How Tom Doak ranks the Open rota courses

Leading golf course architect Tom Doak places the Open courses in order of preference

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1 The Old Course, St Andrews Quite simply, there is nothing else like it in the world of golf. You must have a mental map of the course in your head - and the better you know it, the more fascinating the strategy of play becomes.

2 Muirfield The best fairway bunkering in the world and the best set of par fives, plus beautiful views of the Firth of Forth thrown into the bargain.

3 Royal St George's, Sandwich The third course on the rota, after St Andrews and Muirfield, with interesting short-game play throughout. Has a wider variety of holes than the rest, including blind shots, pitch shots to elevated greens, and plenty of uneven stances.

4 Royal Lytham & St Annes Most people consider the urban setting to be a detraction, but I enjoy it because it's different. Lytham is memorable for its relentless bunkering and it also has my favourite finishing hole in the world.

5 Turnberry (Ailsa) The Ailsa course is probably the No 1 favourite of American visitors to these isles, because of the coastal scenery. It's a great course, but to me it feels more like Pebble Beach than a true, bumpy links.

6 Royal Troon (Old)

7 Royal Birkdale Rather like Turnberry, Birkdale is generally rated much more highly by the players and by American visitors than by me personally. It's a sturdy test of golfing ability, but there is not much variety in the holes: they all play down the valleys between beautiful dunes which seldom come into play.

8 Carnoustie These links have always been the ultimate test of golf, even without the ridiculous set-up which was installed for the Open of 1999.

9 Hoylake The Royal Liverpool club oozes history, thanks in no small part to the trophy case full of medals from Harold Hilton and John Ball, but in truth only a handful of holes located out by the Dee Estuary are really memorable. I'll be very interested to see how it plays, after a 39-year hiatus, in 2006.