

# Up, Up and Away

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**W**e have all heard the story of the sailor on leave who rents a boat and takes a cruise, and of the bus driver on his day off taking a tour of the city. Would you believe the story of an agronomist who travels over 25,000 miles each year talking turf with golf course superintendents and club officials in the United States, who then takes his vacation and travels halfway around the world to look at turf and play golf?

On one of those beautiful Chicago winter days with 20 inches of snow and the thermometer hovering between 20 and 30 degrees, a plane left from O'Hare International Airport enroute to Malaga, Spain; there I was, bags, baggage and golf clubs. Eight hours later we landed on the Costa Del Sol, the sun coast of Spain's Andalusian coastline.

The weather was warm and comfortable, as it is most of the year. The climate was a welcome relief from the freezing temperatures of the Midwest. However, the climate was also favorable for *Poa annua*. Although the lawns and fairways are predominately bermudagrass, *Poa annua* makes its presence known on golf courses in Spain as it does here. The greens are bentgrass but *Poa annua* is scattered throughout.

Since Costa del Sol is among Europe's favorite sunshine playgrounds, it receives over two million tourists annually. Fortunately, not all of them play golf, but those who do contribute significantly to the usual problems of wear and tear on turf. Due to the large amount of play, most tees have some form of bermudagrass vegetation showing signs of traffic. Fairways are a combination of bermudagrass and bluegrass.

Because the climate is of a maritime nature, many tropical and warm-season ornamental plants are used throughout the golf courses to bring added beauty to the property.

## CULTURAL PRACTICES

As one may expect, the level of maintenance varies from one course to another as it does in the United States. Some golf courses use the newer triplex riding greensmowers, others still use the hand walking mowers. Several courses had finished aerifying fairways with the latest model aerifier available, although a course 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) down the coast has never aerified fairways and they were aerifying greens by hand with a series of tines welded on a cross bar.

# to Spain!



The condition of the golf courses in Spain, as in other parts of the world, can be directly related to the equipment and the personnel who use it. The majority of specialized turfgrass equipment, such as greensmowers, aerifiers, etc. are imported from the United States. The trucks, tractors and utility vehicles were of local origin.

Personnel seemed to be plentiful. The speed at which people move throughout the whole area of southern Spain is considerably slower than the hustle and hurry attitude that is prevalent on American freeways and fairways. Although my Spanish vocabulary is very limited, the first two words a tourist learns are "uno momento" and "manana." "Uno momento" translated, literally means "one moment" but the moment in Spain can take as long as 30 to 40 minutes! "Manana" means "tomorrow"; as slow as some things happen, like waiting for a taxi or accepting delivery on a rental car, tomorrow may be a couple of days away! During siesta time, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. or 12 noon to 5 p.m., depending upon the month, virtually all activities cease.

## CARTS AND TRAFFIC CONTROL

Three- or four-wheel electric or gasoline powered golf cars are few and far between. Many courses do not have golf cars within the complex, although a few have some cars that are privately owned. Consequently, the caddie is still an integral part of the game in Spain. It is very common for many school boys to play hookie once or twice a week to caddie.

After a week in the warm sunshine of southern Spain and northern Africa, it was back to the Midwest winter of snow; awaiting again the first blade of green grass. Waiting also was a little white ball with Spanish dimples and a Spanish smile.