

# PGA

## Orlando Optimistic After Year of Doubt

Back when the PGA decided it would have its annual merchandise extravaganza at Disney World again, there admittedly was some grumblings from the rank-and-file.

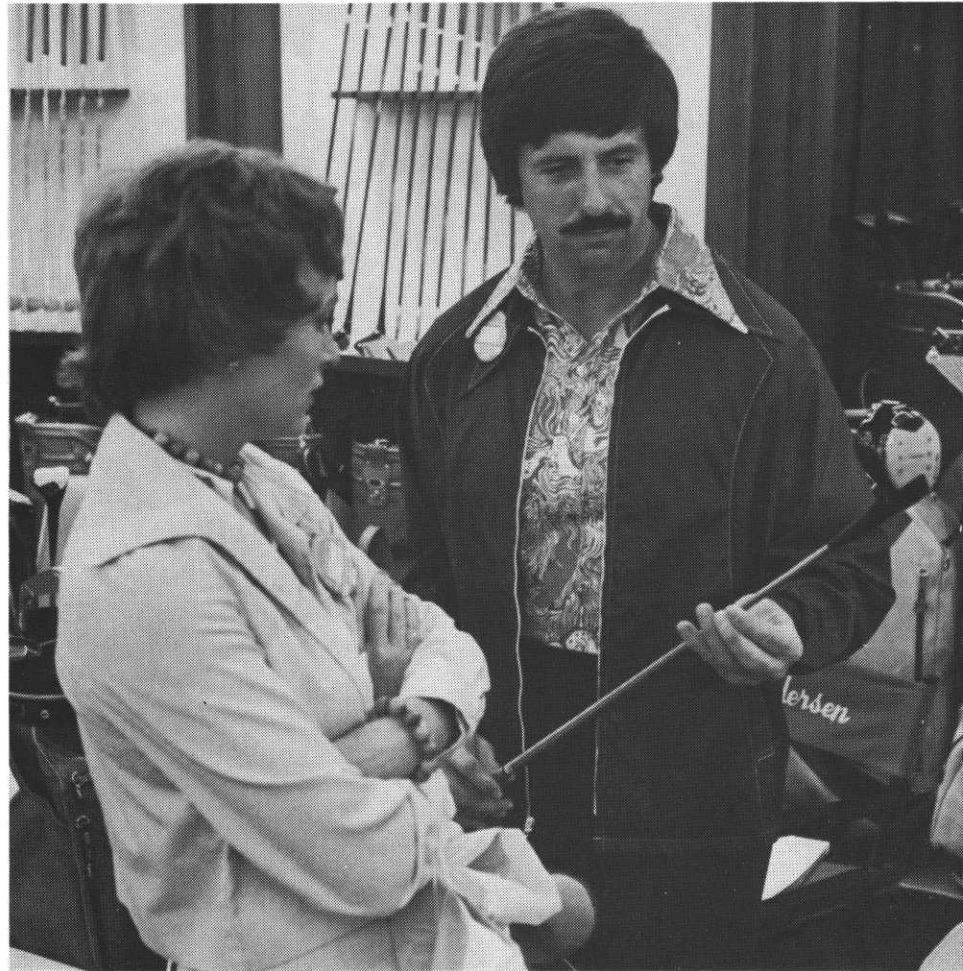
But when the 2,365 club professionals and their families showed up in Orlando in late January, there were few discouraging words in the land where Mickey Mouse plays. In fact, the 1976 PGA Merchandise Show seemed a success for everyone that put in an appearance.

Most of the headaches and confusion of a year ago seemed to have vanished in the halls and rooms of the Contemporary Hotel. Things went well enough that the PGA will probably pick up its option to have the show there again in '77 in the vicinity of Jan. 23-26. Final decision on that should come this month.

It wasn't a perfect affair, something that big couldn't be, but it seemed fewer pros were getting lost trying to find their favorite manufacturer and the manufacturers were happy enough to take their orders.

Every manufacturer, be it clubs to cars, was playing the numbers game. The percentage of sales over last year was good for everyone. Several companies told GOLFDOM sales had increased at least 40 percent over '75.

Exhibitors in the Contemporary Annex, which had gained a repu-



**Buying was brisk at the Orlando show. Several of the firms boasted of breaking sales records set at Disney World last winter. Pros and their wives were quite watchful of the merchandise, as Annett and John Kelly, Avriil Park, N.Y., check out some new woods from Pedersen.**

tation as a "no pros" land last winter, were happy with the traffic and interest they received outside the main building. For example, Rod Easterling of Acme Bag Storage told of his initial fright at the annex location, but as pros found their way to his room, sales advanced.

Not everyone was happy, though. Carl Ross, president of Lynx Golf voiced the biggest beef about his floor position, which was wedged in between a snack bar and a game room for the kiddies. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Golf Manufacturers and Distributors Association, Ross let off a broadside on the PGA system of establishing position on the show floor.

Ross and GMDA President Wally Phillips spent 10 minutes in a heated exchange on the matter, until

association secretary Paul Hornung discovered neither Ross nor his company was even a member of the organization. In fact, out of over 240 exhibitors, only about 40 people showed up for the GMDA session.

Phillips, who also doubles as an executive for the makers of Etonic golf shoes, was reelected to the top office, along with the other GMDA officers, for another term. It's unlikely, though, that anyone in the industry would want his job.

Another mild controversy that arose during the four-day event was the proliferation of black guest badges that were gained by friends and family of the club pros.

Jim Applegate, secretary of the Michigan PGA section, commented to GOLFDOM on the problem. "There are just too many of those guest badges around. Those people don't buy. It's tough to get

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around the clog of humanity in the aisles."

PGA national secretary Don Padgett told GOLFDOM the association could do little to alleviate the situation, since the problem lies with the professionals that request badges in the first place. The general attitude is that some pros are getting badges for their entire families to make the continuity of their Florida trip go easier and where children are involved, save some money on a baby sitter.

It's possible that only buyers or club professionals may be allowed on the floor in future years, but unlikely next year.

In all, total attendance at the show was 6,700, up over 100 percent from '75. Included in that total were many new head professionals that went to Orlando with the chief intention of stocking their shops. "I'm doing 100 percent of my buying down here," said Scott Weidner, Fargo (N.D.) Country Club. Weidner also remarked that having the show in January is ideal for the northern pro, since most keep their shops open to accommodate the Christmas buying season.

Gary Smith, new head pro at the Sheraton Hotel Golf Resort in French Lick, Ind., was new to the Orlando show as his shop's chief buyer, while Mike Stowe, Woodley Country Club, Montgomery, Ala., was looking at merchandise which he otherwise wouldn't see, since some company reps don't call on him.

There was, as always, the experienced buyers at the Contemporary. Vern Schnell, 30-year veteran of the pro shop at Mayville (Wisc.) Golf Club told GOLFDOM that since the show offers the pro a lot to look at and he has continued to buy product in spite of the uncertainty of the economy.

Bubber Johnson, pro at the new Temple Hills Country Club in Nashville, Tenn., and a former pro at one of the Disney World resort courses, said the show offers a lot of mer-

chandising possibilities for the pro, but he too was unhappy with the "non-buyers" populating the floor.

Not too far away from home, but buying, was Rick Famlin, head pro at Ponte Vedra, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. "I really enjoy the show and it always seems like I do a lot of ordering," said Famlin, who has been at Ponte Vedra for 26 years.

Again though, the optimism seemed to come from the younger pros in attendance, those which had gone through the rigors of the business school and were now seeing their industry in action at Disney World. John Mullaney, a third-year pro at Beaver Hills Country Club, Cedar Falls, Ia., commented that he was hopeful for more sales this year. The midwest pro said he liked having the show in January, but mentioned that the Iowa PGA section was looking into having its own show in the fall for more convenient buying. This is a trend that many PGA sections around the country have already adopted.

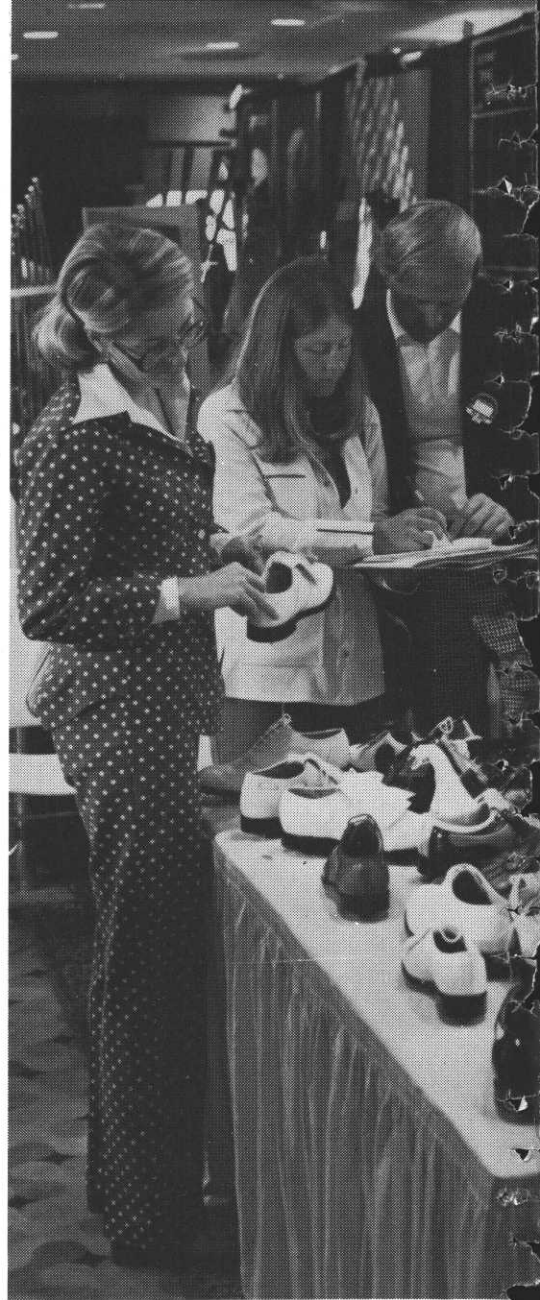
Ease of shopping by comparison was another plus the show offered according to Dick Stewart, Birchwood Farm Country Club, Harbor Springs, Mich. "I am very interested in the different soft good lines exhibited down here. When you see the companies set against each other, it's easier to decide what to buy."

Even with the optimism shown by some, there were pros that remember the slow days of '75. Glade Montgomery, pro at Liberty Country Club, near Richmond, Ind., said he was doing some buying at Orlando, but still had a watchword eye on the economy.

It is obvious the PGA Merchandise Show has come a long way in its 23-year history. The exhibitors have grown with the event so much so that the PGA is continually getting more requests for exhibitor space than it has.

No scientist can measure the effect a show like this has on sales. The show is obviously not set up for the great majority of professionals in the country, some 6,000 Class "A" head pros.

A PGA official admitted that the show will probably never rise to its maximum strength in numbers. It wasn't set up that way. □



Here, in clockwise order, are a few of the pros and personalities at the Contemporary Hotel. Above, there was order taking at many of the booths, but the soft goods people seemed to have had one of their best shows ever. At top right, Jim Atwood, pro at Tippecanoe Country Club, Leesburg, Ind., and his wife look over the latest from Royal Golf. Several of the younger equipment firms made a big impact at Orlando and at center, a pair of salesmen from Square Two talk over the day's business. There was work to be done by the PGA officials too. At right center, national secretary Don Padgett rests up on the last day of the show. Below center, several golf car companies appeared at the show including Pargo. Checking catalogs for products was another fulltime job for the pros. Claude Young of Lake Toxaway (N.C.) Country Club, looks at a Spalding booklet.

