

DODGEM-CARS

Patrick Smartt

Unwisely, I once wrote that I was shock-proof where golf is concerned, though disapproval still had its moments of activity.

As everyone who has ever listened to a political election speech knows, such positive assertions rebound. I read a while ago that in some clubs in the United States, members are required to play their round in golf carts! The reason presented is, I gather, that it speeds up play. There is a corollary in a quote from a professional to the effect that if he permitted the elder members to walk between strokes they would hold up the other players.

The purple-faced onset of a burst of blood pressure that this caricature of the game induced made it patent that I am a "square". I am, in short, shocked. At the present rate of retrogression, the young man of today who has been brought up in the traditions of golf will find himself a "square"—or, whatever the term may be then—in ten years time. I cannot visualise him on arrival at the club, transferring from a fast sports car to a "dodgem".

The problem of slow play is a very real one. I am constantly told that with overcrowded courses it is necessary to shave the rough, in order to save time looking for lost balls. Well, que sera, sera. The obvious question of why elect so many members is unpopular. I cannot see, however, why this should be solved by means that reduce a fine game to the equivalent of swinging dumb-bells at home.

There is a difference, as the late Gilbert Harding liked to point out, between a game and a sport. Golf is a game, but in contradistinction to bridge or bingo it is an outdoor game. Which means exercise. There are many instances of doctors suggesting to persons no longer young that they take up golf, because it entails walking. This I have always understood was directed to those who led a sedentary life, seated behind a desk, risking overweight and possible heart conditions.

Casting aside one's revulsion of

mechanised golf, it is diverting to review possibilities that could arise. I assume that these carts are single-seaters. If not, what happens when one player has sliced and the other hooked? Is an otherwise tedious wait going to be alleviated by listening to a stream of vituperative epithets, and the sight of an all-in wrestling match for possession of the steering tiller.

Eventually the couple behind, losing patience will drive off (mechanically), followed as shortly as possible by the next match. We now have several carts on the same hole, including the one concerned with the lost ball which will be trying to worm its way out like a motorist from a side road. If the carts are single-seaters there will be more traffic on each hole. A barging match seems inevitable, which is why I have named this piece Dodgem-Cars. These carts are not limited to the old. The young have to use them as well. What will be the condition of their legs when playing in a 36-hole tournament elsewhere?

Furthermore, fond memories of youthful exuberance on motor cycles and sports cars indicate some competitive dicing. With the passage of years the record for the course will be assessed in hours and minutes instead of the number of strokes used. Crash helmets, while looking odd, would leave my withers unwrung as a substitute for the popular cross of the headgear of an American engine-driver and that worn by a jockey.

For the few who are open-minded over methods of defeating an opponent, there seem to be opportunities for running over his ball (quite by mistake of course), or gradually edging his cart, himself and clubs into a bunker and then claiming a penalty. Other points in the Rules present themselves. If a cart breaks down and the player completes the round on foot, he has broken a club local rule (not the Rules of Golf). Does he lose the match? Again, if he sends for a mechanic, surely he is guilty of "undue delay".

An elderly watcher with limited
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Dodgem-Cars

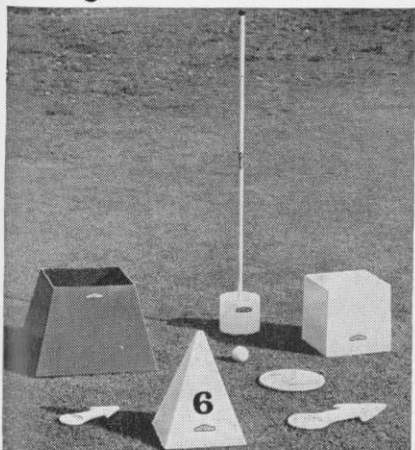
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walking powers, I should accept one for that purpose only. But when it comes to a Royal & Ancient game, Carts, are in the words of Winston Churchill (who on rare occasions directed a club in the general direction of the ball) something: "Up with which I will not put."



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