



# Palm Beach Trade Winds



## TAKE IT FOR A TEST DRIVE

Suppose your car is running poorly. It's been some time since the last tune up, so you take it into the shop for service. As you drive home, you find it still idles rough. To your dismay, you find the mechanic failed to take it for a test drive. He installed new plugs, a rotor cap, and everything else required for a textbook tune up but unless he took it for a test drive, the mechanic can not be certain everything is just right. Perhaps the timing is just a degree or two off causing that rough idle. Something relatively minor was overlooked, which appears to the customer as an unsatisfactory service.

This same analogy could be used within the golf course superintendent's profession. A golfer plays the course. Everything appears textbook perfect. The cups have just been set, the greens and tees mowed, and even the coolers are freshly filled with ice and water. However, maybe

there is something wrong — something that only a test drive would notice. Presumably, it would be something rather specific and technical, much like the case where only the mechanic tuning your car would understand and be able to correct. Your problem is, the golfer realizes it's not quite right, but they do not totally understand why.


A good example might be that the golfer complains of missing putts. Just as the ball heads right toward the cup, it veers off to the side! Perhaps the employee changing cups incorrectly pulled the cup cutter up too fast thereby slightly heaving the soil around the new cup. The employee was totally unaware of such a mistake and even the golfer can not see the ever so slight hump around the pin.

The problem could have been overcome if the employee had performed the complete job function. By stepping firmly on the cup setter tool which automatically depresses the cup to a pre-determined depth along with leveling the turfgrass at the rim of the new cup, this would virtually eliminate the heaving and perhaps the golfer's putt would truly roll into the center of the cup, producing customer satisfaction.

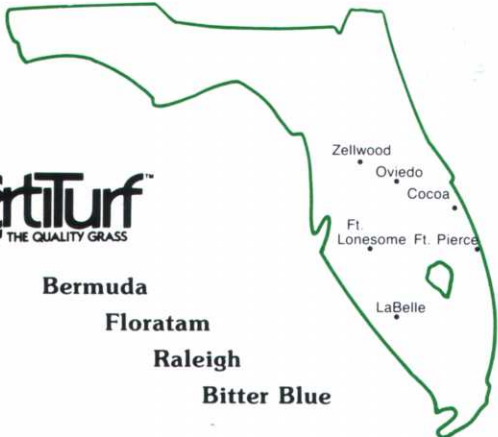
Sometimes a mistake with the tune up can be psychological. Perhaps it could be the golfer's inability to play the game where every tee shot is a drastic fade off to the right and only a lesson from the pro and a few buckets of range balls might cure. Yet, you are often to blame. Are those tee markers lined up correctly on the tee? Many times I have heard complaints such as, "the tee markers are set crooked and that caused me to aim towards the lake." The fact is, it's only human for the golfer to ignore his own inability. Perhaps the tee was designed oval in shape, therefore an optical illusion of aiming towards the center of the fairway lies solely upon the angle of the tee markers. As a supervisor, you might drive past that problem tee several times a day. How often do you have time to stand on every tee, every day? Probably not very often! It was beginning to seem every golfer's out of bounds banana ball was being blamed on our crew setting crooked tee markers. To help combat this complaint, the employee now places a tee square towards the center of the landing area target to confirm proper alignment. I must admit, it's amazing how an improper alignment of just one foot for either tee marker can misalign the golfer to the rough. Here again a test drive can reveal a legitimate problem. To help resolve this problem, it's even better if the employee is allowed to

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play the course periodically to better appreciate the intensity of the problem.

If that complaint seemed peculiar, how about this one. Once I heard a lady complain, "the water in the coolers taste like diesel fuel." I am not exactly sure what diesel fuel tastes like, so I immediately proceeded to the seventh tee to get a drink of diesel. To my dismay, one quick sip concluded a plastic, rubbery aftertaste. An employee had inadvertently filled the water coolers from a newly installed garden hose. This water cooler was located on a part of the golf course where, as a supervisor, I seldom frequented. As a golfer, the water cooler was located at a far corner of the course after a long par five. I have now learned to test drive each water cooler every morning. Even if I'm not thirsty, I at least taste samples for a diesel aftertaste. Since then, we wash the jugs every Friday morning, and even spray and clean the push button spigot with a toothbrush once a week so those two year old water coolers appear fresh and new.

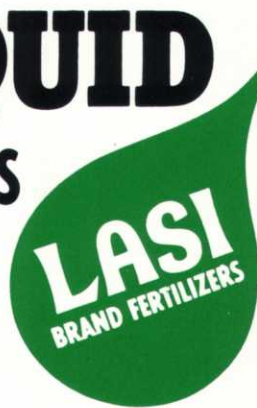
These three examples are common complaints within our industry. Sure, we know how to resolve such issues — take it for a test drive. Who else is better qualified to critique the golf course than the golf course superintendent? Yes, the golf pro can best understand playing the game and how to play the course. The men's or lady's club champion can best analyze the course from a member's point of view. But who knows the golf course best from an agronomic point of view? Because of this, it is best for the golf course superintendent to periodically take it for a test drive.

The next question is, how often should the golf course superintendent play golf? The answer will vary between clubs. Hopefully your club does not frown upon having the superintendent play on a regular basis. A superintendent will view the course from a player's point of view. Something will be noticed. It might be minor, yet on the other hand it could be major. The point is, it will be time well spent. A resort or municipal operation might consider the superintendent's tee time as a loss of revenue. A private club might consider the tee time an inconvenience to the members. But, while playing the course is a privilege, it is also a duty — a duty the superintendent should perform. And it doesn't stop with the superintendent. The maintenance staff, if allowed to play on designated days, can also benefit the club. To appreciate pin placements, the raking of bunkers, the mowing of greens, tees, fairways and rough, along with fresh drinking water, it is best approached from the playing point of view.

I am probably as particular as anyone about their car. I park way out in the corner of the parking lot to prevent door dings and I would not let just anyone drive it around town. However when it goes in for service, I prefer the mechanic to take it for a thorough test drive around town. Test the brakes and the air. Take it out on the highway, but don't abuse the test.

This would also apply when taking the golf course for a test drive. Play the golf course as thoroughly and as often as necessary to determine its optimal condition, but don't race the engine past the red line. ■

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