



Reinventing the *Wheel*

Part 2

Lee Manvell gives an update on the new Powakaddy wheel which BIGGA helped develop last year

Following what was possibly the worst December and January weather since the turn of the millennium any kind of good news story for golf course owners and greenkeepers has to be celebrated.

We reported back in October that Powakaddy had collaborated with BIGGA on the design and testing of a new winter wheel solution for electric trolleys. At the time we couldn't possibly have predicted how severe the weather would be over the winter and how vital this new product is proving not only for golf course owners and greenkeepers but also retailers and of course those hardy golf enthusiasts who wanted to play come rain, frost or snow. Granted many courses were completely closed for extended periods particularly in the run-up to Christmas and mid January but for many others Powakaddy's new winter wheel facilitated incremental green fees and ancillary revenue.

With the 'open tread' design inspired by lawn protection products, Powakaddy's new winter wheels very rapidly received widespread approval from greenkeepers, golf course owners, retailers and golfers. In the development phase the new winter wheel was rigorously tested by Powakaddy's design team in conjunction with a BIGGA advisory panel.

The wheel's key performance attributes, such as weight distribution, traction, turning ability and the subsequent affect on the grass blades, root damage and soil compaction were scrutinised and in all

cases the new winter wheels passed with flying colours and was ready for launch.

Terry Hale, Powakaddy's Chief Executive acknowledges the key role that Course Managers have played in the immediate impact of the new winter wheel solution. "The support of greenkeepers up and down the country has been the absolute key to the success of our winter wheels launch. Our on-course retail partners needed the buy-in from their Course Manager to be able to stock the product and I am pleased to say that the vast majority to date have embraced the concept".

Once the green staff had given the green light it then required golf retailers to stock the product at a time when they would be looking to run down stock as the year came to a close and in turn for Powakaddy electric trolley users to part with their hard earned cash for a new golf accessory.

As Simon Homer, Powakaddy's Sales Director explains, the uptake from both retailers and consumers has been extremely encouraging.

"We sold in the new wheel in limited numbers pre-Christmas to test the water and to ensure that the right process was being adhered to in terms of garnering support from individual Course Managers. The reaction was fantastic and we have some great anecdotal stories of golf professionals, faced with very low traffic coming through the door due to the weather, enjoying big demand for the wheels and giving their pre-Christmas turnover a welcome boost".

Once such retailer was Richard



ABOVE: Glenn Porter, Head of Engineering, Powakaddy.

Mudge from Staverton Park Golf Club, "We are very pleased that Powakaddy have come up with such an innovative product. At Staverton we do have trolley bans so the Winter Wheels have been a lifeline to our members as it allows them to play throughout the wet wintry conditions without damaging the course. Our Head Greenkeeper had no hesitation in giving them the thumbs up"

Probably more importantly for the long term impact of the new winter wheels as a revenue stream for golf course owners and retailers is that there hasn't appeared to be any adverse reaction from Course Managers once the winter wheels had actually been out on the course for an extended period of time with multiple users and dozens of round played in wet wintry conditions.

The usual symptoms with standard wheels would be damaged grass roots, muddy trails, compacted turf and skid marks but the open tread design, based on a principal seen in lawn protec-



tion mesh mat systems, evenly distributes the load over a smaller surface area avoiding compacting and denting.

At Haywards Heath Golf Club in West Sussex they have seen the benefits of the Winter Wheels and Andrew Smith – Senior Professional is delighted with the performance, “The new Powakaddy Winter Wheels have proven to be an invaluable asset. On soft ground the new wheel causes negligible damage. They have enabled at least 40 of our members to enjoy playing golf throughout this winter.”

With the launch period proving so successful and sales figures in the first two months well above plan Powakaddy is rolling out the winter wheels to as many golf clubs and retail partners as possible for the remainder of the winter while still being sensitive to the need for education and communication between the major stakeholders within a golf club.

As Simon Homer explains “it is imperative that the consultation

process between greenkeeper and retailer, that has been so vital to the success of our winter wheels to date, continues as consumer demand for the product increases. We have to make sure that the benefits of the product are effectively communicated to all parties so the positive impact on course conditioning is fully understood.”

With the emphasis very much on education Powakaddy has embarked on a comprehensive trade focused PR and communications campaign, including extended articles in the key golf trade press, trial sets being issued by Powakaddy Sales Managers and the production of a promotional video to visually demonstrate the key features and benefits of the winter wheels. In addition the company made its debut at the BTME show in Harrogate at the end of January to showcase the product and facilitate as many one-on-one conversations with greenkeepers as possible.

“The feedback from the BTME show was extremely encouraging



ABOVE: Andrew Smith, Senior Professional, Haywards Heath, who gave a testimonial on the Powakaddy video.

and an important element in the ongoing consultation process” commented Homer. Popularity of the winter wheels has been so high that Powakaddy now plans to extend the availability to sister brand Hill Billy trolleys later in the year.

With no ill effects on course conditioning for greenkeepers, increased traffic, rental fleet revenue and member satisfaction for golf course owners and incremental business for retailers during the slow winter months, Powakaddy’s winter wheels are certainly ticking a lot of boxes.

Ultimately the final word must go to the hard core golfers that keep this industry ticking over. For older players or players with injuries, an electric trolley is the only way they can play and for many others it is a major part of their enjoyment of the game so it is heartening to see a new product introduced that is not just marketing fluff but has tangible benefits to the end user.

Lee Manvell is Group Product Manager for Powakaddy