island state was indeed fruitful as he won the Barclay's Singapore Open and moved into the tenth place on the European Order of Merit, now called the Race to Dubai.

The weather held out, and so did Poulter, after he in his own words 'made things too close for comfort' before winning his first international title since the Dunlop Phoenix in Japan and his first on the European Tour since the Madrid Open in 2006.

The top Indian was Gaganjeet Bhullar, who was on pace for a top-10 finish, before bogeys on 16th and 18th derailed his efforts and he ended in a tie for 14th with as redoubtable golfers, Phil Mickelson, Ernie Els, Thongchai Jaidee and Justin Rose at four-under 280. Bhullar was four-under through 15 holes and all set for a yet another top-10 this year. His birdies came on second, sixth, eighth and 15th and dropped bogeys on 16th and 18th.

Jyoti Randhawa finished in a tie for 43rd after a final round of 72, just as he had shot in second and third rounds, too.

'I had a good week and it has continued to be a fine lesson for me,' said a modest Bhullar, who is excited about playing WGCX-HSBC Champions next week. 'This golf course is tough and when you miss, you pay a penalty. '

Last year Poulter lost his favourite driver a week earlier and pulled out of the same tournament last year, when India's Jeev Milkha Singh won the title. This time Poulter came with his driver intact - a new one though, which he received only three days before coming to Singapore - and despite some errant shots with it, he finished at 10-under 274 to grab \$833,333 first place cheque.

China's Liang Wen-chong finished second on nine-under-par 275, with Australian pair Scott Hend and Adam Scott tied for third at 276.

Played in front of more than 15,000 people in an amphitheatre-like atmosphere the Singapore Open was for the first time this week free from any weather-related interruptions.

Poulter said: 'I shrugged off a few cobwebs. I played really solid. I was missing some shots and then I made it interesting. I made it a bit too close for comfort. I was annoyed as I let easy holes slip by. But that birdie on 13 calmed me.'

Before Poulter tapped in his par-putt to deny Liang a chance of having another go at him in a play-off, Adam Scott raised prospects of a winner coming in from the 'wrong side of the course'.

With the organisers opting for a two-tee start and sticking to the third round tee off times, Scott, two-time winner in 2005 and 2006, first shot a third round 65 and then came within striking distance despite three bogeys on the back nine. He finished with a 68 and a total of eight-under 276 for a tie with Scott Hend in third place, one shot behind Liang, who moved into second place on Asian Tour Order of Merit.

The colourful Poulter, clad in distinctive pink, held his nerve and game as he played through two

separate mid-round blips in the third and final round during a 30-hole Sunday marathon as he won Asia's biggest event.

Resuming his third round on the ninth hole, Poulter dropped bogeys on the ninth and tenth to go five-over and was out of the lead. But he found his way back with four birdies over last seven holes to finish with a 72 and get back a one-shot lead over Graeme McDowell and a three-shot lead over Liang into the final round.

Two birdies on the first and fourth in final round seem to give the edge once again to Poulter, only to see him stutter into another dramatic mini-collapse with four bogeys between seventh and 12th as the lead and the trophy seemed to be slipping away.

Poulter clawed his way back with a birdie on 13th and five more birdies for a second successive 72 that sufficed for a one-shot win over the fast-charging Liang (70) by one shot, and by two over two-time champion Adam Scott, who compiled a 65-68 in final two rounds to finish tied third, with Scott Hand (69).

'Coming out of a six-week stretch, I wanted to get to close to top-10 in Race to Dubai,' he added. 'There's three more counting events, so hopefully I can do that.'

Two-time British Open winner, Pdraig Harrington (69) tied for 38th at even par 284 for four rounds.

The leading stars all move to WGC-HSBC Champions next week.

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