

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

I used to think that HOC meant “height of cut.” Recently, I’m convinced it means “height of conceit. Greenspeeds with HOCs of .09 inches are being bandied about by superintendents, like kids bragging about how fast their cars go. Didn’t anybody teach them that speed kills?

GCSAA spends tons of money trying to portray superintendents as responsible adults. But superintendents’ grass-cutting hormones are still going through high-speed puberty. Whose fault is it anyway? Is it some sort of recessive gene that makes superintendents take these risks? Or is it club officials or “influential golfers” who are driving the fast-greens express?

If clubs, or God forbid superintendents, are using the Stimpmeter as a speedometer, then they flunk Golf 101. Every good turf-grass manager knows that Mr. Stimpson was looking for consistency with his invention, not speed.

Don’t take my word for it that speed can kill, just look along the roadside. Speed limits are posted for safety and survival reasons.

Being human, we all have put the pedal to the metal at some point and gotten away with it — even if we knew we were taking chances. It’s like grooming greens for a major event. You can push them to the limit for a few days, but you’d better slow down soon after. If you keep ignoring the road signs and keep taking chances, there’s a good chance you and your greens could crash.

Big egos can lead to road rage, and there’s the old argument that you’ve never heard of a superintendent being fired for fast greens. But offenders beware because the warning signs are there for good reasons. Of course, heeding them is a matter of self-discipline and common sense.

Dips and bumps — Golf course designers need to play traffic engineers with course owners and superintendents. The blueprints should show maximum allowable speeds for the contours of the greens.

Donald Ross never envisioned .09 inches. Otherwise, he never would have buried those elephants under his greens. At these heights and speeds, watch out for scalping.

Don’t Get Caught in the Speed Trap

BY JOEL JACKSON



SOME
SUPERINTENDENTS'
GRASS-CUTTING
HORMONES ARE
STILL GOING
THROUGH HIGH-
SPEED PUBERTY

Slippery when wet — Algae loves stressed-out greens. If you keep them short when it’s cloudy and wet for a few days, the slime will grow quicker than the turf. Better back off that accelerator — I mean, Stimpmeter — because you and the greens will live longer.

Divided highway — The great dichotomy of turf management is grooming turf for low handicappers on one side and high handicappers on the other.

A friend, who’s a superintendent, conducted a greenspeed study. Instead of keeping up with the Joneses and playing the fast greens game, he focused on smooth and consistent greens. The members’ handicaps improved three to four strokes. Of course, nobody brags about smooth greens, and boasting that your greens are rolling 10 seems to be more important than playing to par and enjoying the game.

Congested area — Making greens fast means slope and contour are exaggerated and pin locations shrink to a few areas on each green. That means foot traffic and wear are intensified in those areas. If you seek relief by moving the pin to a crowned area, you’ll get raked over the coals for using an unfair location. Slow down, and you’ll find more usable areas.

Speed limit — Of course there’s no limit, at least not one that the police can enforce. But consider the concept of speed limits: The highest speeds are allowed only on open, flat and straight stretches of highway. When obstacles, curves, hills, wet pavement, congested areas are present, the prudent and wise thing to do is to slow down.

That goes equally for you and the turf.

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney’s golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.