

# The Green Section on Golf Carts

**H**ARDLY anyone is their champion. Few golfers openly and eagerly subscribe to their use. But as the fiberglass pole has been accepted in vaulting, the golf cart has found a home in the world of everyday golf. The traditionalists have lost this battle.

The cart has been condemned, restricted, banned and outlawed during the last 15 years. Still it persists, and actually gains in popularity each year. Over 25,000 were sold in 1965. The only conclusions one can draw are (1) The motorized cart obviously serves a useful purpose and (2) to criticize it is fashionable, but to use it is acceptable. No other piece of equipment has had the impact on golf or on golf course maintenance in the last 15 years as the motorized golf cart.

During the evolution, members of the USGA Green Section Staff have seen carts under all conditions and spoken to literally thousands of individuals directly concerned. From this close personal contact with Green Chairmen, Golf Course Superintendents, Professionals and others "on the firing line," considered opinions and viewpoints have emerged. We thought you would be interested and therefore decided to print this candid conversation between Green Section Staff members on this always controversial, yet interesting topic. The discussion started in a hotel room last January in New York. Staff members participating in the discussion included:

Alexander M. Radko, Eastern Director.

Holman M. Griffin, Northeastern Agronomist.

Lee Record, Northeastern Agronomist.

James B. Moncrief, Southeastern Agronomist.

Dr. Marvin H. Ferguson, Mid-Continent Director.

James L. Holmes, Midwestern Agronomist.

William H. Bengueyfield, Western Director.

They had gathered for an afternoon of conversation and review.

---

**MODERATOR:** In your travels and contacts with clubs, what percentage of them still outlaw the golf cart completely; what percentage allows some cart use (for example, for health reasons only) and what percentage has dropped all restrictions and allows unlimited use?

**DR. FERGUSON:** If any clubs have limitations, I am unaware of them.

**MONCRIEF:** Well, the limitations are hard to find. I know of only one club which prohibits the use of all carts. Caddies are used extensively. Surprisingly, the club is in a golf resort area in Virginia.

**HOLMES:** I know of no clubs where the golf cart is completely outlawed. And really, when it gets right down to it, there are actually no clubs where "limited use" has prevailed. If a person wishes to use a cart badly enough, he will develop a sore toe or some such reason to get a doctor's OK. For all intents and purposes, unlimited cart use on all courses in the Midwest has or is abruptly becoming a reality.

**RECORD:** Yes, the barriers are



**JAMES B. MONCRIEF**



**DR. MARVIN H. FERGUSON**

coming down. There is only one club in my area still outlawing all carts. Overall, I find about 20 percent of the clubs still carry some type of limitation while 80 percent have unlimited cart use.

**MONCRIEF:** The main cart restriction I find occurs during adverse weather conditions, especially on courses constructed on clay soils. Those on sandy type soils are less restricted. Otherwise, if the carts are available, they can be used providing they adhere to the policies of the country club.

**GRIFFIN:** My figures would jibe closely with Lee Records'. What interests me, however, is the definite increase in the use of carts at clubs where they are available. Over 50 percent of the golfers will use a cart today and most of the interested parties expect the use rate to increase in the next few years. After that, there may be a gradual leveling off.

**HOLMES:** The trend is increased cart use, growing with leaps and bounds at every course I visit. The cart use rate as far as I can see definitely is not leveling off but is materially increasing.

**RADKO:** No question, cart use in general is on the increase, and clubs

having the greatest number, perhaps between 40 and 50 carts, are really doing a good cart business. In the East however, I think we have a leveling off point. It now seems to be between 40 and 50 carts for an 18-hole private course.

**RECORD:** The cart increase we're talking about, I believe, has been at those clubs not having carts in the past. The leveling off of carts is being noticed at those clubs that have been on the cart bandwagon from the start. From 15 to 30 percent of the golfers at courses I visit now use carts.

**DR. FERGUSON:** Well, although no one can deny the past increase in cart use, I think a "leveling off" is now in progress. Why? Simply because everyone who has an inclination to ride does so. My guess would be 60 percent of today's golfers use carts.

**BENGEYFIELD:** Yes, 60 to 70 percent in the West. Although, I've heard of one retired California couple who use their private golf cart to drive from their home to the course and then they proceed over the 18 holes on foot! I doubt if we can count on this as a trend however. Besides, golf cart use is becoming an important source of additional revenue for many clubs.



WILLIAM H. BENGUEYFIELD



JAMES L. HOLMES

MONCRIEF: In the South, we expect an increased use and an increased income from carts for the next five years at least. At the present time, I would say somewhere between 30 to 60 percent of all golfers use a cart.

BENGUEYFIELD: Caddies were mentioned a moment ago. I wonder if you would agree that, at most clubs at least, the old "caddie yard" has now become the "cart storage yard." Any comments?

RADKO: The caddie is going the way of the "vanishing American." Draw your own analogy—automation in bowling did away with the pin boys, golf carts will eventually do away with the caddie. We already feel the pressure of the "vanishing caddie" at some clubs. Boys don't like to go to a club and wait to see if the player is going to choose him, or the cart. With more carts, fewer caddies will "make the loop." If you now have one caddie and two carts in a foursome, it stands to reason that fewer caddies will make less money each year, and as carts increase, caddies decrease.

MONCRIEF: The use of carts in the South has sabotaged the use of caddies. Caddies can make more money on regular jobs in many instances.

DR. FERGUSON: I think it's the other way around. Shortage of caddies and the uncertainty of supply has boosted cart use.

RECORD: I agree. Caddies have been reduced greatly—not by carts, but lack of available men. Carts have been introduced at several courses due to this manpower shortage.

GRIFFIN: Because good caddies are becoming increasingly hard to find, at some clubs at least, golf carts have come to the fore. For the occasional tournament however, there still seems to be plenty of caddies around.

HOLMES: Golf carts have killed the caddie as we once knew him. I believe the Western Golf Association and other golf associations with caddie funds had better begin to worry just exactly how they are going to get carts through college on scholarships. There are still three or four clubs in the greater Chicago area which insist caddies go out with or without carts whenever caddies are available. However, the trend is breaking down and I foresee the time in the near future when it no longer will be necessary take caddies, even at the old "traditional clubs." Further, there are at least two courses in the Chicago area which require golfers to take carts and are opposed

to having caddies of any kind around the clubhouse or in the general clubhouse area.

**MODERATOR:** As a guesstimate, how many carts can a club have before noticeable wear and cart path damage starts to occur?

**DR. FERGUSON:** This is a hard one to answer. Too many modifying factors are involved. I'd say 20 or less probably wouldn't do noticeable damage if they are driven sensibly, i.e. have big tires, etc.

**GRIFFIN:** I have observed this particular point for a couple of years and find that with 20 carts or less used once a day each, most clubs seem to get along fairly well under good maintenance. With 20 or more, damage is increasingly evident.

**HOLMES:** As a guesstimate, a club must have exactly one cart before noticeable wear and cart path damage starts to occur. This is kind of like the straw that broke the camel's back. It is the last straw. Concurrently, it is the first cart that begins the "noticeable cart damage."

**RADKO:** Depending on the size of the cart, terrain, and architecture of the course, I'd say normally between 10 and 20 carts can cause damage. There are extreme cases where excessive low, wet areas exist, where numerous deep sand traps exist, where greens and tees are elevated and unaccessible to easy approach, etc. These are the clubs that suffer the most.

**RECORD:** I have been told by superintendents that damage is approximately the same with six carts as it is with 12 to 18. The increased number of carts

seems to lengthen the already damaged areas. I would imagine on a given day, one cart could cause as much havoc under wet conditions as 12 carts could under normal conditions.

**MONCRIEF:** There's another point to consider too. The course which is built on clay soil may show damage from 5 to 10 carts while a course built on sandy loam may support 20 carts before showing the same amount of damage. An estimate of 10 to 15 carts will start showing cart damage unless maintenance practices counteract the wear they create.

**BENGEYFIELD:** Where we do have carts—of any kind—we must have a larger budget. The more carts, the more money needed. It's that simple.

**MODERATOR:** In your opinion then should carts be restricted to roughs only or should carts be allowed to roam throughout the course except on tees, greens and approaches? Is the day coming when cart paths will be needed from the first tee through the 18th green?

**HOLMES:** Most of the clubs I call on have gone through the gambit of restricting carts to rough only. After a time, they observed that a bare and dusty road developed on either side of the fairway. Therefore, it is currently considered proper practice to allow carts to roam throughout the golf course. However, it must be added that asphalt cart paths are being installed in traffic funnel areas on practically every golf course on which I call.

**RADKO:** Carts should not be restricted to roughs alone, they should be allowed throughout except on tees, greens and approaches. In my opinion,

asphalt roads throughout the course are not only ugly, but they don't seem to speed up play. If a cart has to stay on the blacktop road and the players walk to their ball on each fairway, I say forget it! They are not only wasting time, but they are not getting full enjoyment out of the game. Many times they take one or two clubs to their ball and find they have the wrong club and, rather than go back for the right club, they use the one that they brought. Surveying a shot from an asphalt path is quite different from surveying it where the ball actually lies.

**BENGEYFIELD:** I know of one club where, on Par 4 and Par 5 holes, golfers are allowed to use their cart from the tee path area directly to where their ball lies. Then, after their shot, they must immediately leave the fairway and get on a paved path in the rough. It works out fairly well.

**DR. FERGUSON:** Carts should be allowed to roam throughout except on tees, greens, and approaches. Mr. Richard Tufts put it best when he said that "the inherent inaccuracy of the golfer will serve to distribute the traffic." Paths in roughs probably would be useful in bad weather.

**BENGEYFIELD:** I like your point about paths and bad weather. Where golf is played 12 months of the year, cart paths are almost essential during the "rainy season" or the "dormant season." If the weather is tolerable for golf, some members will want to play and they will insist on using a golf cart. Others will not play and will not use any of the clubhouse facilities because the course is "closed" to carts. Both the member AND the club are losers. Therefore, I believe we will someday see cart paths from the first



HOLMAN M. GRIFFIN



LEE RECORD



ALEXANDER M. RADKO

tee through the 18th green on most courses. We may not like them, but we will need them to survive.

MONCRIEF: In developing new courses, golf course architects should stress the handling of cart traffic and the freer use of carts throughout the course in their design. Probably there will always be restrictions on how close carts should come to the green. There is a tendency toward more courses building a cart system and cart freedom in relation to prevailing weather conditions. Furthermore, cart manufacturers could help in their advertising if they would show the carts away from the green, not close to it.

RECORD: If we restrict carts to roughs alone, we are defeating the primary reason for the cart. I believe cart paths should be developed as needed. Carts generally however, should have the freedom of the course. The superintendent should have complete control over their use. A strong turf management program is essential under these conditions. Weak turf areas show up regardless of the type of traffic and climatic conditions. An adequate budget is really the answer to meet these demands.

GRIFFIN: In my opinion, the restrictions placed on a cart would depend somewhat on the number of carts being used at a club. However, sooner or later, I believe all clubs will build paths for the carts.

MODERATOR: What is the trend today throughout the country in regard to gas carts vs. electric carts? Is there a significant difference in maintenance and operating costs, the acceptability of gas carts, the longevity of electric carts, etc.?

GRIFFIN: This seems to be a matter of personal preference. Gasoline carts make more noise but, under the eyes of a good gas engine maintenance man, they seem to be easier to maintain and keep in use. However, I am sure electric cart enthusiasts would and could use the same argument in their favor.

HOLMES: It seems to me that two or three years ago the new gas cart gained popularity in the Midwest. However, at the present time I would estimate the trend has reversed and electric carts are definitely in favor. At the present time it would seem to me that electric carts would continue to be the most used in this area. Approximately 90 to 95 percent of all carts here are electric.

MONCRIEF: There is no doubt that electric carts are still favored in the South and gas carts do not appear to be gaining in popularity. The main reasons for electric rather than gas cart use are: 1. Maintenance is cheaper and, 2. noise is less with the electric cart.

MODERATOR: Do you know of any unusual training techniques or guides for proper cart use?

DR. FERGUSON: No, but I feel we need one new approach in the training of golf cart use. It is this—when a person drives an automobile, he usually pulls to the right and parks. This “instinct” or training seems to carry over to golf cart operation. Thus when a cart operator parks, he pulls off the path to the right. It’s murder on the turf alongside the path.

RECORD: An original idea just came to mind. I think the side of every

cart should have the following inscription: "Caution: cart riding may be hazardous to your health."

GRIFFIN: Lines, signs and fines just about sum up the guides for proper cart use. Many clubs use guide lines of one sort or another to direct carts. Others have operational instructions posted on the first tee or some other such area as well as in the carts themselves. Occasionally fines are imposed on members for misuse of carts. Some clubs use all three techniques.

MODERATOR: Do you have any ideas on how carts may be improved in regard to turf wear? I am thinking of things such as slower starts and less turning radius. Should we insist on four wheels and nine-inch tires?

DR. FERGUSON: We agree on the points in your question, i.e., slower starts, less turning radius, four wheels with nine-inch tires. From the safety standpoint however, the accelerator and brake should be more widely separated. Too often, a person intends to step on the brake but hits the accelerator. I speak from personal experience. I was rammed from behind last year.

BENGEYFIELD: Cart manufacturers must give greater attention to safer design. I'm sure the four-wheel cart will someday replace the three-wheeler. It is far more stable and this is extremely important, particularly on hilly courses.

Recently there's been renewed interest in single passenger golf carts. I wonder about these. Unless the newer models are radically different from the old, they're likely to be too unstable, too fast and too short in turning radius to satisfy me.

MONCRIEF: One of the many ways to reduce turf wear is a slower cart. This in turn will reduce quick starts, slow down the turns, and prevent players in carts from rushing up behind foursomes with comments of slow play. Use a minimum 9.50 x 8-inch tire which gives six pounds per square inch pressure on the ground.

HOLMES: I really do not have any concrete ideas on this one. I am not particularly in favor of the wide tire. It seems to me more damage is done at the time turf is commencing to wilt than at any other time. Certainly, with the wide tire, less damage is done in overwet soils. However, the wide tire is considerably more damaging during drought conditions because a larger area of turf is covered with the tire.

I think the ultimate improvement would be an air transport type cart that floats anywhere from three inches to three feet above the ground and swoops along on a cushion of air. Don't laugh, I think that this type of golfer transportation might be closer to a reality than we realize.

RADKO: That's the only answer. When they devise a car that rides an air cushion, I'll feel a lot better about the no wear and tear on turf, and I think you are right; the day is coming.

GRIFFIN: For the moment, I think a club should insist on wide tires but I don't see how the type of cart we know could be improved a great deal. To really do any good we will have to come up with some ideas and designs as new and different as the idea of using carts in the first place was a few years ago.

MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen.