

# Putting the Horse in Front of the Cart

*Using rubber horse stall mats as a durable, low-bounce cart path surface.*

by MATT NELSON

ASK MOST golf purists and golf course superintendents alike, and they will tell you that power golf carts are the scourge of the game. Golf carts can be loud, smell, and lead to considerable turfgrass wear or death. Cart paths are expensive to construct, and so is the renovation of worn or killed grass. Hard surface cart paths can negatively affect a golf shot, and carts in general can be argued to detract from the overall golf experience. After all, golf is a walking game, right?

Ask golf course managers or those profiting from cart revenue, and money talks. There is no question that carts can provide significant revenue at many golf facilities. Carts also allow the handicapped or physically ailing access to the game. Carts save exertion, especially during hot and humid weather. Some people argue that golf carts increase the pace of play, but *cart path only* restrictions and golfers who sit rather than prepare for the next shot sacrifice any perceived increase in the pace of play. Like them or not, golf carts have become an integral part of the American game and are here to stay.

The intent of this article is to address the issue of cart path surfaces and their potential to negatively affect a golf shot. There really is no perfect cart path surface for all situations. Concrete or asphalt are perhaps the best choices, although these surfaces are expensive to install and can cause an unfortunate bounce if too close to play. Gravel, wood chips, or other unstable cart path surfaces are time-consuming and costly to maintain, and may provide poor definition for proper ruling when a player's lie or stance may be affected. Usually there is controversy when a cart path is located in a high-play area. Sometimes there is opportunity to relocate the cart path and solve the problem, and sometimes not.

Amby Mrozak, golf course superintendent at Cameron Park C.C., Cameron Park, California, was faced with this dilemma at the 18th hole of



*There is no perfect cart path surface for all situations, but rubber horse stall liners have provided a durable, low-bounce cart path surface at Cameron Park C.C. (Cameron Park, California). Road base was installed on the subgrade of the cart path with a railroad tie embedded along the midpoint. The railroad tie was used as a contact point for the rubber mats and to provide a crown to the surface.*

the golf course. The cart path crosses the fairway in front of a hazard on this par-five hole. Relocating the cart path would compromise safety, so the problem was to find a suitable cart path surface that would not cause huge golf ball bounces yet be durable and easy to maintain. Mr. Mrozak found his solution in rubber horse stall mats.

The thick rubber mats are used in horse stalls as durable flooring. The mats are commonly 4' wide by 6' long. The rubber is 1" thick and of medium softness. Mr. Mrozak prepared the subgrade of the cart path crossing the fairway and installed road base. A railroad tie was then installed down the center of the subgrade to provide a contact point for the rubber mats and also a slight crown to the surface for drainage. Lag bolts were used to attach the mats to the railroad ties and the individual mats were spaced approximately  $\frac{3}{8}$ " apart to account for shrinking and swelling. Drain tile was installed along both sides of the new cart path as this location is in an area of poor drainage.

To date, Mr. Mrozak claims the rubber mats have worked perfectly without any problems. They have held up very well in the year and a half they have been in place. The project has improved a problem area of the golf course by managing traffic, improving drainage, and eliminating bad bounces. The mats provide a bounce much like firm ground. The members at the club are pleased with the new surface.

Rubber horse stall mats may not be the best solution for reducing cart path interference with play, but they are a novel approach to a common problem that may at least get you thinking of other possibilities. As with much of problem solving, putting the horse in front of the cart is a logical beginning point.

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*As an agronomist in the USGA Green Section's Northwest Region, MATT NELSON often finds it's the "horse sense" of golf course superintendents that leads to innovative solutions to problems.*