



Jack Henkel, who was an assistant at Turf Valley, but now has his own shop in Lancaster, Pa., discusses merchandising with another employee, Ernie Nortman. Bill Strausbaugh, Turf Valley pro, wasn't at the club the day *Golfdom's* photographer took this picture.

Turf Valley Shop Plays with Display to Increase Sales

Golf tastes constantly change . . . So Bill Strausbaugh and his staff reason you have to improvise your merchandising game to keep up with them

By JOE DOAN

To say that a race horse built Turf Valley CC, located in bluegrass country just east of the Blue Ridge mountains near Ellicott City, Md., wouldn't be completely accurate. But a horse made the down payment on this multi-million dollar golf installation that Builder Sam Pistorio staked out around 1960 after draining a large expanse of swampland just north of Route 40.

The horse's name was Tuscany. You may have laid a few bob on him. Less than a decade ago he earned a quarter of a million for Pistorio at Eastern and mid-Southern tracks. Ordinarily, when a horse owner realizes such a windfall he starts shopping around for another thoroughbred or two with an eye to pyramiding his fortune, but Sam had different ideas. He had been looking at that swamp too long. He wanted to reclaim it.

It was located just below and to the east of his horse farm. The farm covers about 700 acres and located right in the center of it is a one-quarter mile enclosed race track. Just to the west of the farm is an airport that Pistorio also owns. Since Maryland is far from being Texas-size you might get the impression that Sam owns practically the entire state, but he disclaims any ambitions to build an empire. "I hold a few thousand acres in this area," he says. "They keep me busy. I'm happy to be around golfers and horses."

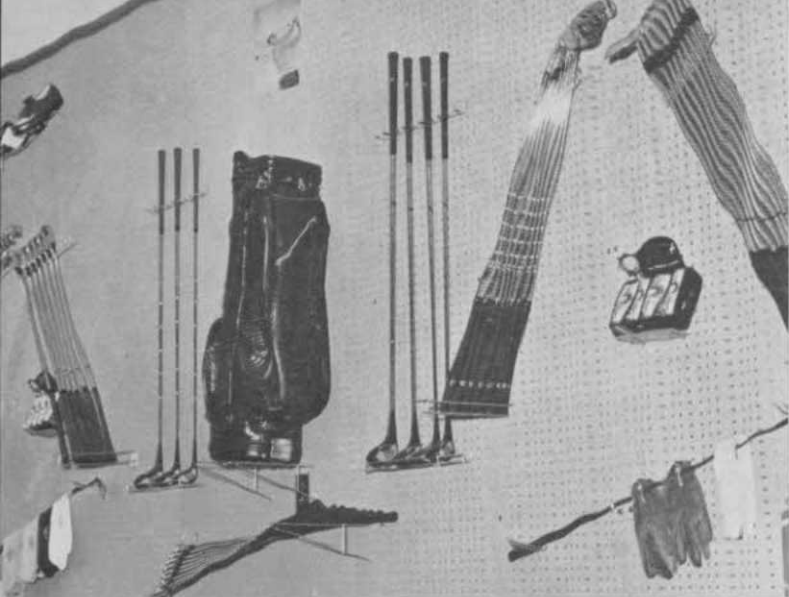
Magnificent Clubhouse

Golfers probably don't see much of the busy Pistorio, but they are happy to be around his Turf Valley club. Its magnificent clubhouse walls in something like 30,000 square feet of floor space and there are dining rooms, ballrooms, lounges and card rooms to take care of almost any kind of social occasion. The 11,000 square feet of swimming pool is said to be the largest of its kind at any private club between Maine and Florida.

As for the golf facilities, they are being expanded at the moment from 18 to 27 holes and eventually there will be 36. Architect Ed Ault is supervising the expansion. The original 18 extends to 6,850 yards along the back tee route, and considering that there are 500 golfing members at Turf Valley, the club knows days when traffic is somewhat congested. But this will be alleviated, perhaps by late fall. The Ladies PGA cavalcade invaded Turf Valley last year to play the Kelly

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**Inside Bill Strausbaugh's
Shop at Turf Valley**





Approximately \$1 million has been invested in big, rambling Turf Valley clubhouse (top). Lake in foreground is one of five on the club's property. Since a race horse provided the down payment on the club, it's appropriate that an equine farm is located next door (below). Horses can stand at fence and watch golfers on three holes at Turf Valley.

Girl Open and this year it will return for a renewal of the event under the name of the Sight Open.

Draws from Four Cities

The membership rolls at Turf Valley include many names from Frederick, Baltimore and Hagerstown and a fairly large quorum from Washington, D. C. A large percentage of these people is in the "new club member" class, meaning that Pro Bill Strausbaugh has had to work overtime in the last two years or so to orient them to buying in the pro shop. Considering that he finds it necessary to carry an average inventory of something like \$25,000, it appears that Bill perhaps has discovered a magic formula.

"There's no magic about it," says Strausbaugh, "We've just kept plugging. Most of the members were never hesitant in buying the lower price items, but getting them to buy pro-make clubs has been something else. Yet," the Turf Valley shopmaster continues, "we can't complain too much. We got smart about a year or so ago and started getting people interested in buying broken sets with the idea of filling them in later.

"Some people in the golf field frown on this," Strausbaugh observes, "but may-

be it's because they haven't worked at a new spot where many of the members are joining a club for the first time and possibly haven't played golf before. If you have to wean them away from the stores by suggesting seven- or nine-club sets, then that's the thing to do. The idea is to win them over. Then you can start talking 14-club sets."

There is a natural tie-in, incidentally, between the incompleting sets and Christmas shopping business, according to Bill Strausbaugh. When a pro is at a club where he knows that perhaps half of his members are carrying less than 14 clubs, his suggestion that the gift buyer purchase a fill-in club for the recipient often is accepted as one that borders on genius. "It solves many of those 'I didn't know what to get him' situations," Strausbaugh explains.

Christmas Year Around

The Turf Valley pro staff tries to keep gift buying on a sustaining basis, not being satisfied to let it die out after the Christmas season is over. In 1961, it set up a gift wrapping station at Christmas-time in the center of the sales room and stacked wrapped packages in every avail-

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Turf Valley Pro Shop

(Continued from page 28)

able corner of the shop. Seeing these things, members became infected with the spirit of buying. The idea was repeated in 1962 and in both years, Strausbaugh did a thriving Yuletide business. The gift wrapping offer was carried over so that it is now extended around the calendar, and on such special occasions as Mother's and Father's Day, gift wrapped packages are brought out and displayed in order to remind members that if they are going to fulfill their familial obligations, it's smart to do so with golf gifts.

Turf Valley used 500 copies of Golf-dom's "Christmas Shopping at Your Pro Shop" last year. Jack Henkel, who was Strausbaugh's assistant at the time and now is head pro at Media Heights CC in Lancaster, Pa., kept a record of calls made in conjunction with distribution of the shopping guide and says they totalled more than 1,000. "The followup," Henkel points out, "is important in getting the business."

The Turf Valley staff, incidentally, hangs on to some of its Christmas catalogs and uses them the following year in pro-

moting gift business on special days.

Turns Shop Upside Down

Strausbaugh was in such demand as a teacher at Turf Valley while Henkel was there that he turned over a good deal of the shop operation to his No. 1 assistant. Jack, who got started in the golf business at Lancaster, Pa., under A. B. Thorne, one of the real veterans in the game, has a leaning toward merchandising. In 1962, when the confusion of organizing a new shop was behind him, and there was time to do some experimenting in display and sales methods, Henkel frequently turned the shop upside down.

"Maybe we overdid it," says Jack, "but we were trying to find more and better ways of getting the merchandise to sell itself. We constantly checked with our players, both men and women, to get their reaction as to how different arrangements struck them, and once we brought in a merchandising expert from Baltimore to help us. He also handled our outside shop when the Kelly Girl Open was played. Apparently he knew a few secrets about selling because he did quite a flourishing business with the galleryites.

"Several times we made a chart of

where the different items were spotted after the stock was moved around," Henkel continues, "and then we checked our sales records against these various arrangements to see if they gave us any leads as to the best way to display merchandise. It was an idea I picked up after reading how the supermarkets test some of the products they handle. I can't report that we made any great new discoveries. However, we did more or less conclude that if a little confusion is introduced to the display scene, it attracts more attention than if everything is neatly stacked and arranged. That doesn't mean, of course, that you should have people tripping over clubs and golf bags."

Too Much Glare

Henkel goes on to explain a few things that the Turf Valley shop found out about golf ball sales. Among them is that if golf balls are displayed in a glass case, light may strike the case in such a way that the glare makes it impossible to see the balls at different times during the day.

"Early last year," says Henkel, "we were wondering why we weren't selling more golf balls. Then, by accident if nothing else, somebody noticed that the sunlight was being reflected by the ball case most of the afternoon. Because of this our customers had to do considerable neck craning to see what was in the case. We moved the case to another corner of the sales room where there wasn't any glare and sales picked up. It's kind of hard to believe but little things like this make a difference."

Don't Pyramid Them

Henkel also has a couple other observations to pass on that he feels might possibly help other pros increase their golf ball sales. One is to stack the packages straight up and down and not pyramid them. "A fellow who is supposed to know about these things," Henkel explains, "says that the pyramid display doesn't present enough broadside to the shopper. The customer doesn't keep his eye on the ball, as they say, when they're arranged this way."

The second idea that Henkel recommends is to intermix balls that are put up in red packages with those that are packaged in blue, green or other colors. The reason: Most people are attracted by, or first focus on the red. Then, the other colors begin to attract attention.

"One of my women players, a decorator, tipped me off on that one," says Henkel.

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"At first, I wasn't quite sold. We have a large pegboard display at one end of the shop and on this particular day there wasn't a red item pinned on it. The woman persuaded me to hang a red shirt on it, if only in one of the bottom corners. I did, walked out of the pro shop as she suggested, and then came back in. The first thing I saw was the red shirt. Now, I hang something red on that display, even if it is only a glove or a pair of socks. The color has pulling power, no doubt about it."

Synchronized Teaching

As Henkel has suggested before, he doesn't claim to have made any discoveries that he thinks are going to revolutionize pro shop merchandising. The former Turf Valley assistant puts it this way: "It's nothing more than a continuous study in trial and error. Things that will work for you one month may not do so well the next. You can't ever say you've found the formula because when you do they'll change the figures on you. People's tastes probably are changing more today than ever before. You have to keep guessing as to how they change."

When Jack Henkel was at Turf Valley, he and Bill Strausbaugh collaborated as much as they could in their teaching

methods. Strausbaugh, who has a long established reputation as being an outstanding instructor, set up a basic pattern for lesson giving. Then he and Henkel got together and compromised whatever small points on which they may have differed. The result is they frequently interchanged pupils, picking up the lesson with ease from where one or the other left off.

The advantage of this method, they point out, is that the head pro, for example, doesn't have to be booked for twice as many lessons as he can find time to give. When members become convinced that both the professional and his assistant teach exactly alike they are less likely to insist on one in preference to the other. They realize that with the change in instructors it won't be necessary to go back and start over, so to speak, but that the learning sequence can be picked up where it was halted in their previous lesson.

"A second advantage in this way of handling lessons," Bill Strausbaugh observes, "is that it doesn't tend to make specialists of anyone on the shop staff. It can give the pro and his assistant equal time on the inside and outside. This not only makes their jobs more interesting, but gives them a better grasp of the overall operation."