

Nationwide Cart Survey

By William H. Bengueyfield, Western Director

By now, much of the golfing community accepts, perhaps grudgingly, the motorized golf cart. No longer is the most frequently-asked question on turf management concerned with damage from disease or insects but rather:

"What are other clubs doing about golf carts?"

It has become a real problem and real answers are hard to find. So far as we can determine, no nationwide study to provide answers to such questions has been conducted. Several local surveys have been undertaken and done well, but none on a national scale.

In an attempt to fill the void and contribute to a consensus on this subject, the five USGA Green Section Offices conducted a sampling of courses in their geographical areas: the Northeast; the Southeast; Midwest; Southwest and Western regions. The results show development of interesting patterns, certain precepts emerging and, although each club will always have cart problems peculiar to itself, some standardization or comparison can now be made.

For those interested in "what the other clubs are doing" about golf carts, the following summarization of the Green Section survey has been prepared. Perhaps the survey will be most helpful as a guide in determining what action might be taken at your course to better plan and develop golf cart utilization and potential there.

QUESTION: *What percentage of golfers uses carts on your course?*

The range of answers is extremely

wide. The greatest number of "carted golfers" was found in the West (where 60 to 70 percent of golfers use them) and the Southwest (60 percent). The South was next (30 to 60 percent), followed by the Midwest (30 percent) and the East (20 percent). However, each of the last three areas reported an expected increase in "cart use rate" this year and predicted the trend will continue for the next several years.

QUESTION: *Are the carts (a) club owned, (b) privately owned, (c) other type of ownership?*

Club ownership exceeds all other types although a "rental lease" arrangement is almost as popular. One club President reported:

"We have learned from experience that the maintenance and replacement of golf carts is a business in itself. Consequently, we now have a contract with a distributor who supplies all necessary carts. New carts are furnished no less than every three years. The lessor has complete responsibility in all areas although the club does supply storage room. There are no other expenses to the club.

Our arrangement is 60 percent to the distributor and 40 percent to the club. Of this gross figure, the club allows one dollar a round to the golf professional. We believe the club is better off to take what amounts to a smaller guaranteed net profit rather than insert itself into the golf cart business. It has proven very satis-

factory to our Board of Directors.”

The early day arrangement of professionally owned or privately owned carts is definitely on the decline. This arrangement is difficult to police and enforcement of cart rules is onerous. Where the practice still prevails however, most clubs now collect a fixed monthly rate from the cart owner. Nevertheless, a gradual phase-out of this type of ownership is underway.

QUESTION: How many golf carts are used on your course?

Pick a number from 1 to 250 and you would be right! The range is far and wide. However, the present “level off” figure is in the neighborhood of 50 to 60 carts for an 18-hole course. During weekends and other periods of heavy play, they’ll make the round twice a day. In our opinion, this presents a very real and substantial problem in turfgrass management.

QUESTION: Does the club provide storage facilities?

Yes, clubs generally provide storage facilities for all carts. In a few instances, privately owned carts must be privately stored.

QUESTION: What are the storage charges per month?

Storage charges vary considerably. Apparently clubs find them hard to tie down. In many cases, they are included with maintenance charges (see below). In any event, of those clubs reporting on this item, storage ranged from \$2 to \$15 per month per cart.

QUESTION: What are the maintenance charges per month?

Most clubs report a “storage and maintenance” charge somewhere be-

tween \$18 to \$25 per month. This figure includes labor, electricity and materials for watering and charging the batteries, keeping the carts clean and storing them as well. Battery replacement, new tires or other major items apparently are not included.

For cart maintenance alone, the figures ranged from \$3 to \$75 per month. The higher figure undoubtedly includes major items.

QUESTION: How many employees are required for cart storage and maintenance?

Of course the answer would depend on the size of the cart fleet, age and condition of carts, etc. However, answers ranged from one to five men. Most clubs reported one full-time man sometimes needing a part-time helper.

QUESTION: What type of cart insurance would you recommend?

Surprisingly, less than half of the clubs in the survey bothered to answer. Of those that did, the following excerpts have been taken:

“The best.”

“Cart renter is responsible for cart and personal injury to himself and riders.”

“Members should carry personal liability on their own carts. Clubs should carry primary on club owned and secondary (non-owner liability) on non-owned carts.”

“As to cart insurance, we are covered under a floater type policy, covering fire, lightning, explosion, wind storms, flood, collisions, overturns, theft, hail, damage of vehicles, vandalism, etc. for 100 percent of value. As to body injury liability, we carry \$250,000 per person and \$1,000,000 per accident. As to property liability, we carry \$50,000.”

“Maximum liability and personal in-



Erosion problems are accentuated at beginning of hardtop paths. Car, cart, and foot traffic wear the turf and a minor erosion problem could quickly develop into something big. Path leading away from No. 7 green at Woodbride Country Club, Woodbridge, Conn. the day after a heavy rainfall.

jury. Accident insurance to cart is not necessary.”

“\$50,000/\$100,000 and \$5,000 property damage.”

QUESTION: *Is there a specific committee (cart committee) for all cart policy decisions? This would include rules establishment and enforcement, cart charges, cart specifications, traffic control, path requirements, storage facilities, trade-ins, etc.*

One would think such a committee would be of increasing value to a club as more and more carts go into use and require more and more policy decisions. However, the majority of clubs (62 percent) indicated they do not have such a committee today. One replied, “Yes, we have a cart committee, but it’s not too active.” The club has 40 carts.

It would seem that a number of clubs depend on their Green, Grounds, Golf or Tournament Committee to

handle the cart problem and, undoubtedly these committees can do the job. However, the survey also shows the need for a closer and more realistic approach to cart income, costs, enforcement of rules, etc. than is now being accomplished at most clubs. Perhaps, in the future, the “Cart Committee” will come into greater prominence.

QUESTION: *Have you established standards or specifications for carts such as maximum weight, number of wheels, tire width, horns, radios, etc?*

“Yes: wide tires but no ornaments, horns, radios, etc.” replied one co-operator. “No,” said the majority (75 percent) and we are astounded at this reply.

Clubs that have established standards are concerned almost entirely with tire size. The eight or nine-inch tire is the most frequently found requirement. Next is the outlawing of

the gas cart. Five percent of cooperating clubs have so ruled. Total weight and number of wheels (important factors in soil compaction and wear) have received little attention.

QUESTION: *Are cart users required to take a caddie?*

The East, South and Midwest are the last caddie strongholds and even they are slipping away. In the Northeast, where caddie requirements are greatest, it's a 50-50 proposition this year. Half the clubs require a caddie to accompany carts (if caddies are available) while half do not. Throughout the Mid-Continent and Western states, the survey shows less than 20 percent will require caddies with carts today.

QUESTION: *Does the club expect a profit from carts, or only that they pay their own way, including the cost of repairing the damage they cause to the course?*

The replies to this question are too colorful not to pass along:

"Can't help but make a profit!"

"We expected a break-even arrangement, but we are enjoying the profit."

"With only 75 members, we expect no profit. However, the club could not hire a professional without cart proceeds going to him."

"We expect a profit, I'm sure."

"No, no profit expected. If there is one, it goes into the General Fund."

"We expect to make a profit of between \$20,000 to \$24,000 annually after all expenses."

"We expect a profit, but my personal opinion is that it does not cover the damage done."

QUESTION: *What percentage of cart income actually goes toward course maintenance?*

Despite the years of accumulated

evidence and thousands of written words proving the contrary, most clubs obviously feel the golf cart has done little or, at most, insignificant damage to their course. This is truly amazing! The survey shows only 25 percent of clubs allocating all, or at least a percentage, of cart income to course maintenance. Frequently the allocation is restricted to cart path development. One club actually replied, "carts do no damage."

Apparently, the trend is toward clubs placing any profit from carts into the "General Fund," where it immediately loses all identity. For the turf man, it is a frustrating predicament to discover golf cart money going into items such as new carpets and interior decorations for the clubhouse while an inadequate 50-year old irrigation system is continually breaking down, mowing and new maintenance equipment is sorely needed and through it all, the golf carts keep wearing out the turf near every green, tee, and along some fairways! If nothing else, the survey shows a great need for further stress and information to the membership on the subject of "Golf Cart Damage to the Course."

QUESTION: *What percentage of cart income should go toward course maintenance?*

The answer depends on just who is being asked. In our survey, golf course superintendents, green chairmen and professionals supplied most of the answers. Less than 10 percent replied, "No cart proceeds should go toward course maintenance." The remaining 90 percent felt that at least a percentage (from 18 percent to 90 percent) should be allotted. About half of those replying felt that all cart income should go toward course maintenance.

Two ladies crawled from beneath this overturned cart and escaped without serious injury. The operator did not know what caused her to turn over in this ravine.



QUESTION: Do you have a "trade-in plan," i.e. trade-in so many carts yearly?

Although this would seem to be a principle of good business management, only 25 percent of the clubs surveyed have developed a "trade-in" policy.

QUESTION: What is the useful life of a cart under your conditions?

For the Southwest and West, the average "cart life" at private courses ranged from three to four years. Not too surprisingly, in the Midwest and East (where 12 month cart use is rare), the average is from four to five years. Only one club reported a "two-year cart life" (Texas) while, at the other end of the scale, one club said ten years (Midwest) was long enough.

QUESTION: During adverse weather:

(a) Who determines if carts may be used?

Nationwide, 60 percent of the golf course superintendents make this determination. The next most frequently mentioned was the golf professional (15 percent), then the green

chairmen followed by other club officials.

(b) Who enforces the decision?

The golf professional is singled out for this task 40 percent of the time. The green chairman or similar committee chairman has the responsibility at 35 percent of the cooperating clubs followed by superintendents, general managers, and club officials for the remaining 25 percent.

(c) Who handles the complaints?

Although the individual's title varies considerably (green chairman, golf, rules, cart, complaint or grounds chairman), he's usually the one to handle this difficult task. The Board Members, including the President and Vice-President, come next in this survey. Among club employees, the golf professional was mentioned for this task most often (20 percent of the time) while the superintendent and general manager dealt with cart complaints less than 10 percent of the time.

SUMMARY

The 1966 Survey shows some very real needs in golf cart administration.

For example, there is an obvious need for some committee (whether it be called a "cart committee" or whether it be a sub-committee of one already established, such as the Green Committee) to take active responsibility in all phases of cart administration. This would include recommendations to the Board of Directors on purchasing, cart specifications, trade-ins, charges, storage and maintenance, cart rules and enforcement, safety, insurance needs, path locations and construction, and many other decisions required wherever carts are present. Such a committee

should become thoroughly familiar with the seen and unseen damage heavy cart traffic brings to the golf course. We would hope a recommendation would be made for all or at least some percentage of cart income being diverted to course maintenance—if not course improvement.

One point is certain. Carts are going to find greater and greater use in the coming years. The opportunity to use this phenomenon for the general good of the golf course is now at hand. Will the golfer, concerned with the condition of his course, allow it to slip by?

COMING EVENTS

August 8-9	Field Days Purdue University Lafayette, Indiana
August 12	Golf & Fine Turf Field Day Rutgers University New Brunswick, N. J.
August 15-16	Midwest Turf Field Days Purdue University Lafayette, Ind.
August 17-18	Penn State Field Day Pennsylvania State University University Park, Pa.
August 18	Regional Turfgrass Conference Belvedere Country Club Hot Springs, Ark.
August 21-26	American Society of Agronomy Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
August 26-26	Hawaiian Turfgrass Management Conf. University of Hawaii Honolulu, Hawaii
August 26-28	Turfgrass Sprinkler Irrigation Conf. University of Calif. Conference Center Lake Arrowhead, Calif.
September 13	Northern Michigan Turfgrass Conference Traverse City Country Club Traverse City, Michigan
September 28	Arizona Turfgrass Conference Randolph Park Tucson, Arizona