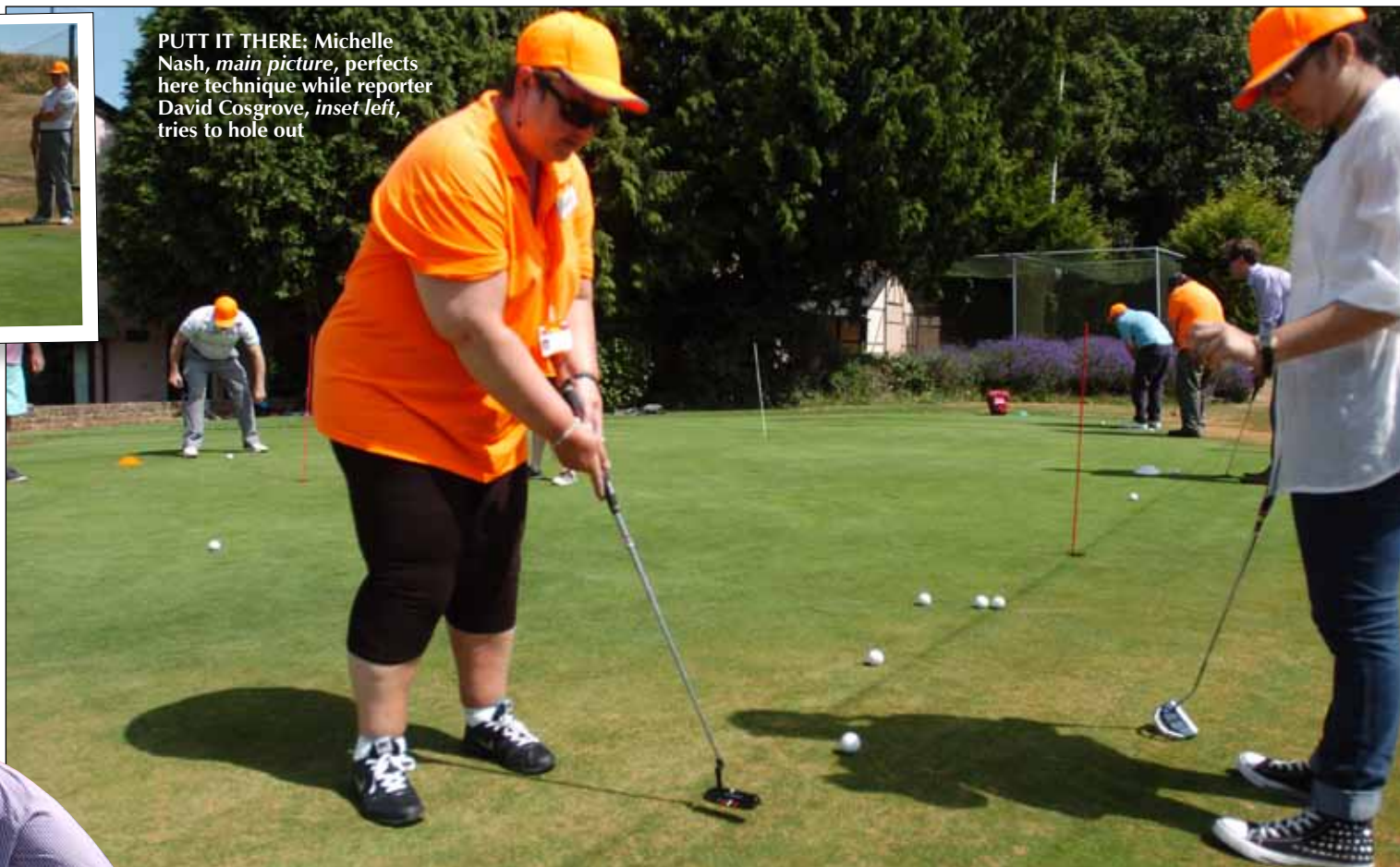




**PUTT IT THERE:** Michelle Nash, *main picture*, perfects here technique while reporter David Cosgrove, *inset left*, tries to hole out



**DAVID COSGROVE**

MICHELLE takes a couple of practice swings with her putter.

Seemingly happy with her stroke, she positions the club behind the ball.

From 5ft away she swings the putter back and forth in a smooth pendulum motion.

The ball travels straight into the heart of the hole and sinks with a satisfying plop.

Holing a 5ft putt? You might think this is routine.

For some people it might be – but bear in mind Michelle cannot see anything.

She is blind.

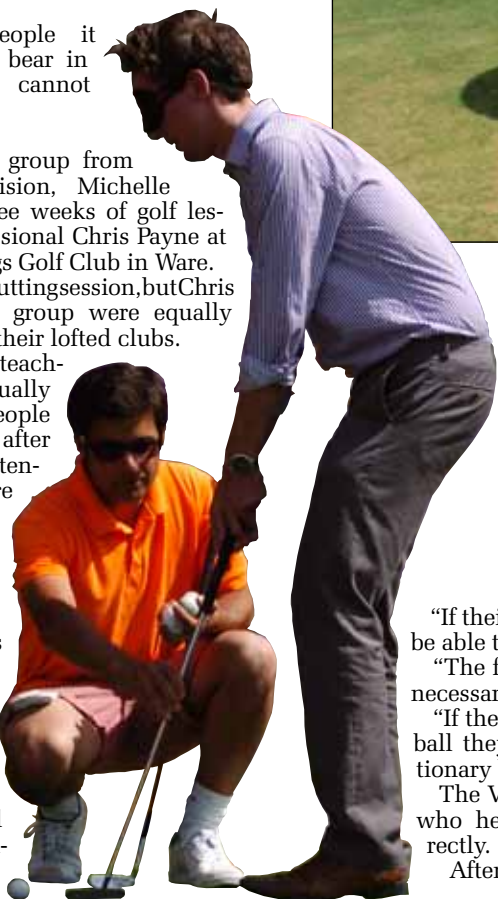
Along with a group from Four Swans Vision, Michelle took part in three weeks of golf lessons with professional Chris Payne at Chadwell Springs Golf Club in Ware.

I attended the putting session, but Chris assured me the group were equally successful with their lofted clubs.

The idea for teaching golf to visually impaired people came to Chris after Four Swans' VI tennis lessons were featured in the *Mercury* last year.

Chris said: "I read in the paper that Four Swans Vision had done tennis.

"I suppose I've always been interested in wanting to teach blind or visually-impaired people.



"If their technique is okay they'll still be able to hit good shots.

"The fact they can't see the ball isn't necessarily a disadvantage.

"If they can do tennis with a moving ball they should be able to hit a stationary ball."

The VI golfers are aided by a guide, who helps them line up shots correctly.

After that, it is up to the golfer to

swing through the ball.

Midway through the lesson, Chris set up a task which involved trying to gauge distance. Each of us stepped up and hit balls first to a marker 5ft away, then 10ft, then 15ft.

The idea is that this provides a memory of how hard you need to hit a putt.

Visually impaired golfers have to rely much more on their feel for a shot.

In his first lesson with Four Swans, Chris introduced the group to the theory that if their

technique was correct they would be able to play good shots.

Even so, he was impressed with some of the performances.

Chris said: "I think some of them were quite surprised by the quality of their shots.

"Michelle, who is totally blind, was better than everyone. She completely trusted her swing."

The reaction from the group was unanimously positive. Fiona Musgrove from Four

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\* May contain fishbones or shell. v Suitable for vegetarians. Please be aware that all our dishes are prepared in kitchens where nuts & gluten are present & our menu descriptions do not contain all ingredients. Please ask a member of our staff before ordering if you have any particular allergy or requirement.

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**TAKING THE LEAD:** Fiona Musgrove leads reporter David Cosgrove to his ball, above, while Alen Nevill shows how its done  
 Pictures: Amelia Bullett



Swans said: "Everyone really enjoyed it and I think it was a really great experience for Four Swans to have had."

"What was even more important was the fact that when visually impaired people access these activities transport is always a major problem. If it wasn't for Chris coming to pick us up in the minibus we wouldn't have been able to do it."

"I'd also like to thank the volunteers who helped us aim - they were a great help."

Michelle, who lives in Elm Drive, Cheshunt, said: "I just loved it. The hardest thing is trying to find where the ball is but thankfully I had a couple of helpers."

"They kept telling me how every shot, or at least most of the shots, were dead straight. Chris was very encouraging and really helpful."

"It would be nice to carry on doing it."

■ An admission: When I came to try putting without being able to see, I was nigh on useless.

Fitted with a blindfold, I knew the hole was pretty close and my putter was placed somewhere behind the ball.

I swung the club as I was told to and

pricked my ears for the sound of the ball dropping into the hole. But all that I heard were the words "that was so close".

In the course of the hour-long session, I failed to hole a single putt.

In all honesty, my failure was more down to my poor technique than anything else.

I've never been much of a golfer.

But my annoyance was compounded when our photographer Amelia stepped up to have a go.

At first, it didn't even look as if she knew which way up to hold the club.

Then, on her third putt, she sent the ball sailing straight into the hole.

Cue incredulity from this embarrassed reporter.



**TEE PARTY:** David Cosgrove with the Four Swans VI members at Chadwell Springs

## SPECIAL HOMING APPEAL

**This is Lucy and her sister Hattie; they will be 12 months old on 1 August**

As kittens, they contracted calicivirus which affected their gums, resulting in their back and side teeth being extracted. This will not affect their normal eating habits, but has given them a more pain-free way of life. Any future vet costs and medication related to this condition will be met by Cats Protection. Hattie and Lucy both deserve a loving home. Initially timid, they would seek out some hiding places but, given time and patience, they soon reveal their loving and gentle personalities. They must be homed as a pair, the only cats in a quiet home without young children. As you can see, they are both very pretty girls!



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