



curse of the

Sound like a Grade-B horror film? The beast can bring in customers, but the dilemma is, at what cost to the condition of the course?

By Gerry Finn

Behold, the ever-wise, but bewitched golf course superintendent. Once again he finds himself in the clutches of a new adversary—a snarling, mechanized monster said to be a distant cousin of the golf car. It wears no disguises. It spares no victim. It is, indeed, a wolf in wolf's clothing.

The great snowmobile rush is a product of the our time. Recreation is now one of man's basic necessities, whereas it once was a luxury. And with recreation came the idea of putting man within easy reach of its facilities in the

dead, forlorn season of winter. So, there was born this chain-driven demon which can run amuck if not properly disciplined.

There is no splitting the verdict in the superintendent's clash with this intrusion on his sacred grounds. He is aware of his underdog status in an attempt to rid his sprawling workshop of the snowmobile. There is none among the profession who can say its invasion of the winter scene hasn't caused some concern in the never-ending program of course conditioning. But the golf course appar-

ently has been designated as a haven for the spiraling-popularized vehicle. It is a natural in this respect. Its potential along these lines is limitless. Barreling through a sand trap . . . skidding over a green. What else could the adventurous spirit seek?

In a recent spot check of the New England area, an obvious mecca for snowmobile activities, 17 out of 20 superintendents expressed strong views in opposition to their use. The minority, too, wasn't that emphatic in the raise of hands. Its position was based on technical conclusions concerning the snowmobile's harmful effects on turf.

Adding to the confusion is the mixed reaction of the golf course



snowmobile

landlord—the club president, board of directors, independent owner and others who control the use of the grounds. For the most part, the financially sound private clubs go along with the superintendent's voice in support of the negative stand. They are oriented to the fact that the problems of the super must not be compounded by risking the occurrence of damage from sources other than Mother Nature.

On the other hand, the economic windfall accompanying the promiscuous use of snowmobiles has prompted certain courses to turn their acreage into booming winter playgrounds. In this instance, it seems the ringing sound of the cash register drowns out the whirl-

ing, grinding roar of the mechanical sleds.

As a matter of fact, it has become commonplace for these enterprising courses to promote the formation of local snowmobile clubs and assume an active part in the organization of a schedule of rallies and races. Packed bars and crowded dining rooms are the desired result. And it works wonders.

With this bonus-plan operation gaining popularity, the superintendent's war on winter wheels finds him losing ground rally by rally. It becomes a case of realistic, business-like outlook by the struggling course owner or the corporation guiding the financial path of a private country club. It stands

to reason that if an owner can develop year-round returns from his investment in the golf course, his mind is going to busy itself trying to lure the snowmobile to his otherwise winter-darkened place of business.

Snowmobile rallies are fast becoming the thing. On occasion they draw as many as 500 hungry and thirsty people to the rallying site. The golf course owner, whose revenue depends as much on whisky and soda as birdies and bogies, is fascinated by the possibility of the big off-season cash register hit. And you really can't condemn such an attitude, especially if the summer before has been one of sweat and scratch.

In addition to these woes, the

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snowmobile

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superintendent is being infiltrated from within. Among certain experts in the turf management field there is a feeling that snowmobiles are not the tools of course destruction. None of them wish to be identified but each drops the hint that maybe the super is crying foul before one is committed.

The superintendent is ever mindful of the possibility he might be barking up the wrong tree. However, he must look upon his task through different eyes, since he remains responsible to the membership for bringing the course to manure sharpness at the first signs of the golf season.

In all matters of course damage the super assumes the attitude of the researcher, rather than the physician. He is brought up on the doctrine of prevention, not cure. "Why court trouble?" is the universal question. "We have enough of it without these mechanical devils."

Technical arguments follow. From the superintendent's vantage point, the snowmobile causes a fabricated sheet of strangulation on top of the naturally porous snow cover. In doing so, the compaction shuts off all oxygen to the plant below, hindering life just like a choking layer of ice. For that reason alone, the snowmobile serves as a curse to the turf.

The snowmobile cult and its supporters counter with their ammunition, based on the flimsy but applicable assumption that the super's conclusions are controversial. The plea here is that off-season damage or winter kill existed

The long and the short of it

Short caddies have a tall problem with apparently no solution in sight.

Since many are not 6 feet, they are forced to carry the golf bag at a level that rubs up against their knees. The bag manufacturers have standardized their product so that when the strap is raised to the highest possible notch, the bag still hangs too low for shorter people.

A leading manufacturer responded to this single complaint with the statement that if they were to make the straps any shorter many people wouldn't be able to fit their arm inside it. He also added: it would be highly expensive to redo production lines; it didn't seem to warrant the expense, and that he had never gotten any complaints in the some 40 years he has been in business.

Obviously, one short caddy doesn't agree. □

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long before anyone dreamed of building a snowmobile. The technical battle at present appears to be a standoff.

When finally there is concession made in the form of an economical venture by the golf courses's powers-to-be, the superintendent must take a dim view of his professional position. Fittingly, when a course opens its arms to snowmobiling, there must be established a set of rules for operating the vehicles and a plan for preparing the course. This smacks the super with an added burden. He is the outstanding victim.

In such a touchy development, the superintendent must realize that he and his help are to be 24-hour watch dogs. When the snowmobile is allowed to roam the course, round-the-clock surveillance is required, the responsibility thrust on the shoulders of the super.

Staking the course also falls in the lap of the belabored superintendent. All greens must be fenced off with care taken to avoid charging into water pipes backboning the irrigation system.

Finally, when the course has been groomed for the invasion of driving tread and daredevil drivers, the physical properties of snow cover have to be expertly assessed before the green light is given. A depth of six inches is the absolute minimum for the prevention of turf injury. Then, in the case of slushy conditions, the super must be on hand to determine if it is safe enough to risk a machine's claws scraping bare spots.

In arriving at a windup point in this discussion, the superintendent is forced to realize that he is both a product and victim of the recreational surge which might have prompted him to turn his professional aspirations to the golf course in the first place.

Progress, no matter how defined or exposed, constitutes an unstoppable. There were only a few thousand snowmobiles in operation five years ago. This burgeoning season it is estimated manufacturers will complete sales of 100,000 or more. In the immediate future there are visions of one million snow-spitting racers carving their way through and across the United States.

In essence, the snowmobile—according to the reluctant retreat of the golf course superintendent—is a necessary evil. Like the electric or gas-driven golf car, it has sneaked up on him and accounted for new avenues of challenge and responsibility. True, he doesn't have to like it. Unfortunately, he has to live with it. □



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