

Cars CAN be modified for special handicaps

Golf cars are not designed to fill the needs of the physically challenged.

Yet, as National Amputee Golf Association Executive Director Bob Wilson said: "When you start getting into the question of wheelchairs you really open up a can of worms. Unless a person can get out of the car and into a chair unassisted, you've got problems."

Now a number of golfers are finding an alternative — having a golf car customized to fit their particular handicaps.

Probably the first handicapped golfer to have a golf car customized was Dennis Walters, who was on the verge of joining the PGA Qualifying Tour in 1974 when a fluke accident rendered him paralyzed from the waist down.

After the accident, Walters customized a car "by trial and error," and it has been his ticket onto the course ever since.

In fact, each year he gives dozens of trick-shot exhibitions from his car. The vehicle sports a seat that swings out to the side 90 degrees, allowing him to make his shot and swing back into the car.

"I have blueprints and if anybody writes in, I send them the blueprints," he said.

Handicapped

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and expense-wise" the hospital could never operate a course just for the handicapped.

Asked if Edwin Shaw's pioneering program is a breakthrough for handicapped golfers, Wilson said: "It's got to start some place... Possibly once it hits the papers and gets publicized enough, the next logical step is that other people say, 'Hey, we're doing this (training) in a gymnasium with whiffle balls; we've got 150 acres out here that nobody's using for anything; why don't we put in a golf course?'"

As for Edwin Shaw Hospital's part, Cinson said: "Our planning committee is really ready to go. We're anxious..."



Dennis Walters tees off from his specially designed golf car during one of his many demonstrations.

"Machine shops can make the alterations easily."

"There are a lot of people all over this country who didn't think it was possible they could ever play golf," Walters said. "At least now people know they have the option. It is possible now."

Walters said that at each of the 82 shows where he performed last year "there were people in wheelchairs. Now they're aware it's possible. When they know that, they'll want to do it."

Special training said making major impact

Longo, Carbin videotapes open frontiers to challenged

Handicapped people, who a few years ago had little hope of playing golf, may soon have a major impact on golf courses around the country.

From Dennis Walter's public exhibitions to Peter Longo's "Challenge Golf" video and Kathy Corbin's "Never Say Never" video and program, the handicapped are being taught golf. They are finding that the game is not the impossibility they had thought, but rather can be an important part of their rehabilitation.

The National Amputee Golf Association, based in Amherst, N.H., has high expectations for the First Swing program which was developed by the Professional Golf Foundation's Junior Golf Foundation as an instructional booklet.

Last year NAGA Executive Director Bob Wilson taught eight First Swing seminars, and this year he already has 16 scheduled. One that he held at Grand Junction Veterans Administration Medical Center in Colorado in February attracted 130 participants, including more than 90 in wheelchairs.

"The main thrust of our First Swing program is to provide physical recreation thera-

pists with the basics of the golf swing so that they can use that as a form of rehabilitation," Wilson said. "If you wanted to look at the amputee population, it's probably skewed pretty much to the elderly from the standpoint that most of them suffer amputations because of diabetes. It doesn't matter if you're 4 or 104, the first swing is still your first swing."

"I imagine that if you're talking about 60- to 70-year-olds, they were golfers when they had all their parts. By using golf as a rehab vehicle, the idea is to show them that they can still play this game even though they're missing a part, and to get them out there playing again."

Wilson said he will conduct a First Swing seminar and clinic at any hospital that would like to host one, not just VA facilities, many of which have golf courses.

"Until Kathy Corbin and Peter Longo came along there was nothing (for the physically challenged)," Wilson said, adding that "Never Say Never" and "Challenge Golf" have had a major impact.

Wilson expects a growth spurt in handicapped golfers in the next few years because of First Swing and other clinics for the handicapped. "And they've all got buddies, too," he said. "By 1995 there's going to be a big demand" for golf courses to be accessible to the handicapped.

LPGA pro's plans for 18-holer in works

While Edwin Shaw Hospital proceeds with its plans for a golf facility for the handicapped, Ladies Professional Golf Association teaching pro Shirley Hicks is close on its tail with a plan to build a full handicapped-accessible 18-hole golf course.

Hicks, a nurse who recently retired from the U.S. Navy and is living in Dublin, Calif., has her sights on a parcel of land in Barryville, Ark. She says the project is basically being slowed by indecisiveness of the landowner. She wants to buy 120 acres; he wants to sell 90.

Hicks said she is hoping for a quick resolu-

tion because she wants to begin work on at least a couple of holes soon.

She has not decided who will build the course.

She said Merrill-Lynch in Little Rock, Ark., and Kodak have expressed interest in helping fund the project, but have not committed themselves.

"We probably will know (the project's status) within the next six months," Hicks said. "The package is being revised and rewritten, and there are a lot of politics involved."

Hicks consulted Bob Wilson, executive

director of the National Amputee Golf Association, and Dr. Alice Martinson, among others.

"One of our biggest problems is to find a kind of material to put on the greens so we can put wheelchairs on them. Another is to make the course difficult enough so that it will be a challenge, but not too difficult so that it will impair anyone's ability to play it," Hicks said.

She said southwest Arkansas is considered the third most desirable part of the country for retirees, taking into consideration weather, land costs and other factors.

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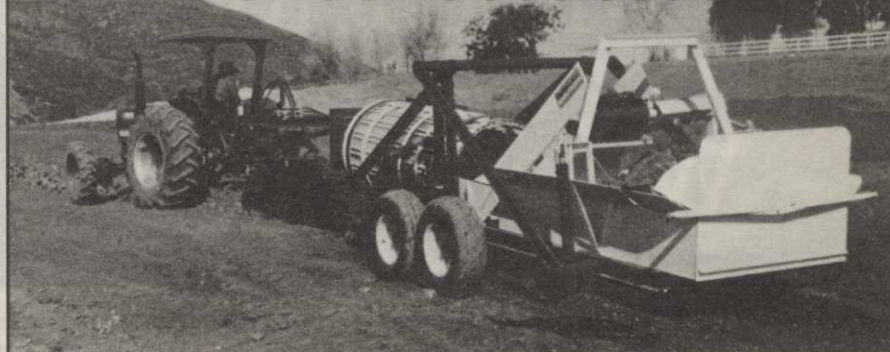
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