



GAS SHORTAGE: Regional Reports

west

by **DON CURLEE**

SAN FRANCISCO—Golf businessmen in the West are taking the fuel shortage seriously, but in stride. Few of them have been directly or intensely affected enough yet to know if their precautionary thinking and planning are correct.

Discussions with them about it raise at least as many happy thoughts as talking about burial plots or missed putts.

One tells how a golf course construction project was held up because delivery of PVC irrigation pipe (a petroleum derivative) was long overdue. With the trenches all dug, the site resembled an antitank barrier, and practically no substitute work could be completed until the pipe was laid.

Everyone contacted here believes the most serious threat to golf operations will be indirect—the reaction of their clientele to restricted supplies of gasoline.

This translates to reduced play, particularly at more remote resort type courses. Managers and professionals of courses close to population centers of various sizes believe play will increase when shortages intensify and

continued on page 31

central

by **JOE DOAN**

CHICAGO—No one connected with the operational side of the golf business has his head buried in a trap, as far as the uncertainties that lie ahead in 1974 are concerned. It is generally accepted that there are going to be some shortages, delivery delays, continued inflation and the perennial difficulty of obtaining all the maintenance and clubhouse labor that is needed.

The crux of how 1974 fares for the nation's golf clubs swings around the gasoline situation. Will there be enough fuel, everyone is asking, to assure at least routine maintenance of courses, operation of gas-powered golf cars, and what may be most important of all, transportation of players and members to and from the clubs?

The answer to each of these questions is a firm if not resounding "Yes." The gasoline situation is tight, but not as critical as it is reported to be in the opinion of at least three out of four club managers, superintendents and club professionals. It is suspected that the Government and oil interests have painted an unnecessarily gloomy picture of the fuel supply plight, causing the public and the Congress to

continued on page 31

east

by **DOUGLAS LUTZ**

NEW YORK—No clear pattern emerges when assessing the impact of the gasoline shortage here on East Coast golf courses.

One course on the coast of North Carolina has curtailed mowing. In the same state, a club set in the Appalachian foothills has been unaffected.

Exclusive courses on New York's fabled North Shore (Long Island) report sporadic shortages. Yet Florida's resort trade seemingly is in no danger.

The gasoline situation here is too fluid to be predictable. Oil company officials, coping with the over-all problem amidst attacks from all quarters, including the Federal government, are short on patience and less than responsive with suggestions on how supervisory personnel can cope with maintenance problems at golf courses. They are still trying to assess the large picture, hoping to forestall drastic governmental action against their interests.

A marketing specialist, when pressured to predict what might lie ahead for the golf industry for 1974, cryptically responded, "Take up tennis." He did, however, acknowledge that,

continued on page 31

WEST *from page 26*

travel is curtailed.

But most golf resort managers and professionals are optimistic about their chances for survival, even for progress, during the pinch.

One of the more remote is Singing Hills Lodge and CC at El Cajon, Calif. Although it is less than 20 miles east of San Diego, most of the play is represented by tournament groups from the Los Angeles area, almost 150 miles away. As partner and general manager Steve Horrell sees it: "One tank of gas, down and back."

With two championship 18s and an 18-hole executive course to fill, it takes a lot of traffic. "If we get a ban on Sunday driving, we're in trouble," Horrell says. But he adds: "Even with rationing, I don't think we'll be affected too badly."

Horrell's boldness extends to the green fees, which are being increased this year to \$5 on weekdays and \$7 on weekends, a one dollar increase. He switched to propane for heating and cooking and now finds this fuel hard to get. He expects to eliminate one mowing per week, if necessary, to conserve fuel in the course maintenance program.

But Horrell is not extremely worried. Singing Hills courses are booked for 46 of the 52 weekends in 1974—subject to cancellation, of course, if gasoline becomes unavailable to players. The lodge has 60 units, with 20 more scheduled for completion by the end of the year. A tennis complex is being built.

Cliff Waggoner, superintendent at Del Rio CC in Modesto, Calif., believes some benefits may result from the energy shortage. "It can make superintendents manage their allotted energy better and evaluate their practices more carefully, and perhaps work closer with their professionals and club managers."

Decisions forced by energy shortages, Waggoner feels, will involve the entire club management. "If it comes to a choice between using available fuel for running golf cars or mowing grass, heating the dining room or powering a tractor, everybody on the management team will get into the act." He feels this might bring some superintendents deeper into the decision-making process.

He expects a general belt-tightening in maintenance programs—less mow-

continued

CENTRAL *from page 26*

overreact, and as the truth starts leaking out, it will be found that things aren't nearly as critical as purported. This doesn't mean that clubs haven't started cutting back. Heat has been cut down, less electricity is being used and at many clubs, rooms and lounges that were previously used during the winter months, have been sealed off.

If it turns out that the fuel crisis is not a barefaced hoax, and the threatened rationing becomes imminent, clubs will take steps to cope with whatever restrictions are placed on them. Superintendents, some of whom had brushes with gas rationing last year, are prepared to hold back on maintenance, reduce mowing operations and fertilizer applications. There is even talk at some clubs of getting car pools organized.

All in all, the energy emergency is being treated here with skepticism. Nobody can quite understand why a small cutback in imported oil can cause such wide-spread economic disorder. Bungled, contradictory reports by the Federal Energy Commission as to the status of domestic fuel supplies have fired the skepticism. So has the reluctance of the oil industry to make a frank accounting. And, of course, club managers, like everyone else, believe the fuel crisis has been blown up to create a diversion from Watergate. Then, too, most people in charge of the club operation feel that there is enough fuel secretly stored away that can be tapped if the economy starts grinding to a halt.

As a result of the general disbelief, there are no distress flags flapping above the clubhouses, at least in the Chicago district. Superintendents, for instance, expect to run short periodically on gasoline, but not to the extent that it will seriously cramp routine maintenance. Other than this, chemical fertilizers are going to be hard to get. Most professionals feel that they probably won't be able to get all the merchandise they can sell, but they doubt shortages will be so severe that their sales for the year will show any significant decrease. Club managers are more concerned about continued inflation than anything else, although sporadic shortages will crop up. These factors, plus possible difficulty in hiring maintenance and clubhouse labor, are the principal worries of club administrators.

continued

EAST *from page 26*

although the golf course or club may not be a major consumer of energy fuel, golf courses in general were steady customers. "Perhaps applying the principles of pooling might help in your area of concern," he suggested. "The problem really is one of distribution and priority, principally at the retail level. Our concerns here must examine only the broadest aspects of the national crisis. The problems being faced by each ultimate customer disturbs us too, but it is, after all, the larger picture to which we must be free to address our energies toward solving."

As is frequently the case, it falls to the superintendents and managers to analyze their own situations and find their own solutions. At this time the shortages continue to be isolated, and each problem is local.

Cape Fear CC, home of the Azalea Open in Wilmington, N.C., reports there have been times when they simply couldn't mow. Bob MacDermid, manager, said recently, "They supply us when they can, and we'll just have to sweat it out." He indicated that the club had not as yet been put on any quota system. MacDermid feels the situation should loosen up shortly, according to local reports. In the meantime measures are being taken to conserve energy at Cape Fear. "We keep the lights out on the tennis courts, and heat for the ballroom is used only when absolutely necessary," MacDermid said.

Michael Taft, manager at the Country Club of Asheville, N.C., about 300 miles west of Cape Fear, says he's had no trouble whatsoever. "Our supplies are sufficient for our maintenance vehicles, and we're not on any kind of quota system. We're enjoying a mild winter, so we've had no problem with heating oil either," Taft reported, then added, "It's not much of a story, but we're just not having any trouble."

Winter doldrums up north are Mecca times in Florida, as we all know. No one knows it better than Governor Askew. He recently demanded that gasoline stations on Interstate 75 remain open on Sundays. I 75 bisects the state lengthwise, through Gainesville, Ocala, Tampa, St. Petersburg and on into Sarasota.

Arlene Provencher, who assists Superintendent Drew Stephens at Long-

continued on page 67

WEST *continued*

ing, more attention to equipment to ensure efficient operation and careful scheduling. "Some clubs have grounds that are extremely expensive to maintain, and management may be forced to decide whether to maintain the grounds or the golf course."

Waggoner believes less mowing might even be good for the soil. "We've been competing with each other to see how close we can mow and how often we do it," which are not really necessary for good course grooming or good golf. One essential he identifies in case of rationing: the differences in grasses must be taken into account. Del Rio's bermudagrass fairways are tough and take more horsepower and fuel to mow than the softer coastal grasses.

Silverado CC at Napa, Calif., is only an hour's drive from San Francisco, and professional Craig Williamson's optimism is profuse, aided by 278 one and two-bedroom and studio apartments and about 100 individual homes surrounding the course. "I think we'll get a number of people who would drive farther if gas were available, and even some who might come our way instead of going to Hawaii," he says.

With 36 holes, maintenance at Silverado is a major consideration. Efficiency and time-saving have been the key factors in recent equipment purchases. Blessed with good drainage, Silverado can get by with less mowing this winter.

"We really don't expect to lose much play," Williamson says. Arrangements have been made with transit companies in Napa and in the San Francisco Bay area to bring guests from the San Francisco and Oakland airports to Silverado. Another arrangement permits rental cars to be dropped off or picked up at the course. "We're already seeing a doubling up by our guests who arrive by car," he says.

"Awareness of the shortage may help all of us in golf," Williamson said. "It's just another challenge we can overcome." Resort courses well away from airports or otherwise off the beaten path may be in for some setbacks, especially those that are inefficiently operated.

Golf course construction has felt the effects of the fuel shortage, also indirectly. Golf course architect Robert Muir Graves considers the shortened

supplies of plastic pipe "very serious" already. Also difficult to obtain is grass seed (and expensive), mostly because of a light crop last year. Delays have occurred in the installation of automatic irrigation systems because copper wire is in short supply. Fertilizer prices have taken a sharp jump, and manufacturers say supplies may be reduced by fuel shortages, particularly natural gas.

"The most embarrassing area for us in 1973 was prices," Graves said, "we just couldn't keep up." His survey of contractors showed that the minimum average increase was 15 per cent, with some items up 100 per cent and more. He has alerted clients with construction scheduled to order materials from a rough list, just to get them on order and minimize delays.

Graves sees little difficulties during the fuel shortage for local clubs and courses, "but resort courses must be extremely careful how they handle themselves," he said. "The construction phase will be difficult for everybody."

Somewhat typical of the attitude of local clubs is Al Meillon, manager of the California GC in south San Francisco. He agrees that play is likely to increase at local clubs and courses if more extensive travel is restricted. He admits that no serious repercussions have occurred from the shortage yet.

"We're watching our fuel consumption closely," he says, "pushing caddies rather than cars, with a resulting loss in revenue, and turning off lights in the clubhouse wherever they are not needed." No abrupt changes are planned in the maintenance program, but Meillon doesn't rule out adjustments later. "For now we'll just have to wait and see."

Gene "Bunny" Mason is golf and public relations director for Black Butte Ranch, described as a "total recreational, second-home development" 150 miles from Portland and 100 miles from both Salem and Eugene, Ore. At the center of the complex is a challenging 18-hole golf course.

"We don't really expect a drop in play connected with fuel shortages," he says. "Most of our play comes from 'our own family' (property owners), and we think they may make fewer trips here, but we expect them to stay longer each time." It could even increase the number of golf rounds.

Black Butte Ranch accepts no con-

ventions or outside groups, although the golf course is a public play operation. Primary use is by the owners of the 225 individual homes and 75 condominium units surrounding the course. Mason believes they will be occupied more fully during the fuel shortage by families whose breadwinners will visit on weekends, partly as an alternative to more extensive travel vacations.

The prospects of fuel and energy shortages are new to the golf business, and nobody seems able to predict how severe they will be, nor where and when they will hit, if at all. They won't catch golf businessmen in the West by surprise. □

CENTRAL *continued*

Superintendents were advised to secure their gas supplies through primary and secondary sources about a year ago when they were threatened with a shortage that, for the most part, didn't materialize. Allocations for 1974 are the same as in 1973, and only severe rationing will interfere with them. At 18-hole clubs, about 300 to 350 gallons per week are consumed in the maintenance operation and at most places, a three-week supply is on hand. Occasional delays in delivery are being anticipated, but most superintendents expect to get around that by keeping close watch on the storage tank and ordering far enough ahead to obviate any critical shortages. If worse comes to worst, mowing schedules can be curtailed to accommodate gasoline supplies. It was tried last year at a few clubs, and there was little if any criticism by players.

Chemical fertilizers will be in short supply due mainly to shortages of nitrogen, and if there isn't enough to go around, there will simply be less fertilizing. Herbicides and fungicides are not threatened at this time, but shortages are expected later in the year. One large equipment manufacturer has alerted superintendents to expect a shortage of certain mower and tractor parts this spring. Tractors reportedly have to be on order four to six months prior to requested delivery.

The superintendent, of course, is apprehensive about his gasoline source, primarily because he fears some form of rationing before the year is out, but what worries him most is the perennial labor supply problem. Golf

continued on page 35

CENTRAL from page 32

course wages have doubled in the last six years, but the industry still drags in this respect. The superintendent doesn't have a good bargaining tool in the wages he can offer.

Professionals in the Chicago district generally feel that they aren't going to experience any great pinch in 1974. The reason is that golfwear for the new season went into production last summer, long before serious talk of a crisis was heard, and so there should be plenty of merchandise. However, raw supplies of polyester, which is derived from petroleum, and cotton, a large amount of which was sold to Japan in 1973, are dwindling, but the impact probably won't be felt until next fall. As one professional puts it, "We'll probably get through 1974 okay, but what I'm already wondering about is 1975. Sportswear may be hard to come by a year from now."

As for golf clubs, no serious shortages are expected, especially of pro-line models. There is said to be a scarcity of second-line woods and irons, but with True Temper now in full, three-shift production, this will probably be alleviated by mid-spring. According to professionals, there were scattered, hard-to-get models for Christmas sales, but this wasn't serious. As in the sportswear industry, golf club manufacturers start new production fully six months before the clubs go on the market, and with this lead time they were in pretty good shape before being threatened with any material shortages.

Most pros feel that if they are going to be in any trouble at all it will come when they start to place re-orders or order custom built items. According to their estimates, about 60 per cent of their merchandise orders for 1974 were placed last fall, with the remainder being held for the PGA Merchandise show, which was staged in late January in Port St. Lucie. This is about the way it always has been. Several pros said that manufacturers' reps put a little more pressure on them to buy early this year than perhaps ever before because of threatened shortages, but generally it was resisted. In addition, there was no great inclination on the part of members to do any hoarding when they shopped at Christmastime for fear that certain items wouldn't be available in the spring. This is pretty good evidence that a lot

of people are refusing to panic in face of the alleged crisis.

One of the most enthusiastic persons in the golf business over prospects for 1974 being a good to exceptional season is Ken Devine, sales manager for the PGA line at Victor Golf Company. He won't go so far as to ignore some upcoming problems, but based on his company's sales for the coming season, he is hard put to see how they can become serious. PGA-Victor got into women's golfwear for the first time last fall, and sales so far have far exceeded expectations. Orders for clubs match any that Devine's company has experienced in past seasons. No trouble is anticipated this year in supplying doubleknits and, for that matter, any of the sportswear handled by PGA-Victor. Devine does expect any products made from plastics, such as bags and balls, to eventually run short, but this can be offset by adequate substitutes. Additionally, the factory in Chicago, which mainly produces clubs, is booked for 18 solid months of production.

Generally, Devine's optimism is echoed by other golf manufacturing sales managers. Lee Gibson of MacGregor pronounced the 1973 fall sales season as "great, probably as good as any we've had." Scott O'Grady of Wilson detects no sign of a slump in the golf business, but does concede that supply of some materials will be spotty. In January he was slightly fearful of gas rationing, figuring it would take some deft managing to keep salesmen out on 35 gallons per month. "But if they can make their rounds all season we should do about as well as we've ever done," O'Grady avers.

As for clubhouse operations, managers don't foresee any insurmountable problems or at least ones that can't be overcome by spending money. One manager claims that his food costs were up 14 per cent last year, and he's expecting a 10 per cent over-all increase in 1974. The price of china has increased 15 per cent in a year's time, but far worse than this, towels cost 50 to 60 per cent more than they did at the end of 1972. In addition, there is six months' waiting time on towels and linen, both due to the cotton shortage.

The above figures are from a Northside Chicago manager who, on the day GOLFDOM talked to him, was nettled by rumors of a toilet paper shortage,

which turned out to be false. He was the most despondent of approximately 25 people who were surveyed. Three other managers thought that food prices in 1974 wouldn't increase by more than what is now accepted as a reasonable 5 to 8 per cent. They hadn't done any recent trafficking in towels, linen or chinaware, although one said that he was somewhat staggered upon checking into the price of carpeting.

One thing that club managers are certain of is that if gas rationing is imposed, they'll have a captive audience. Vacation and weekend trips that won't be taken will be spent at the club.

Fall and winter patronage of clubs has been good, according to all reports. In comparison with restaurants, eating out at the clubs is a bargain because the menu price line has been held. At the Glenview Club, where Bob Broms features a different foreign dinner once a week from January through March, the tab is the same this year as it was last. Other managers say that their food prices held steady during the past year, but for the coming season they have no choice but to increase them by perhaps as much as 10 per cent. Broms concedes that later on Glenview will be forced to increase prices.

One Chicago district club that has to be mentioned in conjunction with the pinch, crisis, or whatever you want to call it, is Ridge CC on the Southside. It is known as a "walking distance" club, meaning that about 90 per cent of the membership can conveniently reach it even if dismounted. Ridge, accordingly, always has gotten strong play, both on the course and in the use of its facilities. Last fall, when talk of shortages and rationing was starting to come on strong, business, already good, started to pick up. Before this, under its new manager, James Day, Ridge had started paying closer attention to food control, cut out some frills that were hardly missed and resorted to some other mundane economies. The net was that at the end of the year there was a near \$8,000 improvement in the income-expense statement. It proves that with a pickup in volume, which may be almost forced on clubs any day now due to rationing, and closer rein on the everyday operations, a club can't help but come out of the present mess in good shape.

Rationing or not, private clubs in the Chicago area probably aren't going

CENTRAL from page 35

to be hurt to any great extent. If gas isn't restricted, they'll get their normal amount of patronage. If it is, they'll do even better. How about the semi-privates? Owners of these clubs see some possible benefits if rationing is invoked. If people have to stay at home they'll probably play more golf than they did last year. What else is there to do? But car pooling arrangements will have to be made and the clubs will have to take a hand in making them. Some owners say they are not as much concerned with gas rationing itself as they are with the effect that shortages may have on the economy. "If there is a pretty sharp increase in unemployment," says one, "we'll feel it. Even if people don't get laid off they'll start cutting back on recreation in fear that they may lose their jobs. If we only have to contend with rationing, I'm not too concerned. People who want to play golf will find a way to get out here."

Like most Americans, people who are in charge of running golf courses have their doubts about the severity of the oil crisis. They realize that there have been some rather serious dislocations in the fuel situation, but having lived with Watergate for a year and being somewhat distrustful of the oil industry, they aren't ready to buy the whole dreary package. One club manager pretty well sums up the sentiments of most club people when he says, "Maybe we are in awfully bad shape and we need a jolt. But I just can't believe what we are being told. A big country like ours just doesn't go to hell all of a sudden. I think it's another case of where we're being taken." □

EAST from page 31

boat Key GC in Sarasota, said recently she had talked to travelers from Ohio and North Carolina who had no trouble getting gasoline on their trek down to Florida's beckoning fairways. "Traffic is building up," she said, "and there are lots of out of state automobiles showing up. Motels have begun to post No Vacancy signs too."

Jim Sanders, manager at Pine Lakes GC in Jacksonville, continues to "knock on wood" as he was doing last summer when we first reported on East Coast activities. (GOLFDOM, Sept./Oct., 1973). Although Sanders is still

obliged to specify the number of gallons of gasoline he estimates he'll need each month, he has had no problem with his supplier.

Currently enjoying his "biggest month to date in his best season so far," Sanders hopes his good fortune will continue. "There have been some tourist cancellations in areas, which may have affected over-all availability of gasoline," he said recently.

We talked to several of the clubs situated in Nassau County, New York, a 12-mile stretch due east from New York City's boundary line. Again . . . no pattern.

Effective measurements of shortage impacts are difficult this time of year due to variable weather conditions. When temperatures have risen sharply, courses have remained unplayable and maintenance has been almost impossible to carry out.

One superintendent reported he couldn't send any vehicles out because the grounds were so wet. "A few members wanted to play, so I had to send a man out on foot to place the flags. We don't know how we'll be hit when spring comes. Our tanks are full now, but in season we run to over 700 gallons a month. If what I see happening at highway stations is any indication, we'll be in for a lot of trouble this year." Nassau was one of the worst hit areas in terms of retail station closings due to unavailable gasoline.

Other sources indicated they were holding on to their reserves by seriously curtailing winter play, thus allowing the course to get a complete rest requiring little or no maintenance. Traditionally, in this area, golf can be played all year, if it doesn't snow, particularly since New York area weather has undergone such drastic change in the past few years. Bitter cold winters sealed in with heavy snows have given way to January thaws encouraged by temperatures sometimes soaring into the 60s.

Another North Shore, Long Island, spokesman reflected philosophically, "Why limit winter play? Maintenance is virtually impossible anyhow. The few projects we can tackle use up little gasoline because we have to keep the vehicles on the cart paths. It's just a clean up job this time of year at our course." When confronted with the prospects of a full work schedule, however, he was less than philosophic. "We're already planning a cutback

in our mowing operation. Our plans for drainage trenching have been altered to include only the necessities. I'm afraid there'll be a lot of spade work and increased labor costs this coming season. Nassau County is hard hit already. It can only get worse."

Suggestions from East Coast spokesmen on how to cope with the fuel shortage usually reflect their direct involvement to date. If they have not faced shortages, they have given the problem less thought than those who have felt the pinch.

It's an elusive quandary. Curtail maintenance programs to conserve fuel and you set your over-all course improvement plan way behind schedule. Forge ahead as planned and you may stall completely due to dry fuel tanks. This may be the time to consider the return to some hand work, utilizing the manpower pool of available students in your community.

It will take careful study of priorities to determine the most judicious use of limited fuel supplies. Managers, superintendents and ground crews need, more than ever, to work closely together during the energy crisis.

Try to involve the membership as well. There is no clear cut solution, but your members' interests are at stake as well as your own. Conversely, the membership needs to be aware as early as possible of your plans to handle the potential cutbacks in services. Advice to the members might include a consideration of pooling, as the oil company spokesman suggested. A full parking lot generally means many members arrived by themselves, each driving his own automobile. Neighborhood pickups could "pool" four-somes. Turns could be taken the same as commuting pools do.

There is a great deal of confusion on the East Coast as to when and where, and most importantly, how much, gasoline shortage will affect this year's golf course operations. No one force, governmental or industrial, has come forth to clarify the situation.

Each superintendent or manager will have to find his own solutions in direct proportion to the severity of the shortages in his local area. The months ahead promise to test the degree of expertise each man brings to his own club.

It's a serious challenge that no one in golf circles asked for, but that must eventually be faced by all. □