

# The Stimpmeter under scrutiny

The USGA claims that once the Stimp-meter is put into widespread use, and the resulting data can be analysed and acted upon, the possibilities for improved playing conditions are endless. As long ago as the mid-70s it developed preliminary green speed charts. These were based on data from tests performed by its own agronomists on some 1500 greens in 36 American States during the 1976 and 1977 playing seasons. Here are their charts:

## Speeds for Regular Membership Play

8.6"  
7.6"  
6.6"  
5.6"  
4.6"

Fast  
Medium-Fast  
Medium  
Medium-Slow  
Slow

## Speeds for Tournament Play

10.6"  
9.6"  
8.6"  
7.6"  
6.6"

These speeds, the USGA stress, are presented for general information only. It is not the intention of the USGA to attempt to standardise green speeds which should remain up to the membership of each individual club e.g. Augusta National which for the Masters, which is a Club Invitational Tournament, the green speed is determined by the Club and is thought to be between 11" and 12" (the actual speed is not public knowledge!).

Nonetheless this type of information is invaluable and may well influence the green speeds aimed for in USGA-controlled events such as the US Open Championship.

## What's the Stimpmeter position in Britain?

Little is heard of the Stimpmeter. We know one Golf Club where the Head Greenkeeper swears by it – George Barr at the Ham Manor Golf Club in Angmering, East Sussex – and we intend to feature George and his experience with the Stimpmeter in our next article in this series.

There is also the East Sussex National course which may use a Stimpmeter because it is reputed to have been chosen by Jill Thornhill, the Curtis Cup Captain, to help her side prepare for the defence of the Cup against the Americans at Somerset Hills, New Jersey, in July. She has been told that East Sussex National's American-style greens (fast and sloping) have the same speed as Somerset Hills!

Otherwise virtually nothing.

Even the authoritative (and welcome) Report of the Greenkeeping Panel of the Royal & Ancient GC ("The Way Forward") only once mentions the Stimp-meter (page 23 – and this is to warn our greenkeepers and their Golf Clubs) not to bow to pressure from tournament professionals to mow to "a pre-determined Stimpmeter reading – irrespective of prevailing rainfall, grass species or long term damage."

Indeed, it is disappointing not to find in this Report more mention of the Stimp-meter. Was it a missed opportunity? This Report would surely have been the ideal opportunity at least to offer an evaluation of the Stimpmeter. In its concern to warn us (and rightly) against an uncritical transplant of the "Augusta image", the Report itself seems to have been guilty of confusing the function of the Stimp-

**We conclude John Nelson and Harold Swash's expert analysis of the Stimpmeter's use on both sides of the Atlantic.**

meter with the results it can lead to if used uncritically.

The Stimpmeter's function is to measure green speed, and it is the only one known to us at present. Surely therefore it has a role in defining playing quality standards on golf courses (golf greens) – work which the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) see as "the most important research work to be undertaken" in improving the quality of our courses (page 20 of "The Way Forward" Report).

If, as is stated in the Report (page 33), we need "year round courses with firm, fast, true greens and firm, mud-free fairways", then surely we need to define what 'fast' means. Does not that mean using the Stimpmeter (at least in the absence of anything better)?

## Where do we go from here?

Harold would suggest we need first some facts – a database.

We need to find out who is using the Stimpmeter, where and with what results.

We need to find out the speed of our greens for members' use and for tournaments and per type of course e.g. links,

parkland and so on. Only then would we be in an informed position to evaluate the desirability of setting speed standards for our own greens.

This means the use of the Stimpmeter – the trained use – and who better than greenkeeping staff to be trained to use it – not least in order to persuade and convince them to continue to use the Stimpmeter as "their right arm"

## The 'Fudge' Factor

There will be the danger of what Harold has termed the "fudge factor" – the problem of various – unintended or intended – in the length of ball roll, when using the Stimpmeter, produced by "human error". Any two people using the Stimpmeter will handle it differently and might get different results – however slight.

This is one reason why a pattern of up to 8" is accepted by the USGA. In view, however, of what Harold believes are the relatively slower speeds on our greens, he thinks we can live with this problem – at least initially – and that it is more important to get started in training our greenkeepers to use the Stimpmeter and to assemble the database.

But he has foreseen the need to remove "human error" from Stimpmeter readings, and has invented what he has christened a "Stimpmeter Adjustment Bracket". This is fitted to the Stimpmeter and makes its use an automatic one thereby eliminating human error.

However he feels that its current value lies more with the Augusta's of this world which have already become very proficient in using the Stimpmeter and indeed work to a tolerance of no more than 3" in the pattern of ball roll (on such fast greens and fine grasses, a second ball rolling over the track of the first ball could find the grass still lying down from the roll of the first ball and roll that inch further).

## The 1st to adopt the Stimpmeter in Europe

Maybe to have to follow the Americans in discovering the value of the Stimpmeter is not to everyone's liking, but not to be the first in Europe – that really would be unpalatable! Well, Harold noticed that the venue for this year's Peugeot Spanish Open Championship, and Spanish contender to host the Ryder Cup in 1993 – Club de Campo in Madrid – already uses the Stimpmeter.

The day the Championship started (26th April) The Times Newspaper, London, reported;

"Yesterday, before their scheduled double cut, the greens registered 10 on the Stimpmeter, the device used to measure their speed. Today, they should be moving into the Masters region of 11 or 12."



Harold Swash, left, examines his stimpmeter with an assistant.