

No Pie in the Sky Here

GPS technology proves valuable for golf course builders and architects

BY ANTHONY PIOPPA

Several months ago Nick Scigliano had never used the HiPerlite GPS System. Now he can't imagine life without it.

The president of Frontier Construction Co. said he foresees the product soon becoming standard equipment for any golf course construction company such as his, which is based in Jones Mill, Pa.

Scigliano first used HiPerlite, from Topcon Positioning Systems, during a major renovation of the Hidden Valley Country Club in Salem, Va., which began in June 2005. As part

Problem

Members of Hidden Valley Country Club liked the contours on the courses existing greens. But with the greens undergoing a renovation, would the contours be lost?

Solution

Architect Bill Love was able to rebuild the greens within one-eighth of an inch using the HiPerlite technology.



The greens at Hidden Valley Country Club were rebuilt to within one-eighth inch of the originals.

of the work on the Dick Wilson-designed course, architect Bill Love rebuilt every green, two practice greens, all the bunkers and most of the tees. Where the GPS technology really shined was on some of the green work. Since Hidden Valley members liked the contours on 16 of the existing push-up greens — all Wilson originals — Love rebuilt them to within one-eighth inch of the originals using United States Golf Association (USGA) specs, thanks to the HiPerlite technology.

Love said the software technology is also valuable in producing GPS maps that give measurements of slopes and pitch on greens,

in some cases revealing a severity that surprised him.

At Hidden Valley it took two days for Frontier workers to record the contours and elevations of all the green surfaces that were reproduced, something Scigliano said would take three weeks with conventional surveying techniques. The information, which was tallied in 1-foot-square increments, was then downloaded into a computer and within a matter of minutes a 3-D model was available.

Scigliano said if the model showed contours to be too steep, adjustments could be made on the spot.

The measuring is done using a pole that has a GPS

unit and screen on the top and a wheel on the bottom. It is rolled along the green and makes an audible click each time it records. The pole can also be placed on a golf car or utility vehicle for recording of green surrounds and fairways at speeds up to 50 miles per hour, Scigliano said.

During the building of the green, rather than equipment operators working around grading stakes set at 10-foot intervals, one worker with the pole constantly monitors the work making for more preciseness at a faster pace.

Architect Denis Griffiths has been using the HiPerlite system on new course con-

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struction. He said it is most valuable in checking topography maps of sites.

"We have been shocked whenever we do that, the variances we find," he said. "Design wise it allows flexibility to test a topo and to adjust and adapt right away."

Because architects want to use as much soil as they can from a site without having to truck in any, accurately knowing how much cut and fill will be produced is vital to setting a price for the job.

Griffiths said the GPS system has saved him money and time on the three courses he has built since

purchasing HiPerlite.

HiPerlite also has access to not just the 24 U.S. satellites circling the globe but also to nine Glonass satellites, a Russian network. According to Topcon, the U.S. satellites are all in the southern hemisphere while the Russian ones are more evenly distributed across the horizon decreasing the chances of encountering dead spots.

As Griffiths points out, even with the Glonass satellites there are limitations.

"It does not work in the woods," he added. ■

Anthony Pioppi is a contributing editor to Golfdom.

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