

Former Ryder Cup players Phil Price and Peter Baker share the lead with Frenchman Marc Pendaries after the first round of the 14th Mauritian Open Golf Championship. All three players shot five-under-par 67s in difficult conditions on The Legend course at Belle Mare Plage, with the fairways damp after heavy overnight rain and a swirling, blustery wind.

Frenchman Freddy Schoettel set the early standard when, starting first from the 10th, he returned a one-under-par 71.

Not long afterwards, Gary Evans and Bill Longmuir, a representative from the European Seniors Tour, came in with two-under-par 70s before Welshman Price and Pendaries, who were playing together, went to the head of the leaderboard, a position they were to hold until the end of the day.

The 40-year-old Price is keen to make amends for a disastrous capitulation 12 months ago when a four-putt on the final green cost him the title.

And he started in excellent fashion by making birdie at his first hole, the 10th. However, a bogey at the next immediately brought him back to level par.

A birdie at the 13th and another at 17 took him to the turn in 34, a score matched by Pendaries, who had birdies at the 12th, 13th and 17th but bogeyed the 14th.

Price made an encouraging start to his back nine with a birdie at the first and picked up two more, at the fourth and eight.

Pendaries, meanwhile, birdied three of the final six holes to match Price's achievement.

Englishman Baker, who won back his place on the European Tour this season with a 12th place finish in the Challenge Tour order-of-merit, was in the last group to depart the first tee.

He started steadily if unspectacularly with three pars but then collected four birdies in a row from the fourth hole.

He looked to have spoiled his card at the 15th, when he drove into water, but after a penalty drop, Baker hit a magnificent approach to 12 feet and sunk the putt for par. He followed this with a birdie to move to five under and join Price and Pendaries at the head of the leaderboard.

"I played really well on the front nine. I hit my approaches close and putted well," said the 40-year-old who was Ryder Cup captain Ian Woosnam's right-hand man last year.

"I didn't play as well on the back nine but I made some good pars and I enjoyed it. "The greens were tough to read but good to putt on and I holes some good putts." Defending champion Van Phillips, who scored a sensational victory in 2006 when he came from eight strokes off the lead to overhaul Price, didn't enjoy himself so much on Friday. He struggled with his line off the tee and returned a five-over-par 77.

“My driving is a little off at the moment,” he said, “and as everyone knows, when you are only slightly off line on this course, you can be looking at bogey or even more.” Two strokes back from the leaders are four players, Frenchman Gery Watine, who leads the contingent from the European Seniors Tour, Englishmen Phil Golding and Simon Wakefield, and Jose-Filipe Lima, from Portugal.

And in a tightly-packed leaderboard, Gary Evans, Bill Longmuir and Martin Gray share eight place, three shots off the lead, with Jamie Donaldson and France’s Freddie Schoettel a further stroke in arrears.

Leading scores (GB & Ire unless stated): 67 P Price, M Pendaries (Fr), P Baker; 69 G Watine (Fr), P Golding, S Wakefield, J-F Lima (Por); 70 G Evans, W Longmuir, M Gray; 71 F Schoettel (Fr); J Donaldson, J-F Lucquin (Fr), J Theunis (Bel); 72 S Delagrang (Fr), S Osborne; 73 S Webster, M Demory (Fr), G Ruste (Fr); 74 M Rottanburg (SA)*, L Kelly, M McLean, G Cali (It), C Cevaer (Fr), A Mork (Fr), R Chapman, F Cupillard (Fr).

* denotes amateur