

Winter profits and the passage of time have mellowed some strongly negative opinions about snowmobiles. Some clubs have even made physical adjustments to accommodate snowmobile traffic. Others, however, remain unyielding



The SNOWMOBILE:

Finding a Course of Less Resistance

By Gerry Finn

THERE has been a change in the attitude of the golf course superintendent toward the snowmobile—that relatively new member of the mechanical age which in a short period of time has had a phenomenal growth in popularity.

At the height of the snowmobile's invasion of the golf course about 24 months ago, the superintendent gave the track-maker an unequivocal kick in the chasis. The reaction at that time was one of vehement condemnation. Nowadays the feeling has softened so that it could be described as just plain condemnation.

The typical response to the acceptance of the snowmobile is based on the individual situation. It might



even be called diplomatic, to wit: "I have nothing against 'them' just as long as they keep off my course."

It is difficult to seek out a pro-con exchange on the subject, because most superintendents believe they are violating allegiance to the propagation of enhancing the condition of the golf course at all costs if they even hint of favorable thinking.

There is one exception, though. Ed Van Kampen of the Cordial Greens CC in East Greenbush, N.Y., believes that snowmobiles are no more a threat to the well-being of golf course turf than the golfer who takes hat-sized divots. His views will be explored later.

On the other side of the argument

stands Casey Rowley, the resident superintendent of snow country. Rowley handles the conditioning exercises of the Stratton Mountain CC in Vermont, a much-heralded piece of golfing real estate carved out of the slopes and trails where schussers and snow bunnies cavort every Vermont winter.

Rowley says he hasn't changed his mind about the damaging effects of the snowmobile. In fact, he is so convinced winter sports should find a playground other than the golf course that he posts his layout against skiers!

"You think that's strange?" Rowley said one morning last spring after studying the remains of a parallel

swing in the middle of Stratton's 11th green. "If you can appreciate what a pair of skis can do to a green, try thinking of the possibilities that could arise should snowmobiles run the same course."

Rowley has been confronted by members of the Chalet Owners' Assn. at Stratton to alter his stand against the use of snowmobiles. He refuses to budge. "I am thoroughly in accord with the thinking that any turf which gets compacted is bad business," he insists. "I've told the snowmobile addicts this and don't intend to change my mind. Of course, my superiors might step in with an order. That's up to them."

(Continued)

Snowmobile



Just down the road from Rowley or a couple of ski lifts away resides the "semi-pro, semi-con" view of Paul O'Leary who keeps the grass green at the nationally-famous twin courses of Equinox and Ekwanok.

O'Leary claims he is against the use of snowmobiles at this stage of the disagreement. "I look upon the situation as something akin to the golf car several years ago," O'Leary opines. "Eventually the superintendent had to learn to live with the golf car. I suppose if the snowmobile continues its spiral, he may have to assume the same attitude."

Equinox and Ekwanok are laid out on the doorstep of the Big Bromley ski area. Therefore, O'Leary is surrounded by lovers of the winter outdoors. There is a snowmobile run adjacent to his courses which gives him room to rationalize their presence. If and when they are allowed to roam on the golf course, O'Leary might sing a different tune.

Swinging down from Vermont into the Berkshires, the attitude of the superintendent leans along more tolerant lines.

Harry Tynan, whose domain is the rolling terrain of the Country Club of Pittsfield, Mass., reports that snowmobile activity is high there.

"Our members are a year-round participation group," says Tynan. "We stake out a snowmobile run for them and I find there isn't too much

damage if the operation is controlled. Most of them stay in the roughs. We stake off the greens and tees as out of bounds. So far it has worked well."

Now compare all this, with heavy emphasis on the Rowley condemnation measures, to the complete turn-about of Van Kampen who theorizes that his club would die in the winter if he didn't actively promote the use of snowmobiles.

"I am sick and tired of all this fuss about how much damage a snowmobile can contribute to the condition of the golf course," Van Kampen fumes. "To me the effects of a snowmobile on a fairway are the same as a man kicking cement. Sure, there is compaction, but compaction has a hundred other causes besides the snowmobile."

Van Kampen admits his position as owner-superintendent of Cordial Greens gives a false impression of his attitude toward the tracked monsters. "Yes, I'm interested in sources of revenue for my club," he says, "but I am just as dedicated to the feeling I have for giving golfers a top-conditioned course. In fact, I am stronger about this than many superintendents. After all, I have more to lose if my course isn't in playable shape."

Cordial Greens has handled as many as 240 snowmobiles on a single day. At the end of the winter of 1969-1970 Van Kampen wound up his adding machine and zipped off a

total of 20,000 as the number of machines that had run the Cordial Course. And all of this traffic has meant about a 15 per cent increase in winter revenues at the club. Van Kampen feels this figure is more impressive when one considers that he has always worked at having an active winter program even before the advent of snowmobiles. However, for a club that goes into almost a total slump in winter, accommodating snowmobiles could mean far greater increases.

The adventurous spirit of Van Kampen probably has much to do with his acceptance of the snowmobile. "I have always been one who is willing to take a chance rather than sit on unproven theories," he explains. "I think the average superintendent is convinced the snowmobile is the enemy without ever confronting it. Sure, we have had evidence of some damage, but it has been so slight that I can't see abandoning my whole program."

That program is unique for a superintendent. Van Kampen has formed a snowmobile club for his winter friends. He's set up a racing track over the golf course's driving range and figures the action next winter will be phenomenal.

"I'd like to say another thing," Van Kampen adds. "Since I lifted the barrier, my club has come alive during the winter. And my golfers will back me up when I report that the golf course has never been in better condition."

This, then, runs down the pros and cons on the use of snowmobiles. It follows the spectrum from Rowley's "who needs 'em?" reaction to Van Kampen's "their presence is no more harmful than a divot-taking golfer" belief.

One humorous aside to the great debate was experienced in seeking the opinion of Richard Blake, vice president of the Golf Course Superintendents Assn. of America. Blake, who holds the fort at the Mount Pleasant CC in Worcester, Mass., had a personal hand in deciding the snowmobile's fate at his course.

"I decided to try one of the things out," Blake reveals. "I hopped in, got it going and went into a spin. When they pulled me out of the snowmobile, I had three cracked ribs. Personally, I can live without 'em." □