

THE PUTTING GREEN

THE PUTTING GREEN THE STIMPMETER – A USER-FRIENDLY KEY TO BETTER GREENS

Harold Swash with John Nelson

THIS is the fourth in a series of articles in which Harold Swash, Britain's Putting Doctor, engages in dialogue with members of BIGGA on "What golfers want from putting green surfaces."

The title of our previous article, "Doing the Simple Things Well – The First lesson from Augusta", was chosen deliberately to show that it is possible to learn from Augusta National, and to counter the view that all we over here can do is sit back and admire the (unattainable) playing conditions we see there.

Of course we must be selective in what we learn and try to apply. But to argue that the so-called 'Augusta image' is inappropriate elsewhere carries the risk of "throwing the baby out with the bathwater", and it would be a tragedy if this applied to the Stimpmeter.

Augusta and the Stimpmeter

So, for starters, let's put the record straight about the link between the Stimpmeter and Augusta. It is true that the Stimpmeter is "Augusta's right arm". Without it Augusta could not have got its lightning-fast greens accepted for the US Masters.

But it was the ability to accurately measure green speed which the Stimpmeter provided for Augusta. Then, of course, it became possible to control and vary green speed. Augusta then elected (quite separately) to create very fast greens - and even then it had to replace its former Bermuda Rye grass and clay sub-soil with a new sand base and a different type of grass - Bent grass (actually Pennncross).

Augusta had the perspicacity to realise that the Stimpmeter could enable them to measure green speed, and that this then made possible controlled variations in that speed. Ever since, the Stimpmeter has been used daily.

Mr Hord Hardin, Chairman of Augusta National GC, told me during the 1989 US Masters that the Stimpmeter had become an invaluable and indispensable tool to them. "It proves", he said, "that my Board Directors knows what it is doing. We no longer need to rely on hunch and guesswork". He went on to add, "One reason why its so popular with us is because its so simple. Nothing can go wrong with it."

So, the Stimpmeter has become Augusta's "right arm". But Augusta didn't invent it. It didn't start at Augusta although it has come to be associated with Augusta and its lightning fast greens (together with the US Masters and its Green Jackets).

To adopt it over here, therefore, will not be to perpetuate the "Augusta image". Rather, it will be just a long overdue transplant of a powerful American idea which was invented over 40 years ago and for which the United States Golf Association (USGA) has more recently put together a Stimpmeter Instructional Booklet.

The Inventor of the Stimpmeter

The Stimpmeter was actually invented



Three shots of the Stimpmeter in action.



by a Mr Edward S. Stimpson, the 1935 Massachusetts Amateur Champion. Stimpson knew how variations in the speed of consecutive greens - and especially on different parts of the same green-negated the golfer's putting skill. He also knew the frustration of having to rely on subjective 'guesstimates' of green speeds.

So he addressed the problem of how to achieve accurate, objective, and statistically valid measurements of the speed of the putting green. The result of his efforts was the Stimpmeter.

What exactly is the Stimpmeter?

To quote the USGA, "It is a simple accurate device which makes it possible to make a standard measurement of - and place a numerical figure on - the speed of a putting green."

What is the Stimpmeter made of and what are its characteristic features?

It is an extruded aluminium bar, 36 inches long, with a V-shaped groove extending along its entire length. It has a precisely milled ball-release notch 30 inches from the tapered end (the end which rests on the ground). The underside of the tapered end is milled away to reduce bounce as a rolling ball makes contact with the green.

The V-shaped groove has an included angle of 145 degrees thereby supporting a golf ball at two points 1½ inches apart. A ball rolling down the groove has a slight overspin which is thoroughly consistent and has no deleterious effect on the ensuing measurements.

The ball-release notch is so designed that a ball will always be released and start to roll when the Stimpmeter is raised to an angle of approximately 20 degrees from the horizontal. This insures that the velocity of the ball will always be the same when it reaches the tapered end.

How is the Stimpmeter used?

First, you need the Stimpmeter, together with golf balls, 3 tees and a measuring tape.

There are 6 steps to be taken:

Step 1: Select a level area of the green approximately 10' by 10' square. (The level can be checked by laying the Stimpmeter flat on the green and placing a ball in the V-shaped groove. The movement of the ball will show whether or not the green is reasonably level.)

Step 2: Insert a tee on the green near the edge of the area selected to serve as a starting point. Holding the Stimpmeter by the notched end, rest the tapered end on the ground beside the tee and aim it in the direction you intend to roll the ball. Put a ball in the notch and SLOWLY raise that end until the ball is released and starts to roll down the groove. Then, keeping the tapered end on the same spot, repeat the same procedure with two more balls.

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STEP 3: All three balls should come to rest not more than 8" apart. (A pattern larger than 8" is of dubious quality and the three roll series should be repeated). Insert a tee to mark the average stopping distance of the three balls.

Step 4: Repeat Step 2 using the second tee as the starting point and the first tee as the aiming point; i.e. roll a series of three balls along the same line but in the opposite direction.

STEP 5: Repeat Step 3 thereby establishing the average length of the second series of rolls.

STEP 6: Measure the two average distances - for the first and the second series - and calculate their average.

To be continued in next month's issue . . .