



Catering to celebrities may have its problems, but it can be fun. Ultimately, running a successful pro shop means knowing who your customers are

By Robert Joseph Allen

CELEBRITIES MAKE THE SCENE AT RIVIERA CC

One day a few months ago MacGregor Hunter, pro at Riviera CC in Los Angeles, was having lunch with the writer in the club's grill room. At the next table were Jim Backus, Bob Wilke and Lindsey Crosby. There were several other celebrities in the room.

Writers being what they are, and the Riviera being famous for the number of its members who are movie, television and stage stars and for members who are celebrated in other walks of life, this writer was irresistibly inclined to ask Mac Hunter how these luminaries stacked up as customers in his pro shop.

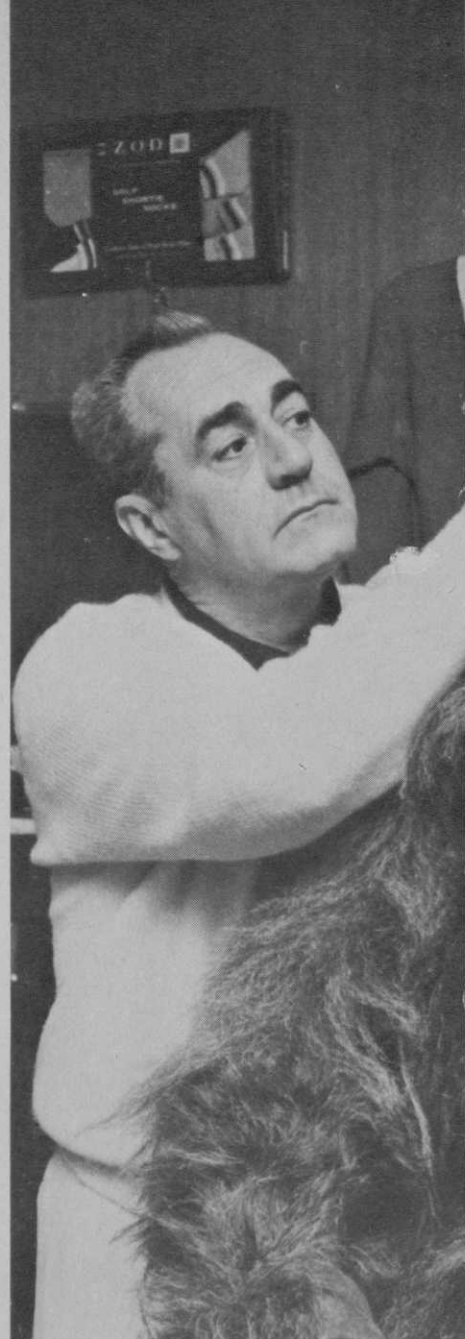
"The very best," he said. "They have to be handled with care, of course, and perhaps pampered a bit, but as customers and all-around members, you can't beat them. Besides being unusually generous with their money, they are very outgoing with everyone around the club. They know their public image is part of their stock in trade and they didn't get where they are by being careless with it.

It is an axiom that entertainment people work hard and at work

that must be sustained at a fast pace during the making of a movie, TV series or during the run of a stage play. Money comes to them quickly and in abundance at these times and so does tension and nervous and physical exhaustion. Consequently, when they have a chance to enjoy leisure periods they tend to spend their money and enjoy themselves at the same pace which characterizes their work. This is particularly true of the golfers among them, who during leisure periods like to play golf every day they can, as much as they can.

"They are more appreciative of extra attention, even though I suppose they could be considered entitled to a little extra fussing over. I have to be careful along this line; a pro shop has to have an impeccable image for impartiality, because the man next to a celebrity may be as good a customer, maybe even better. He would no doubt get a little indignant about any favoritism he saw.

This is particularly true of the quality of membership we have here. While I've never seen an estimate of the total wealth of the



Jim Backus and MacGregor

membership of Riviera, it must be somewhere in the neighborhood of the combined assets of the Swiss banking fraternity. Which reminds me: Harold Lloyd and Jack Warner are members here and used to play a lot, although they don't play much nowadays. Harold, incidentally, has always had a nine-hole golf course in his backyard."

Among those members who are more or less regular customers of the Riviera pro shop and teaching range, or who come to play a lot on the course are Robert Morse, Jack Carter, Don Adams, Jack Oakie, Andy Williams, Jim Backus, Donald O'Connor, Lind-



Hunter in the latter's pro shop outfitting a prospective qualifier for the 1968 U.S. National Open golf tournament.

sey Crosby, Jim Garner, Mike Connors, Dean Martin, Ed Sullivan, Richard Long, Bing Crosby, Buddy Greco, Vic Damone, Jack Ging, Gregory Peck, Bob Hope, Jack Douglas, Bob Wilke, Jack Elliot, Richard Widmark and Gary Morton.

"Of course," said Mac, "I like to yak with the celebrities—who wouldn't—but I keep this indulgence strictly within what time and opportunity permits, using for a measure a scale that is fair to all members.

"The nice thing about the vast majority of our members is that they are very approachable, mainly because they are people of at

least some financial standing and consequence, which makes them secure and this in turn keeps them relaxed on all occasions. They're not given to saying hello first to someone they aren't acquainted with, but if somebody says hello to them in a friendly and warm way he will find them very responsive. Practically all of them are a lot of fun and very interesting. This is especially true of the entertainment stars and particularly around golf courses.

"And I don't know of any of the latter who aren't good buyers of golf equipment and clothes. For one thing they are color and clothes conscious, especially of

shoes. They are also very aware of style, but I've noticed that they only go for styles that personally become them. They never swallow *Haute monde* whole. This is particularly true of the women stars who are customers of our shop. They are naturally beautiful to begin with and have exquisite shapes. And because they are before the public most of the time, they have to dress well. They have almost infallible judgment of what makes them appear chic and beautiful. Therefore, if a style isn't particularly becoming to them, they'll allow merely a hint of it to creep into their

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clothes—sort of paraphrase the style—in order to be as up-to-date as possible. But keeping glamorous is their main objective. Prominent among our distaff members are Rita Hayworth and Greer Garson.

"Going back maybe 15 or 20 years, there were very few country club pro shops that carried much merchandise exclusively for women. But today unless you cater to women golfers, you are passing up one of the greatest profit producers there is.

"I carry a tremendous variety of ladies' wear and I am always looking for more. There is a dazzling display of ladies' hats at every conceivable vantage point in our shop: also blouses, capri pants, bermudas, skirts and sweaters. Anything we can find that's unusual, we'll put among the ladies' display, because it draws the attention of both sexes."

"Do many of them," the writer asked, "have a taste for sharper colors, louder colors?"

"Most of the men stars play down their dress a little," said Mac. "Widmark, Peck and O'Connor are probably the most sedate. Greco and Morse like colors that have authority. They avoid gaudiness and wear only very attractive clothes, and they are most particular when it comes to their golf clothes."

When asked if entertainment celebrities as a class are loyal to the pro shop of their club, Mac said: "I am happy to say that most of them are here and I think they would all like to be at any club they might belong to, at least as long as they like their pro and if he's on the job as much as possible. Of course this goes for members anywhere. It is always up to the pro, I believe, to maintain a warm and friendly relation-

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At top, clothing display at the shop. Bottom left, Mac Hunter (right) and his father, Willie. At right, Mac Hunter with a customer.

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ship with all his members. It is not up to them to court him; the percentage of his members who buy their golf equipment in his shop is a reliable measure of his ability and personality."

It is, Mac believes, a pro's ability to please, or at least get along with the difficult members, that separates the men from the boys in the ranks of professional golfers. "In this regard," he said, "I place great stress on caddie discipline. We have only trained caddies—both as to manners and golf knowledge—around here. My son, Mac, Jr., who is 12, likes to caddy and carries frequently for Andy Williams and Jim Backus."

Entertainment people get to play with the great golfers more often than most people, not only because they are so often asked to perform as a team with golf pros in various charitable angles of tournaments, but because their fame give them *entre* to the champion golfers.

Playing with the top golfers, as well as the additional exposure to the public and to the keen golf sense of the galleries, causes them to be very conscious of the quality of their golf game. Therefore, not wishing to look like a hacker out there impels them to take lots of golf lessons and assiduously practice what they have been taught. As a result, most of them are very good on the course.

"I have a few rules I would recommend to all pros: Stock a great many staples; by that I mean articles that are well accepted by golfers and are continuously advertised by the manufacturers. Advertising is irreplaceable when it comes to establishing products and is the biggest single aid to sales in pro shops. There is no question about it. It is hard to sell a product without a demand and easy to sell it with a demand, and the best way to create a demand is to use advertising and exploitation to keep your product in front of the public."

One should, according to Mac, always stock some low-end lines,

a medium-priced line and, finally, a high-priced line, that you can guarantee to be of the very highest quality. The latter is especially important around his shop because he has so many members who want only the finest merchandise in whatever they buy, whether it's clothes, watches, cars or golf equipment.

Shoes are costly inventory; therefore, he advises picking out perhaps two of the famous lines and stocking in a full run of sizes to satisfy discriminating customers, then buy a few lower-priced lines that you can fit off these staples.

"Use the same strategy when it comes to bags," he said, "but be sure that you have a wide range of colors and styles. This is one item of merchandise that people never hold back on when it comes to brilliant colors. And they'll go out of their way anytime to get the style they prefer.

"Golf balls are the bread and butter of your business and gloves are the cake. Have all brands of balls displayed, even though you are partial to some. A couple of lines of gloves are enough, but have them in all possible sizes, colors and types.

"Stock as many brands of golf clubs as you can possibly afford in all the swing weights, balances and shafts—a full range, in other words. I only deal in pro-line clubs and pro-line balls. I'll always let people try clubs. I feel that every prospective purchaser should hit some balls with the clubs they think they prefer before they buy them. I know I wouldn't buy a set of clubs until I had tried them and I can't fairly expect any different from my customers. I carry break up sets for the women, but not for the men. I take used clubs as trade-ins; it's necessary.

Mac is a strong believer in display. "Display," he said, "is a major component of anyone's successful shop, whether you're aiming your appeal at women, men or children, or all three. You should be constantly changing your display to keep giving the shop a fresher look. To be effective at display you must always be

watching out for what is new and then test with display.

"The biggest appeal that a golf pro shop has to sell is service. If you don't sell service consistently and successfully you're never going to sell yourself, which is vitally necessary to put your shop over. With service you have to have the inventory and the personnel to go with it and all must combine harmoniously. In this connection attractive women employees must be considered a definite asset to a golf shop. They are pleasant as a rule, they simply love to keep the merchandise and the shop clean and they have a knack for colors and styles in clothes. Where my personnel are concerned—both sexes—I insist that they be clean, polite and prompt in their work habits, and that they always find something useful to do on their own without me having to stand over them.

"You might ask in regard to this: 'Doesn't everyone?' and my answer would have to be: 'No, not always.'" □

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