

A checklist for selecting golf cars

by W. P. Stevens, Jr.

The recent rise in popularity and usage of golf cars cannot be denied or overlooked. Many courses have been designed and constructed with golf cars in mind and others have been adapted to allow their utilization. Hence, the question seems to be no longer whether they should be used or not, but rather how many and what type of cars are needed for the golf course.

Golf cars come in a variety of styles and sizes with a broad range of features and options. This diversity allows a wide latitude in selecting a car. The purchaser may not be able to determine which car is most suitable for his needs. Therefore, selection of the right product should be predicated on satisfying a number of parameters that are common to all golf cars.

The first step is the assignment of personnel to conduct a study of golf cars and to make the selection. If the course is privately owned, the owner or his delegate chooses the car. For a public course, the superintendent or the golf pro/manager will usually assume this responsibility. If the course is a membership club, then a committee is normally formed to perform the selection task. However, short of their direct involvement in the manufacture, sales, or distribution of golf cars (this should be avoided because of potential conflict of interest), most individuals concerned with golf car selection usually do not have sufficient expertise to make an informed decision. To aid them in this process, the following guidelines are offered to give them a basic foundation for making a suitable choice.

✓ Electric or gasoline

Electric cars make little noise, are fume-free, and require less maintenance. On the other hand, gasoline-powered cars do not need special power lines and hook-ups. Environmental and energy considerations will also bear heavily on the choice.

✓ Four-wheel vs. three-wheel

The four-wheel car is considered safer than the three-wheel version because of its greater stability. Also, the four-wheel type imposes less wear on the course because its weight is distributed over four wheels instead of just three.

✓ Quantity

Generally, a club should have a car for every eight to ten golfers. However, very few courses can afford to have an inventory of cars where the supply is never depleted. To "stretch" the fleet, choose a car that will go 72 holes and then be able to climb the steepest hill on the course. In this

Bill Stevens is operations manager of Johns-Manville Club Car in Augusta, Ga. A veteran of the industry, he has been involved in virtually all facets of the design, manufacture, and testing of golf cars.



Test driving a golf car before purchase is vitally necessary, though it need not be as strenuous as the factory test shown above. A check for ease of maintenance (right) is also a must.



manner, the course will be assured that the car will be able to handle 36 to 45 holes a day.

✓ Safety

The American National Safety Institute has established tentative safety standards on golf cars related to brakes, steering, stability, battery containment, and electrical components for both electric and gas powered cars. It is wise to consider only those cars that conform to these standards.

✓ Comfort

One of the best ways to check the comfort afforded by a car is to have the smallest women and the largest men operate it. If all the operating pedals are easily accessible to the smaller players and if the larger members are not uncomfortable while seated, driving the car, or getting out, it is fairly evident that the car will be suitable for the majority of users. Another checkpoint to consider is whether or not the car has adequate storage space.

✓ Braking system

If the car contains only one braking system, there is no way to stop the car if the brakes fail. People selecting cars for golf courses with hills or lakes should only consider cars that have a dual braking system.

✓ Corrosion resistance

Corrosion can reduce the life of a car by 1½ to 5 years. This is dependent upon how much and how often fertilizer is applied to the turf and prevailing moisture and salt air conditions. The combination of these factors in coastal areas is by far the most damaging. The proper car for these locations should be constructed of corrosion-free materials or utilize corrosion-resistant coatings.

✓ Ease of maintenance

In order to be sure the cars are properly maintained, all functional parts should be easily accessible. Availability of parts is also important. Service personnel should be available to train the course's mechanics. A technical manual

and parts book should be requested for assurance that replacement parts will be on hand for the life of the car.

✓ General handling qualities

The buyer of the golf car should check the car's performance: handling on turns, braking for smoothness and firmness, steering ease, starting performance, car stability.

✓ Testing

Testing is the one sure way to learn if the car will climb all the hills, whether the brakes will hold downhill, handling characteristics, riding comfort, the impression left on the turf, and other points important to car selection. (Bear in mind that all cars should be tested under the same turf and climatic conditions.) A distance test is of particular significance as it will show how many holes each fully charged car will handle. Each car must bear the same weight, usually about 400 pounds, and operate under the same start-stop conditions. Four complete stops are made at each hole. All cars start out together and each stops at the same spot at each hole. The results are vital for determining battery life.

✓ Purchase or Lease

Leasing is very important to courses just starting to use golf cars. Purchasers can determine the acceptability of golf cars by their members without making a major investment. Also, by working with an experienced lessor, they can obtain sound advice on the optimum number of cars for the course. Also, if the course needs more or less cars than originally estimated, the lessor is in a position to take the necessary action.

However, courses with more experience with golf cars usually purchase cars outright. The club buys, maintains and operates them, using a share of the profits to offset other areas that need money. For example, many clubs set aside a portion of the profits for course maintenance — repairing worn grass, particularly in high traffic areas, construction of car paths, bridges, etc. Furthermore, it has been found that club-owned cars are given better care, enhancing their appearance and performance.

✓ Warranty

It is important to deal with an experienced and financially sound company that will stand behind its product. Equally important is the reliability of the dealer and the service available. The warranty should be carefully studied by the course so that its rights are clearly understood and adequately guaranteed.

✓ Cost

Initial cost is often not the most important criteria. Quality and durability are far more critical than price. The difference in cost between the most and least expensive cars is not great, especially when the cost differential is extended over 3 to 4 years of normal ownership. The sturdier, better designed and engineered cars prove to be more profitable when all costs incurred in operating and maintaining a fleet are included and compared.

Golf cars are one of a club's largest sources of income and have great profit potential if you select your car wisely. □

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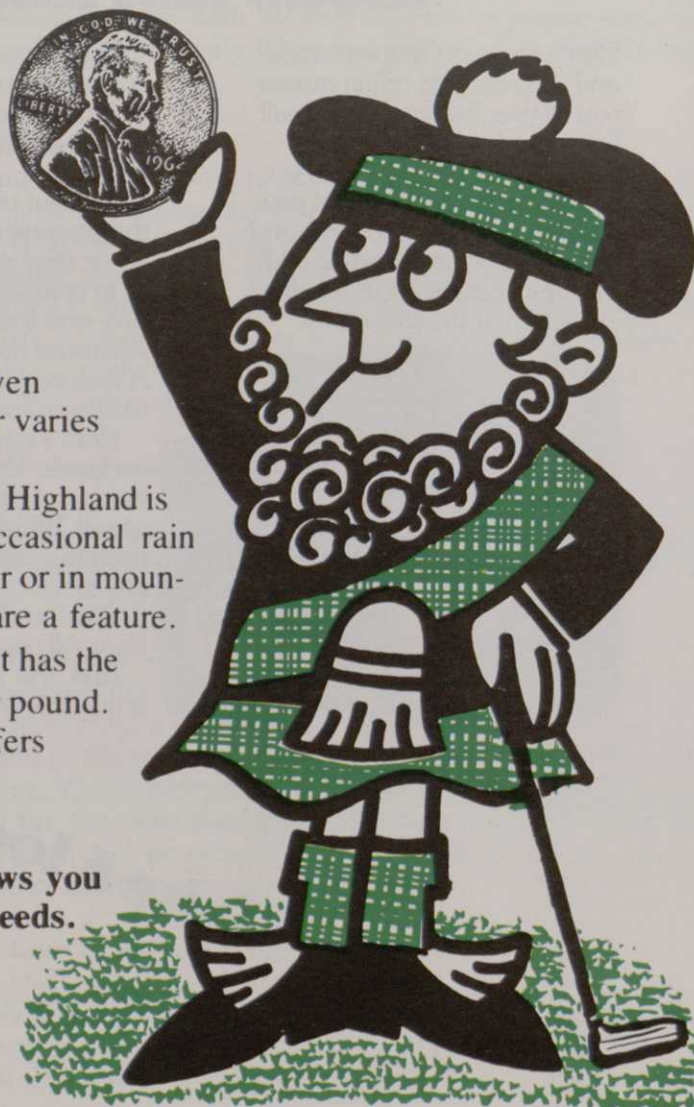
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