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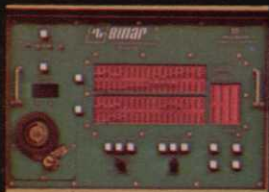
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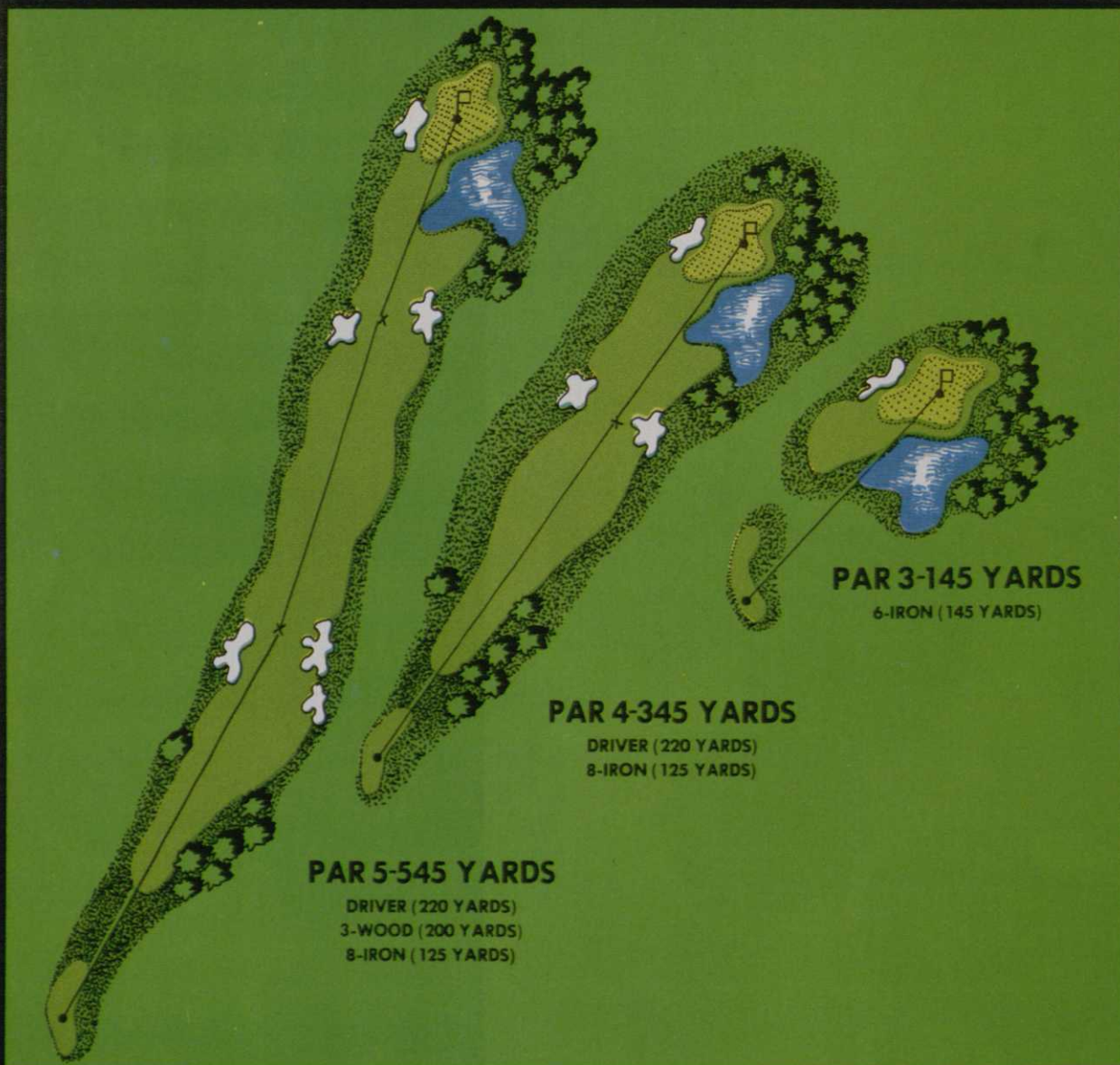
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# EXECUTIVE COURSES: ANSWERING THE SPACE SQUEEZE

Construction of executive courses as a means of retaining golf in high-population areas is a growing trend in the golf industry. These challenging courses can be a revenue-producing part of a green belt program

by JERRY CLAUSSEN

GOLF SERVICES MANAGER  
PHELPS, BRAUER & ASSOCIATES, LAKEWOOD, COLORADO



How can the golf industry prevent the demise of urban golf courses and keep them in the cities? One answer starts with the concept of the executive (middle-length) golf course.

In the past golf courses have been lumped into two general categories. The regulation course usually stretches 6,000 to 7,000 yards for 18 holes with par from 68 to 73. The non-regulation course, the par three, has all, or most of the holes par threes.

The executive course is an amalgamation of both. Combining the best features of both regulation and non-regulation, the executive course derived its name from the theory that a busy executive could play a round faster at a shorter course than on a regulation layout. The executive course has some par three holes, some par fours, rarely a par five. Par for nine holes may total 28 to 33, or 55 to 67 for 18. Yardage for 18 holes usually ranges between 3,500 and 5,000 yards.

Latest statistics from the National Golf Foundation reveal that the United States has at least 278 separate executive courses, plus 75 additional executives attached to regulation courses. The

*The three illustrations (left) depict a golf hole design as interpreted for a regulation, executive and par-three golf course, respectively. The executive course offers a compromise between the challenge of the regulation course and the space conservation of the par-three course. The hole for the executive here requires the accurate placement of the tee shot between two bunkers with a finesse shot into the green just as the regulation course would. Only the fairway wood has been eliminated. The hole design for the par-three course is similar around the green, but does not give the golfer the opportunity to use a variety of clubs.*

*(Design by The Purdys, golf course architects, Livingston, N.J.)*

353 total—103 are 18 holes—compare with 1,122 par three layouts and 11,174 nine and 18 hole courses. Of the 353 executive courses, 222 or 63 per cent are privately-owned daily fee types. There are 88 with private memberships—30 of those added to regulation courses—and 43 municipal. Although still small, the trend is building. Ten years ago hardly anyone had seen an executive course. NGF first listed them as a separate category in 1971. A staff member there admits there are more executive courses than listed, but precise yardage-par information on many courses is not available.

Executive courses are mostly found near cities where land is expensive and scarce, or around resorts. California leads with 60, New York has 24, Florida 22, Illinois 21, Pennsylvania 20 and Arizona 16. But five states including Alaska have none, and six states have only one each.

In Colorado, for example, the executive course was unknown until 1966. The city of Pueblo had an old 18-hole municipal course that was too short and tight. So a new regulation nine was added to the best existing nine, and the remaining nine holes were reworked into a par-30 "short" nine. Colorado, like California, Florida and Arizona, is a hot market for golf courses with in residential-resort developments. Several such communities will soon have executive courses. A par-32, 2,200 yards, will open in 1973 at Heather Ridge, an apartment community in suburban Denver.

Haystack Mt. Ranch GC has been a successful case history. Located five miles out from a small city, off the main highway, the business struggled at first. But now play averages 1,000 rounds a week in summer, over 20,000 rounds annually. The course has nine holes, par 32, 2,153 yards. Five holes are over 275 yards in length. Green fees are \$1.50 for nine and \$2.25 for 18, and \$3.25 all-day weekdays. On weekends the green fees are \$2 for nine holes, \$3

for 18 holes and \$4 for all-day.

Owner-builder C.J. "Bud" Ebel Jr. now knows the concept was sound. He wouldn't do anything differently. "We appeal to probably 90 per cent of all players," Ebel says. "Beginners, women and children like it—the length makes it fun, so golfers aren't all pooped out when they get home. Even the better golfers come out to brush up on their accuracy and short game. Our length is not too long for women, or too short for most men."

Meanwhile, the extra nine holes at Pueblo's City Park GC is also proving its appeal. Play was over 20,000 rounds in 1969, but leaped to almost 30,000 rounds in 1970 and about 35,000 in 1971.

NFG reports another successful case is the nine-hole Ken Lock Golf Links, Lombard, Ill. Now in its 10th season, the business has shown increases every year, up to about 40,000 rounds annually. Nearly half the play is by women and junior golfers. The course covers 33 acres, playing 1,629 to 1,840 yards off tees averaging 30 yards in length.

The father-son owners are the only year-round staff. They have two men on golf course maintenance and two assistants in the clubhouse during the golf season. Total cost of development was about \$175,000, including land. Annual operating budget is only \$35,000.

Popularity with the golfers and economic return determine the feasibility of any golf course. The key question is how much money can an executive course save and/or make over a regulation course? No two situations are alike, of course, but let's use some typical figures and compare two theoretical courses that might be built and operated at the same site.

The regulation 18 in an urban area might use 150 acres of land, if that amount of land can be found. Say it costs for argument's sake \$1,000 an acre. Construction, with design fees and equipment, plus clubhouse, could easily total \$600,000. The total investment for

*continued on page 59*

# THE EXECUTIVE WAY

Executive courses, though short on yardage and par, can be long on sales and services by DOUGLAS LUTZ



*In a farmhouse setting (above) the pro shop at Stony Brook features an attractive fireplace.*

*George Cosgrove's pro shop facilities at Heatherwood GC offer innovative service and display techniques for his merchandise, center photo.*

*On opposite page, Ernie Pagnotta, left, confers with assistant George Di Tullo in executive course pro shop at Stony Brook. The shop features a farmhouse atmosphere.*

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUGLAS LUTZ





The merchandising, service and display initiative that is shown at some executive courses could provide their larger, regulation course competitors with valuable insights to financial success.

To meet the challenge from nearby regulation layouts as well as from shopping center discount stores, owners and professionals at these "in between" courses usually spare no expense on attractive displays and well-stocked shops. Innovative sales and service plans seem to be much in evidence as well.

While researching the metropolitan New York area for a book, the "Metropolitan Golf Guide," I visited 77 individual municipal, public and semi-private courses within a 50-mile radius of New York City. In that circle there were just four executive courses. Oddly enough, the finest pro shops I found belonged to the four "capsule" layouts. Was it coincidence or design?

In a general sense, a basic spirit of innovation prevailed at these four courses. Perhaps specialized needs generate specialized responses. Fine display work was utilized throughout. Service plans—tailor-made. Inventive sales devices—commonplace.

The Stony Brook GC, a par-62 layout in Hopewell, N.J., ranges 3,603 yards over rolling hillocks and mounded greens, making a spectacular course out of former

farmlands. In addition to challenging golf, Stony Brook offers its membership a practice range, practice sand trap, two swimming pools, a picnic area and a children's playground.

Amiable Ernie Pagnotta, head professional, has very cleverly turned half the ground floor of the 108-year-old farmhouse into one of the most attractive pro shops in the metropolitan area. Utilizing the original old front parlor and dining room, which open to each other through a wide arch in the center wall, he has provided his customers with just the right touch of homey atmosphere.

As you enter from the small front porch and turn right off the center hall, you find yourself in the front parlor surrounded by colorful displays of soft goods and accessories. An antique sideboard between the front windows, which are draped in tie-backs, as they must have been many years ago, holds accessories at easy-to-see eye level. In a corner the original built-in hutch, triangular in shape, features soft goods on its base and shelves. The center area of the 20 by 20-foot room is occupied by a soft goods/accessories "tree" display set in a nail keg. All in all, an eye-catching array of goods.

When the golfer goes to register, he must pass by all these displays, which spill on into the dining room. The shoe corner, for instance, fronts on the old fireplace and mantel; directly opposite are the club and bag racks. Not until he has seen all these items does the customer reach the registration desk, which is set in the back of the shop. It probably would have been simpler to locate the registration just inside the front door. More convenient, perhaps, but not as conducive to browsing, according to Ernie Pagnotta. "You've got to have a traffic flow through your shop," he says. "The way we're situated, our customers have to pass by all our merchandise on the way in and again on the way out to the first tee. Invariably someone spots a bag up on the wall he may have been looking for or something else will catch his eye. We've had good response from our shop layout."

Pagnotta and his assistant,

George DiTullo, concentrate on individual needs. Pagnotta says, "Monthly equipment specials are one of our chief sales devices. We feature something each month and try to customer fit our clientele. They get the sale price and personalized attention." Emphasis is on hard goods, which account for 60 per cent of sales.

Unique pricing plans are another Stony Brook innovation. Pagnotta introduced some new ideas this season. Green fees on Mondays are \$1 less than the rest of the weekdays as they are for women on Fridays before 11 p.m. Twilight golf with registration after 5:30 p.m. is available to all, members and non-members, at \$2 on weekdays and \$3 on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Play is limited only by impending darkness.

Associate memberships are offered under two plans. Class A at \$150 a year per person offers unlimited golf; Class B membership at \$15 a year features reduced green fees. Handicap service, not usually a management function at most public courses, is offered free under either membership plan.

Tournaments are organized and run with no entry fee charges and trophies are provided for the winners at Pagnotta's expense. There are available to all members the Club Championship, President's Cup, Senior and Junior and Ladies' Tournaments.

Electric car rentals carry their own pricing structure. Two bags for \$6, three for \$8 and four for \$10 could be considered out of the ordinary when car fees in the area generally run \$8 to \$10 for 18 holes and are not priced according to the number of bags carried.

Pagnotta recently expounded his feelings about executive courses. "Families seem more united today, especially those with youngsters. The executive course gives dad a chance to play, maybe in three hours or so, and still have time to spend with the family. Also, the course is not too frustrating for women. As a result, we see many families out. We have lots of family play."

By providing specialized pricing structures, individual attention, attractive merchandise dis-

*continued*

**EXECUTIVE** *continued*

plays and encouraged tournament activity and family play, Ernie Pagnotta, George DiTullo and the Stony Brook GC may be showing the way toward a successful business operation.

Getting it all together in the relaxed and homey atmosphere that Stony Brook offers might provide some insights worthy of imitation at more pretentious layouts.

In the never ending competitive situation facing most executive course professionals, particularly those not far removed from the very real threat of highway discount stores, Mickey Traina's shop at the Two Bridges CC may be especially noteworthy. Two Bridges is located in the Lincoln Park/Two Bridges area of New Jersey, on the edge of large population concentrations serviced by many shopping centers ribboned along the highways. Until this season, in keeping with the fine brand of golf to be offered here, Traina's shop rivaled the best to be found at private clubs. Soon it may outstrip them completely!

Traina, not satisfied to have just a great looking shop, has torn it completely apart. In a bold move at the beginning of a new season, he is now in the midst of an extensive renovation program guaranteed to provide the finest pro shop facility available to the non-affiliated golfer in northern New Jersey.

Many shops have been torn apart and rebuilt. It's not unusual. What is unusual is to find an exceptional shop to begin with and then find a professional backed by a management insisting on further improvement. The continual striving for excellence, as exemplified by Two Bridges, is commonplace at executive courses.

As I sat talking with Mort Hansen we were continually interrupted by the cash register ringing. The beautiful sound reflected a busy Saturday at Bel Aire, an exceptional executive course in Allenwood, N.J. And it was the first day of the young season to be blessed with a little sunshine!

Hansen greeted each customer personally, mostly on a first name basis. Old friendships were being revived. There was much talk of

Florida trips and the golfing delights of Southern resorts and warmer weather. Many customers expressed their good feelings about being back at Bel Aire to welcome the new season. The New Jersey shore area was coming alive again after a rain-chilled, dismal winter. Nowhere was this more evident than in the beautiful Bel Aire pro shop. And Hansen wasn't even set up yet for the new season!

Mort Hansen doesn't feel he is any great authority on how to operate a pro shop. He feels his business practices are not unusual. He thinks anyone using common sense and following suggestions gleaned from golf publications on how to run sales, set up displays and promote merchandise can be a successful golf businessman. Hansen's modest attitude, while commendable, can-



*A nail keg supports display of accessories at Stony Brook GC.*

not hide the fact that he operates an exceptionally busy place. True, he is ideally situated. Within a few miles of Bel Aire are at least six regulation courses. Spring Meadow, a crowded semi-private layout is just down the road. This season, for the first time in 30 years or more, there will be no competition from Homestead in Spring Lake, about three miles east of Bel Aire. Real estate developers have plowed it under. Hansen may not care to admit it, but he knows how to meet the competition.

Beginning with one of the most handsome shops around (when it is fully set up), Hansen is meeting the needs of the golfers in his area who prefer the executive length and the

shorter day away from home. There are many retirement communities nearby, which could lead to the conclusion that the bulk of Bel Aire's trade is the old crowd. Not so. There is a cross section of golfers to be found any day at Bel Aire: young and old, families, duffers and low handicappers, too.

The most important single factor to be learned about success at Bel Aire is in watching Hansen's personalized approach to every detail. He cares. He makes it his business to know everyone, to greet every individual with a degree of importance and to make sure they leave the shop, whether on their way to the first tee or homeward bound after a round, feeling satisfied.

When you sell a man a set of replacement spikes for a buck, then insist that he leave his shoes with you to replace the spikes for him, you are providing service not measurable by monetary standards. When you take an important telephone message for someone still out on the course and don't write it down, but deliver it verbatim when he comes in—that's service. At Bel Aire a bowl of tees sits on the check-in counter. They're free, and customers are urged to help themselves. There is no better way to serve a need than that.

Mort Hansen's success is assured at this executive course, because his close attention to detail, manifested in personalized service and superb customer handling, will make it happen. Soaring sales will probably keep Bel Aire's cash register ringing all season.

"Trading is the key. We do a big business in used clubs," George Cosgrove says. Cosgrove, head professional at Heatherwood GC in South Setauket, Long Island, was pointing to a sign he put up about nine years ago. It read, "Yes. We take Trade Ins."

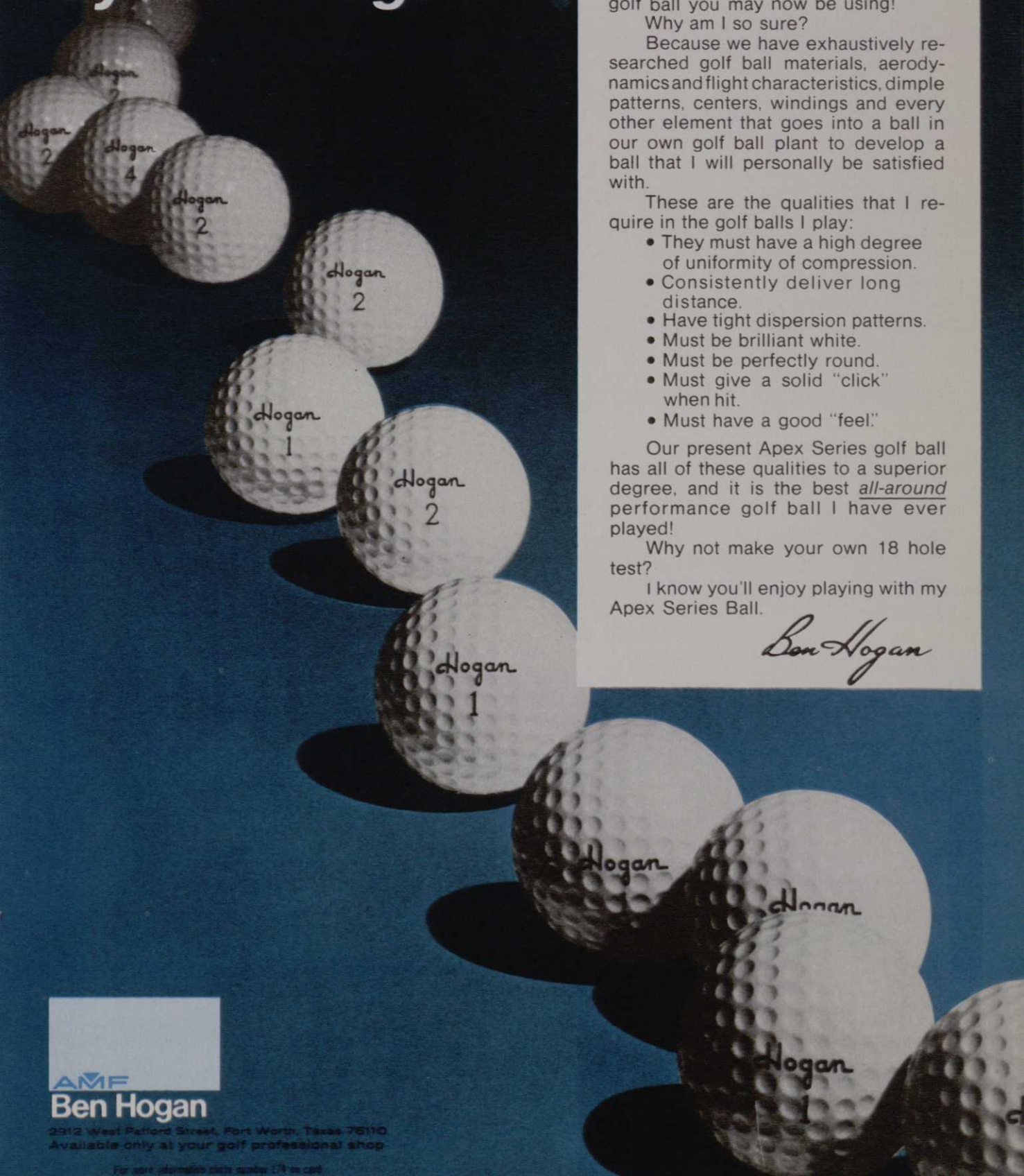
In what is essentially a 10-month season Cosgrove reports annual grosses of \$80,000. Seventy-five per cent of that is in hard goods. Apparently his "trading" schemes are working.

"With our reputation for trading," Cosgrove explains, "we can sometimes count on selling a good set of clubs for, say \$190, two seasons in a row. Many of our golfers

*continued on page 33*



# THE BEST BALL I HAVE EVER PLAYED ... By Ben Hogan



I would like to ask you to buy three of my golf balls and play 18 holes with them.

I am convinced you will find they will outperform any golf ball you may now be using!

Why am I so sure?

Because we have exhaustively researched golf ball materials, aerodynamics and flight characteristics, dimple patterns, centers, windings and every other element that goes into a ball in our own golf ball plant to develop a ball that I will personally be satisfied with.

These are the qualities that I require in the golf balls I play:

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- Must have a good "feel."

Our present Apex Series golf ball has all of these qualities to a superior degree, and it is the best all-around performance golf ball I have ever played!

Why not make your own 18 hole test?

I know you'll enjoy playing with my Apex Series Ball.

*Ben Hogan*



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For more information circle number 174 on card

# Announcing the new Wilson Your members' chances for straight,

## New Wilson 1200 woods: Square hits on more shots.

The woods your members are playing now probably have heads with the center of gravity behind the shaft. Which is the way most woods are made. (Fig. 1)

When golfers swing those clubs, torque is produced in the shaft. This often causes the club face to twist open, and then closed, in the down-swing... and to slide through the ball at impact. So it's difficult to hit the ball squarely time after time. (Fig. 2)

But new WILSON 1200 woods have heads with the center of gravity on-line with the shaft. (Fig. 3) The result of removing the usual back-weight and inserting a tungsten alloy Fore-Weight immediately behind the impact area, deep in the Epoloc face. This scientific fore-weighting reduces the tendency of the club face to open, close or even slide through the ball. The result: a better chance for square impact. So the golfer gets better control and greater distance. (Fig. 4)

You can show how this works by placing a Wilson 1200 club and an ordinary club on a table. The face of the Wilson 1200 club hangs straight down—or square. But the face of the ordinary club does not hang square. Because the weight is in the back part of the head.

New Wilson 1200 woods also have an exclusive Counter-Torque shaft. The lower section of the Counter-Torque shaft is firmer than the lower section in an ordinary shaft. (Fig. 5)

Together, the fore-weighted head and the Counter-Torque shaft help keep the club face square at that critical moment when it hits the ball.

A Wilson 1200 club face that hits the ball squarely means a straight shot. Which means a long shot. Shot after shot. After shot.

## New Wilson 1200 irons: More accuracy on more shots.

Most golfers don't consistently hit the ball on the sweet spot. Some irons attempt to compensate for off-center hits by enlarging the sweet spot

