

Field days showcase the future of turfgrass

To say that the last few years have been tough in the seed business would be a drastic understatement. The turfgrass industry has been dealing with the oversupply caused by the AgriBioTech bankruptcy, the drop in golf course construction and the overall slowdown of the U.S. economy — a potentially disastrous triple whammy.

So far companies are taking the low times in stride, and citing the cyclical nature of the business, predicting an upturn in the near future.

While the business may move in cycles, research and development work must continue unabated for companies to remain competitive. No matter how depressed the market is today, companies must focus on the future to survive. This point was hammered home during June's annual turf field days in Idaho and Oregon.

Because it can take more than 10 years to bring a new turfgrass variety to market, research and development must be nearly constant. Jacklin Seed's research director Doug Brede has been working on the company's soon-



Andrew Overbeck,
editor

to-be-released T-1 and T-2 bentgrass since 1994 (see article page 16). Turf-Seed's Crystal Rose-Fricker started working on selecting fescues and bentgrass for natural Roundup resistance more than 10 years ago (GCN July 2002).

Turfgrass breeders continue to search for new varieties to improve not only appearance and convenience, but also to resist diseases and be easier to maintain. Selecting turfgrass plants for salt tolerance and drought, herbicide and disease resistance is not for the faint at heart. As Rose-Fricker pointed out on a tour around the company's Pure Seed Testing facility, a lot of time and energy goes into trying to kill turfgrass. Plants are doused with salt water, sprayed with Roundup and injected with fungi. What survives this treatment makes it to the next level of testing and brings the industry one step closer to an improved variety.

Genetic modification, however, has the potential to speed up the process and change turfgrass as we know it. The big question is, will modified varieties be allowed to reach the market? At press time, the Scotts Co. and Monsanto were fighting

to gain approval for the production field testing of its Roundup ready bentgrass in Oregon (see www.golfcoursenews.com for an update), while Turf-Seed works to prevent the testing as it develops male sterile varieties of Roundup resistant turfgrass. The

development of Roundup ready bentgrass could slow the advancement of other genetic modification in turfgrass. While the size of the market for Roundup ready bentgrass may not be huge, the rest of the golf industry could benefit from turfgrass that was engi-



danger, according to Turf-Seed president Bill Rose, is the potential for genetically modified bentgrass to contaminate normal plants during the growing and production process. The result would be bentgrass seed that could not be sold in Europe and Japan.

As the debate rages on, industry insiders say holding back the

needed specifically to prevent dollar spot or completely out-compete Poa annua.

What will we see in the next 10 years? While there are still numerous issues to be addressed, genetically modified turfgrass will eventually make it to market as companies look to the future. The possibilities are seemingly endless.

POINT

Golf cars should be an optional part of the game

By Dr. MICHAEL HURDZAN

If Winston Churchill did call golf "a good walk spoiled," imagine his description of golf if you took out the "walk" part.

I have no problem using golf cars where the climate or terrain will not permit walking golf, or for golfers who because of age or disabilities cannot walk. But for these exceptions, I believe that golf cars should be a dispensable, or at least optional, part of the game. I further believe that golf cars often help developers accept, justify or rationalize dysfunctional spatial separation (i.e. long rides between holes and golf course features).

That aside, whether one approves or disapproves of walking golf has a lot to do with the pleasure or the value that each individual gets from the game.

I am an admitted purist who prefers the brand of golf found on historic and traditional golf courses in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. I classify rampant golf car use as part of the definition of North American golf, in addition to lush green playing conditions, sparkling white and perfectly manicured sand bunkers and ornamental accent plantings. In North American golf the emphasis is more on getting the ball into the hole in the fewest strokes, rather than the experience of the quiet exhilaration of walking through a sensually vibrant environment while striking a golf ball.

I have been blessed to be around golf for more than 50 years, beginning as a caddie at a family-owned nine-hole course before the age of golf cars. I was lured to a career in golf by the pleasant sensation and vivid memory of being part of a group of walking golfers. It was the soft banter of four-way conversation against the



Michael Hurdzan

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COUNTERPOINT

Golf cars are a necessary part of the game

By TOM FAZIO

Over the last 30 years, the use of golf cars has had a major impact on modern-day golf courses. Though I can understand the arguments of those who believe that cars are a detriment to the game and a hindrance to quality golf, I believe that, if done well, they can be incorporated into the golf course without having a major negative impact.

There are many pieces of property where, without golf cars, golf course construction would be impossible. Often times, location, the accessibility of caddies and/or the drastic elevation changes require the mandatory use of golf cars. Out of the approximately 16,000 golf courses across the continental United States, as many as 30 percent are on land that is challenging in elevation and features difficult terrain. The golf car allows people to traverse these properties making them viable for golf. Therefore, some 4,000 to 5,000 courses depend on golf cars for operation.

The most challenging aspect of creating new golf courses is integrating car paths. Although we deal with many site conditions including environmental and real estate concerns, the solutions are in most cases obvious. But integrating golf cars into the layout of the course can be difficult.

In the mid-1960s, a golf car was not necessarily considered in design. Paths were placed around some tees and some greens, but they were never a continuous path around a course. Full-course path systems have become almost commonplace only over the last 10 to 20 years.

I can remember visiting one potential client, and his first comment was, "We will not have any car paths on this golf course." After



Tom Fazio

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Game should not be dependent on golf car revenue

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backdrop of gently clanging golf clubs and the squeak of a real leather golf bag strap, echoing the cadence of our steps that drew me in. You could feel the topography of the golf hole as you strained a bit going up grades and then free-wheeling down them.

When golf cars are used, those things are lost and the game of golf simply becomes a matter of hitting the ball, finding it and hitting it again. Walking golf tunes your senses to the nature of things and the game seems more alive. Aside from the ethereal losses caused by golf cars, there are other troubling aspects.

First, most golf courses with predominant car use usually have extensive pathway systems, which are generally paved, and as a result, add a hard, unattractive line to the golf landscape. Hiding the paths usually requires either extra earthmoving and shaping or placing the paths so far from the sightline of the hole that the path is no longer conveniently close to the play areas, which in turn leads to slow play as golfers hike back and forth. Golf car paths are expensive,

adding hundreds of thousands of dollars to construction costs, which ultimately is paid for by golfers.

Golf cars can cause damage to the turf or compaction to the soil if driven off the path in the same area repeatedly. Golfers rarely treat golf cars as serious and dangerous motor vehicles and often drive them like four wheel-

ers, sometimes resulting in serious accidents. For all of these reasons, golf cars are serious sources of liability for golf courses operators and owners that require an extra vigilance on their part to ensure safety.

The most discouraging thing to me about golf cars is that so many golf course feasibility studies show golf car revenue as a

significant source of income. This is sad because golf is a wonderful game and should not be dependent upon golf car revenue to determine its future.

Again, I concede that some golf courses couldn't exist if golf cars were not used, but this should be the exception, not the rule. I am a Casey Martin fan, and I strongly support barrier-free golf courses for physically challenged golfers, and it doesn't bother me that some

fit people won't play golf if they can't ride between shots. However, I do believe that walking golf is more fun, as well as more stimulating and relaxing, and healthier than riding golf. I am not against golf cars, but I am against a mindset that doesn't ever allow for walking golf. ■

Dr. Michael Hurdzan is president of Hurdzan, Fry Golf Course Design in Columbus, Ohio.

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Cars a necessity

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studying the site, I came to the conclusion that as much as I agreed with him, a car path system was necessary because of soil conditions and overall maintenance considerations. As a result, we designed an integrated trail system throughout the course that was used by both golfers and maintenance vehicles.

In the design of car paths, I maintain certain criteria. Car paths should never be a dominant design factor of a golf hole. Golfers should not see the path from the tee or the middle of the fairway, nor should paths interfere with normal golf shots. Placement of paths in relation to traffic flow and hazard placement is also important. For example, when water exists on both sides of a golf hole path placement requires serious consideration. In these situations where you put the path becomes a difficult and important part of the design.

This brings us back to the original question: Do golf cars negatively impact the game of golf? I look at a course as both a golfer and as a walker (I consider myself a walker). Regardless of the impact, positive or negative, in the real world, cars have become a necessary part of the game, and I adjust course design accordingly. ■

Tom Fazio is the president of Fazio Golf Course Designers, Inc. in Jupiter, Fla.

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