



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

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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

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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,

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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-

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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.

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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-

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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." □

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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. □