

# Golf Cart Usage

Daniel Albaugh  
Ruffled Feathers G.C.

The topic that I have chosen to write about for this month's *On Course*, Ask the Expert column is golf cart traffic and its control. I believe that the general golfing public has a lack of education and understanding when it comes to golf and the damage that golf carts cause. I believe that our job is made particularly difficult by the fact that fewer than one percent of the golfing public has any agricultural background in their upbringing or education. These golfers all watch the nationally televised golf events and do not understand that the event has been prepared for with much forethought and meticulous detail. One of these small details is the exclusion of golf cart traffic.

In the beginning of golf, you had a man, a ball, and a few clubs. The golf course itself was sculpted by Mother Nature with help from the winds of time. Rules of play evolved, and golf made its way to America. At the turn of the century, many of our best known and loved golf courses were constructed. Many clubs that were built developed rivalries amongst the memberships, which, in turn, developed more courses.

Back in those days, the preferred method to play the game was to walk, or, if you were lucky enough, you could afford to have a caddy carry your bag for you. As caddies carried these golfers' bags, they themselves developed a love for the game and hence became the second generation of players.

According to Walter H. Fuchs, CGCS, the first golf carts were developed by American

companies such as E-Z GO, Cushman and Harley Davidson. All these carts showed up around 1951. At first, not many players used these carts. The typical player that used carts at this time was a player with some kind of physical condition who usually could not enjoy the game without the aid of the mobility provided by

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the mechanized cart. In the late 1960s, golf carts began to be utilized by most golf courses. At some golf courses, they were used more than at others. At these courses, the greenkeepers at that time started to notice that certain areas, especially near tees and greens, began to show damage due to the wear and tear caused by carts. Once these greenkeepers completed tee and green side cart path installation, they noticed that the wear and tear kept eating away at the ends of the paths. Walter

said that the golfers always hit the same spot; and over the years, he found that if you end the cart path with a gentle curve into the rough, it seems to scatter the players or carts in multiple directions. This minimizes wear at the ends of the paths. This confirms my observation that most golfers are like sheep; they just follow the player in front of them much like sheep hopping through a fence.

In the 1970s, new courses were constructed with golf carts in mind. These new courses were built with continuous cart paths. The idea was that if you had a continuous path, you would not find any worn areas. The idea was nice, but now golf course superintendents found most of the wear at the entrances and exits of the fairways. Again the golfers or carts all converged in the same spots. This is when the rope and stake market developed and, unfortunately, is still here today. To me, nothing looks more obtrusive than ropes and stakes; but until someone develops something better, I believe that they offer the best way to direct cart traffic away from areas that are wet or worn. At Ruffled Feathers, I have found the Flex-Stake to work well in our situation.

Revenue is the cry heard by golf course superintendents. Without carts, golf courses would not make any money. I have read that 85 to 90 percent of the damage inflicted on turf is caused by golf carts. I believe that most, if not all, the money made in cart revenue is lost when you consider the cost of the labor to maintain the cart fleet, the cost to resod all the areas that are worn to bare soil, the cost to irrigate the newly sodded areas, and then the cost to repair the areas that were damaged

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while you were repairing the first area (not to mention the cost to move the ropes and stakes around every other day.) However, it is difficult to put numbers on damage that may happen as a result of cart traffic and explain this to a number cruncher.

Another thing that I often hear is that golf carts speed up play. Here at Ruffled Feathers, I have observed that on days that we are on cart paths only and we have a booked tee sheet that it takes between 4 1/2 and 5 1/2 hours to play all 18 holes. On days that we are using the 90 degree rule or are under no cart restrictions, it takes the same amount of time. What the cart does is gives the golfers more time to drive around and hunt for golf balls in our federally protected wetlands or allows them to drive up and down the fairways

from sprinkler head to sprinkler head to check the yardage marked on the sprinkler heads.

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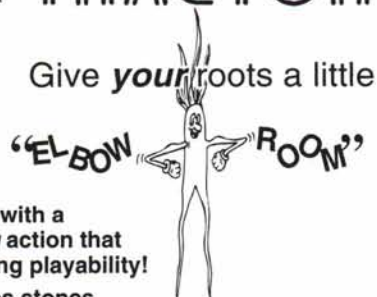
walker is at one with his environment and game; he is walking down the hole from tee to green. He passes the sprinklers and yardage markers on his way down

the hole from shot to shot. He can tell if a particular fairway is wet or dry and, therefore, usually does not have to second-guess his shot and club up or club down. The walking golfer has less time to hunt for lost balls and pays more attention to his shot; therefore, he spends less time searching for errant shots. The golfer on the cart seems to pay more attention to the general direction that the ball flies and not where the ball lands. He thinks that he will find the ball faster by driving up and down the rough even though he did not see the ball bounce to another area.

All national golf events are widely televised and are played at courses that are well conditioned. The preparation for a U.S. Open typically starts five to six years prior to the event. Danny Quast, superintendent at Medinah Country Club who hosted the last

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U.S. Open in the Chicago area in 1990, stated that prior to the event cart traffic was restricted on course No. 3 for one month before the tournament. Danny stated in addition to compaction, the roughs become matted down, producing poor lies. The rough does not stand erect and upright as needed for such an event. Danny also stated that he believes that 90 percent of the damage caused at the course he maintains is caused by cart traffic.

Dave Ward, superintendent at Olympia Fields Country Club, hosted the USGA Senior Open last June. Dave also held golf cart traffic off the course that he maintained for three weeks prior to the Seniors event. Dave said it is amazing how rapidly the turf healed before the event. Typically, there are no cart restrictions, barring the weather, at Olympia Fields.

My next door neighbor at Cog Hill Golf and Country Club hosts the Western Open on an annual basis. Ken Lapp holds carts to cart paths only for two weeks before the Western. He also closes the course to play one week

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before. He plans to do the same for the U.S. Amateur this August, except the course will be open for play the week before the Amateur.

Golf has a very rich history and tradition, more so than any other sport. It is a game of honor and integrity where there are no referees but the players themselves. Golf has captured a wide audience and has had many widely-known players through the ages from Old Tom Morris, Chick Evans, Gene Sarazen, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and today's greats like Tiger Woods and Justin Lenards. People love to watch these players. They emulate their favorites. Tiger won at Augusta using the Titleist Cameroon Putter. Our pro shop still cannot keep it stocked. John Daly hit 300-yard drives with the Big Bertha driver! So every one must have a Big Bertha driver. All I know is that I have never seen Arnold, Jack, or Tiger hop on a cart and drive down a fairway. I am still waiting for the general golfing public to hop on the "play like the pros, and let's walk" bandwagon. ■

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