Hugh Tilley casts his eye over the items which can make such a difference on any golf course

Icing on the cake

The multitude of accessories and furniture such as hole cups, signs, markers, flags and the like are a necessity on any course and although they may appear trivial they are very important to the smooth and satisfactory operation of the course, furthermore they do add considerably to the cost.

While many courses do not use tee mats, nor have a driving range, these items also come within the description of accessories and for those clubs which use them they are important. Nor are most of these items inexpensive – and some areas find themselves with a considerable bill each year for

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replacing vandalised and stolen items.

Simple things such as bunker rakes are more complex than perhaps appears at first sight, and not all rakes are equal. One greenkeeper told of the club which is being sued because a golfer got a splinter in his hand from a wooden handle. Needless to say that club has changed to glass reinforced plastic (grp) handles for their rakes. Another club found that each autumn several rakes got "borrowed" for someone's garden leaves, but there are models which are not suitable for raking leaves. Tee mats, once simply the prerogative of a driving range, are finding favour on an ever increasing number of courses, particularly to save the grass tee areas in winter. In addition players are favouring them because they provide a cleaner and more stable surface from which to drive. Winter tee mats are usually supplied complete with a base, steel with mesh bottom and adjustable legs, or perhaps wood. They can be expected to cost several hundreds of pounds if bought as a complete ready made item, however, Course Manager, Paul Bishop, of Combe Manor near Bath, said they make their own in treated timber which they bed on sand and peg down – and this has proved to be much cheaper than buying proprietary units. He also commented that it has the advantage that they can trim the mat to fit exactly. Catalogues list a wide variety of mats, of differing materials and sizes, to suit differing needs and locations. Some allow the golfer to insert their own tee pegs, others require a flat based ball tee. Many clubs have a practice bay or similar enclosure, Tildenet is pre-eminent in this field although there are other well established net makers. Tildenet has been pre-eminent in this field although there are other well established net makers. Tildenet is able to supply the complete unit including poles, guy ropes and pegs. Like most of these items which tend to stay out all year round, in wind, rain and sun, it is important that they are fully protected from these elements, or if not rot proofed, then they must be cheap and easy enough to replace regularly. Steel is usually painted, but may be better galvanised while timber is best tanalised to B.S. standard rather than just surface treated. Degradation occurs with most types of plastic, including glass reinforced plastic (grp) unless sufficient u.v. stabiliser is included in the compound. However, excess stabiliser can cause other life reducing effects such as brittleness and loss of plasticity. With the correct

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Colour pin may be acceptable, but if backgrounds change according to the approach then two colour banded pins will be essential. On most courses each hole is different, but having differing types or colours of pins is likely to be unacceptable – and impractical. Pins are now expected to stand upright, thus a well fitting wear resistant ferrule at the bottom extends the life of cup and pin, most flags now swivel at the top. Swivel top pins are more expensive, but can be expected to last longer. Bottom wear is exacerbated by the fact that sand and water forms a good grinding medium. Exceptionally exposed sites may need a flag pin with greater rigidity – there are available.

Vandalism on some courses is a major cause of loss, and the option some clubs have taken is to use inexpensive alternatives, such as a length of standard PVC pipe. Greenkeepers talk about having their flag pins used as javelins and of having them thrown into a lake. Similar can occur to any easily movable course furniture – such as signs, seats and rakes. Perhaps the feature of the Tacit Tufftex solid ball type tee marker will float is of vital importance to some greenkeepers.

While flags are freely available in various colours with numbers on them, there are other options, including having sponsors or club names on them. Nylon and polyester are the usual materials used, but these may be knitted or woven, with number or logo etc. either printed or sewn on. The important point in getting value for money is longevity – some styles will last longer and look smarter, the main flag ‘killer’ being wind, and nothing looks worse than a tattered flag. For clubs with frequent match days perhaps the ability to change flags quickly and easily becomes important – this facility can be found.

A wide variety of signs is available, from temporary usage signs such as "Ground Under Repair" and "Spraying in Progress" to customised signs – you name it and it can be made. It looks better if all signs on the course are of the same format and type, and while most suppliers of course equipment offer both off the peg and customised signs it is also possible to use a local company/sign writer to produce them – and perhaps less expensive. The most preferred signage would appear to be of cast aluminium, however there are plastic or resin based alternatives which may be less expensive.

Another item increasingly being made available on courses is the ball cleaner, and naturally this must be frost resistant. Detergents and ‘anti-freeze’ are options but I suspect most clubs either empty or remove the unit for the winter. The brushes and paddles are considered to be wearing items, so the ease of replacement and cost needs considering.

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