



In Bounds

By Jack MacKenzie, CGCS
North Oaks Golf Club

My son recently earned his driver's license. It didn't surprise me, as he has been practice driving since he was five. You name it: E-Z-Go, Club Car, Harley, Yamaha or Cushman, he has mastered them all. One of the multiple advantages of being the kid of a Superintendent! In fact, mastery of motion is critical for all rookie drivers.

It was no different for me growing up on a golf course. As I have mentioned before, my siblings and I spent many fun evenings driving the White Bear Yacht Club in "sun charged" carts. And once employed on the grounds crew it was only a matter of natural progression for me to move up to a three-on-the-tree manual Cushman complete with clutch.

Ah yes, the old indestructible backbone of the turf industry. With all of the gear grinding, heavy hauling, multi-driver abuse the units received, it was more usual than not to have one unit upon the lift for repairs or a tune up.

During the fall of 1978, while an orange flat bed Cushman was being worked upon, a prank developed among the senior members of the crew. A tall tale really, devoted to the annual rally of professional Cushman drivers and their mechanics, called the Cushman Nationals.

While the utility vehicle was on the lift, we would tell the story of how each club in the state would send a rookie driver and the mechanic to a local speedway for time trials and the opportunity to compete against other drivers. State elimination took place at Brainerd International Speedway. The annual fall event would prepare the winners for the "National" to be held at Daytona speedway in Florida sometime around Thanksgiving time.

Just imagine the look on the faces of our newbees as they learned of a buggy race that only they were eligible to entertain. Of course there were strict criteria. Accidents during the year disqualified the racers from entering. Participation was up to the judgment of the Superintendent. And there would be no practice driving upon the course!

It really helped to have the whole senior team on board with the fictional ruse. Roger Zolner, a long time employee with an interesting permanent facial expression that added to his tale of a meet and greet on an inside bank, would begin the twist. While changing a flat tire, Max Olson might subtly mention the advantages of smooth verses grooved tires in the speed runs. And of course the "older" college kids would turn the screw deeper with expanded drama

detailing fast Cushmans and even faster women at the competitions they were selected for.

For many weeks the young lads surely lost sleep dreaming about their chance to impress the world with impeccable driving skills. Rotary mowing had to have flown by as the kids went mindless thinking of tight turns, tank tops and taking home the gold! Indeed, the discussions while edging bunkers truly reached epic proportions as they verbally bantered the Cushman Nationals and the opportunities the challenge would provide. As the season waned, our contestants would take themselves out of the running. Perhaps an accident while raking bunkers, insubordination or even the request for a family vacation would gradually eliminate the first-year employees from the event. That was until only one potential participant remained.

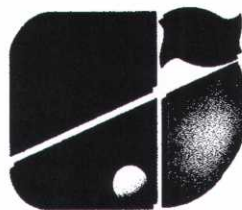
The build up was intense. Team colors and outfits had to be decided upon. The Cushman, back on the rack for an oil change, was being fitted with a nitrous tank. An old employee would visit and discuss strategy in the straightaway. The addition of winter inventory parts added to the illusion of preparation. Soon the date was decided for the state competition.

Dang it, the Cushman National Board of Directors once again selected the Tuesday after Labor Day to host the event. Nuts! That always happened to be the first day back to school!

Oh the fun we have!



North Oaks green staff members getting ready for the Cushman Nationals: I am looking for group and individual pictures of green staff members and crews along with club name. Everyone loves a picture, especially our key players. -- JM



**GILL
MILLER** INC.
Golf Course Architects

Design • Renovation • Master Planning • Practice Centers

122 North 2nd Street • River Falls, WI 54022 • 715-425-9511 • e-mail: info@gillmiller.com

visit our website www.gillmiller.com

Member: American Society of Golf Course Architects