

Preventive maintenance keeps golf cars running — and earning

Golf cars represent a very profitable part of many golf facility operations, but also a substantial investment. It pays, therefore, to take good care of that investment in order to make the most of it. Golf cars don't make money when they are not running.

For golf cars, just as for humans, the best kind of medicine is preventive medicine. It is far better to establish and follow a routine of preventive maintenance and avoid costly downtime than to wait until a car is out of order and out of business to fix it. Fortunately, preventive maintenance of golf cars is not difficult. The following suggestions, culled from a variety of expert sources, will help prevent most problems if followed conscientiously. To further simplify things, we have grouped these maintenance procedures according to the parts of the car they apply to.

Body

Whether your golf cars have fiberglass, aluminum, or steel body panels — or a combination — the basics are the same.

Wash the car often. How often will depend on how dusty or muddy your course gets, but a good rule of thumb is to wash a golf car when it looks like it needs it — when it looks like a golfer might prefer not to rent it. Wash the car with soap and water. A household detergent will do, but nothing stronger. An automotive car wash soap is probably better, since it won't remove as much of the wax. Yes, it is a good idea to wax your golf cars.

Any good automobile wax or polish will work just fine. Just be sure the car is clean before waxing, and don't wax in the sun. A waxed golf car will last longer, will please your customers, and won't need washing as often. And, it will come clean easier.

Hose down the underside of the body and the chassis when washing a golf car, to remove mud and grass clippings.

When you wash a golf car is a good



Body

time to look for cracks in the fiberglass or dents in the metal — though it's best if the car is inspected for these things after each rental. Either way, if damage is found which might affect the structural integrity of the body or interfere with movement of the wheels or suspension, pull the car out of service to be repaired.

Upholstery

While you're washing a golf car is also a good time to look at the inside. Naturally, paper and other trash should be cleaned out after every rental or once a day, but it's a good idea to clean the upholstery periodically too. And it's best to do it before the seats get so dirty that golfers hesitate to sit down on them in their pastel golf slacks and skirts.

Soap and water can be used, but avoid harsh chemicals. An automotive-type vinyl cleaner works best.



Upholstery

As with the golf car body, cleaning time is also a good inspection time for the upholstery. Check for rips and tears, cigarette burns, and spike punctures from golfers who put their foot on the seat to tie their shoe. Minor burns and holes can be fixed with the help of an inexpensive vinyl repair kit, but if the damage is severe, you might have to buy seat covers or new upholstery.

Check the bag straps and their buckles, too. It's embarrassing and time-consuming when a golfer spills his irons down the first fairway because a bag strap didn't hold.

Tires and wheels

Check the tire tread regularly for cuts, nails, sharp stones, and so on — then check the sidewalls for cracks and separation from the tread. Naturally, if a tire looks low, you should check the air pressure. But it's best to check all of the tires occasionally with an accurate tire pressure gauge. Inflate them to the proper pressure, and make a note of any that are abnormally low. Those should be watched closely in the future to be sure that a car isn't sent out on a flat.



Mechanical

Recommended tire pressures vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, from 15 up to 25 pounds per square inch, so consult your owner's manual for the proper inflation for your golf cars.

Also look for uneven tread wear. Tires can be rotated from front to rear to even out wear and extend the life of the set, but greater wear on one side, in the middle, or on the outside edges

of a tire indicate the need for adjusting wheel alignment or air pressure.

Mechanical

Probably the most important part of a golf car to maintain in top condition at all times is not a part that makes it go — it is what makes the car stop: the brakes.

Keep the brakes adjusted to stop the car easily, to hold on the steepest hill on your course, to not pull to either side — but to not drag, either. Consult your owner's manual for specific procedure for your brand of golf car. Also be sure the brakes release automatically with the accelerator pedal.

Routine periodic brake maintenance involves inspecting the linings and drums for wear, maintaining the proper fluid level, and checking the cylinders and lines for leaks.

Lubrication schedules and procedures will also vary from one manufacturer to the next, but generally speaking you should be sure all moving parts, levers, rods, ball joints, hinge points, and cables move freely and are well lubricated. Check the differential oil level regularly.

Other mechanical checks involve testing the steering assembly for loose movement and looking for broken leaves in the car's springs. At least once per season, inspect and repack the front fork and wheel bearings.

A standard periodic "road test" should include listening for loose nuts and bolts and dragging parts as well as the more obvious things like testing the transmission's operation at various speeds and in reverse.

Engine

If your course owns gasoline-powered golf cars, there are also some elementary preventive maintenance features to follow for their engines.

Check the air filter regularly, especially if your cars run on dirt paths or in other dusty conditions, and clean or replace it as necessary. Also check the oil level if your cars have four-cycle engines. Inspect the fuel filter and clean or replace if necessary. If your brand of golf car doesn't have a filter between the fuel pump and the carburetor, consider installing one — it can help prevent carburetion problems before they begin.

While looking around the engine

Tires & Wheels



near the carburetor, check the operation of the throttle, choke, and governor cables or linkage. Lubricate them periodically or when they seem to bind or stick.

Belts should be examined regularly for cracks and fraying. Applying automobile fan belt dressing will not

only keep them quite, but will make them last longer as well.

Just as on an automobile engine, the spark plugs and distributor contact points should be inspected at regular intervals. If not badly burned or corroded, these can be cleaned and regapped. You can clean the plugs

with a wire brush, but a spark plug cleaning machine can be a good investment if you don't already have one in your shop. When you total up all of the spark plugs used in your mowers, tractors, trucks, maintenance vehicles, and other power equipment and add those to the ones in your golf cars, it's easy to realize how much money you could save by cleaning and reusing spark plugs instead of replacing them all the time.

Points can be cleaned with fine sandpaper or a very small, very fine file before resetting to the proper gap.

Consult your owner's manual golf car for further details and specific timing on all of the above procedures.

Electrical

Whether your cars are gas or electric, it's a good idea to check all wiring on the cars periodically. Tighten loose connections and tape or replace wires with cut or frayed insulation.

If your cars are electric, note the length of the motor brushes (once per season) and install new ones if necessary. Take an air hose and blow the dust and carbon out of the motor occasionally, too. Also clean and tighten the charger plug and receptacle.

We won't go into the details of battery care now, since that's enough material for another whole article (look for it in GOLF BUSINESS in about 2 months). In general, though: check water level at least once a week and add water if low; only add water after charging; try not to spill water on outside of batteries; clean off corrosion with baking soda; keep batteries charged, but don't overcharge; don't drain charge below level recommended by battery manufacturer.

Recordkeeping

Last but not least, keep good records on the use and maintenance of your golf cars. There are many ways to do it, but you should be able to know the condition of all cars at all times. You should know how much — and when — each car has been used as well as when and what maintenance has been performed on it.

Maintaining these records will not only help keep you ahead of trouble with your golf cars, it will also help you determine what it costs to maintain your golf cars — and, therefore, how much money they make. □



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