Pedaling to par in the Northwest

Inventors adapt mountain bike technology to golf cars to provide exercise and fun

By Bob Spiwak

Mike Valentine of Everett, Wash., was golfing in Palm Springs, Calif., last year. The course was crowded, play was slow, and he waited at each hole, sitting in an electric golf car and stewing.

Then the 32-year-old Boeing Co. employee, a lead mechanic on 767 airplanes, had an idea: a pedal-powered golf car.

So-called "mountain bikes" with gear combinations allowing as many as 23 speeds have been the rage for several years. Valentine considered this technology for a golf car. It would provide exercise, speed up play and be environmentally sound. Golfers of all ages could propel the four-wheeled vehicles.

Valentine, who has several inventions under his belt, all the property of Boeing, got together with his younger brother in Everett and came up with the T.J. — Transportation to tomorrow.

The prototype vehicle is about five feet long and 30 inches wide. With chrome alloy tubing for the frame, it weighs 40 pounds. It has drum brakes on the front wheels and conventional brakes at the rear, with 1-1/2 inch tires.

While the prototype lacks them, production plans call for independent front suspension and adjustable seat stays.

"It has convenient access to the seat so the vehicle can be mounted and dismounted quickly and easily," said David Valentine, who is in charge of marketing.

The brothers, both golfers, acknowledge the machine has limitations. It is probably best suited to flat, dry courses. In the Puget Sound region, where they live, the turf might be too wet. But, east of the Cascade Mountains and across America, thousands of courses are less liberally watered by Mother Nature.

Ash Court, owner of Bear Creek Golf Club in Winthrop, Wash., expressed interest. "My only concern would be what effect it would have on the wetter areas of the course," he said. "Otherwise, it might be a good idea."

"It sounds terrific. If the tires didn't tear up the course, it seems like a great idea."

Said Tom Kimbrell, a 2-handicapper, mountain climber and owner of an outdoor equipment store (which also sells and rents mountain bikes): "It sounds terrific. If the tires didn't tear up the course, it seems like a great idea."

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Aeration Industries to appeal federal court ruling

MINNEAPOLIS — Aeration Industries International Inc. of Chaska, Minn., will appeal February's federal court ruling that its pond aeration device patent is unenforceable, according to company President and Chief Executive Officer Daniel J. Durda.

"We believe the court made a grievous mistake and will definitely appeal," said Durda of United States District Court Judge Donald D. Alsop's ruling that Aeration Industries' "Method For Treating Water" patent is not enforceable. Aeration Industries manufactures the Aire-OZ horizontal aerator for, among others, The Toro Co.

Alsop's decision involved Aeration Industries' patent infringement suit against Aeromix System Inc. of Minneapolis filed in November, 1989. Aeromix filed several counterclaims. Alsop's ruling allows Aeromix to seek recovery of legal fees from Aeration and press ahead with other suits that could total millions of dollars in damages.

Despite the ruling, Aeration Industries' patent remains valid, states a company news release. Judge Alsop did not invalidate the patent, nor did he make any findings on the issue of whether or not the patent had been infringed, it reads.

J. Randall Benham of Oppenheim, Wolf & Donnelly of Minneapolis is Aeration Industries' legal counsel.

Protection certificates issued for turfgrasses

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently issued certificates of protection to developers of new varieties of red fescue, tall fescue, annual ryegrass and perennial ryegrass.

Issued certificates were:
• Thoroughbred variety of tall fescue developed by Pickseed West, Inc. of Tangent, Ore.
• Rustmaster variety of annual ryegrass developed by Daenhardt, Inc. of Albany, Ore.
• Pinnacle variety of perennial ryegrass developed by Norman, Inc. of Tangent.
• Surprise perennial ryegrass developed by Cebeco Zaden, B.V. The Netherlands.
• Barraw variety of perennial ryegrass developed by Barenbrug Holland, B.V. of the Netherlands.
• Stallion and Aquitras varieties of perennial ryegrass developed by KWSAG, West Germany.

Certificates for Surprise and Barraw are being issued to be sold by variety name only as a class of certified seed and to conform to the number of generations specified by the owner.