

Tips for keeping fleets in top condition. *By Erin Brereton, Contributing Editor*

ON THE RIGHT PATH

SUMMING IT UP

- Keep a regular maintenance schedule and a detailed log for each golf car in your fleet.
- Rotate vehicles to have equal wear on each car.
- Educate staff, as well as members and guests, on the proper operation of golf cars.

The avid golf enthusiast will likely notice your club's course more than anything else. However, if your golf cars aren't clean, charged or full of gas, the green may take a backseat to your members seeing red.

"It's important for our facility to look good," says Jay Giannetto, Assistant Golf Professional at Ames (Iowa) Country Club. "Golf cars are a big part of that. Having them in good condition lets people play faster, and also helps to make sure they can keep playing as they get older."

That's especially important at busy clubs, where things need to be kept moving. "You spend four hours on them!" says Renee Holloman, General Manager of Hershey (Pa.) Country Club, who adds, "They're part of the overall appearance of the club, just like when you walk in the front entrance [of the clubhouse]. They're critical to that first impression and in some cases, may be the only chance you get.

"These cars are [members'] personal vehicles while they're here," Holloman adds. "They expect the bathrooms to be spotless, and the cars, too. And we're all about meeting those expectations."

Checking and Recording

Most club and resort managers know the importance of regular maintenance for golf car fleets, as recommended by manufacturers. "Clubs need to check the batteries on a regular basis, especially on an electric vehicle, and make sure water levels are maintained," says an executive with one manufacturer. "They also need to make sure the batteries are kept clean and there's no acid buildup. If [clubs] have their own mechanic, they should also check the brake adjustment."

Equally important is having full maintenance and upkeep records at ready disposal for every car in a fleet. Without a good monitoring and

tracking system, even the most basic car maintenance program can quickly get derailed.

Staying up on golf car cleaning, maintenance and performance records, and operational problems is, as Hershey's Holloway describes it, a task that lasts "all day, every day." Many properties now rely on a simple, publicly posted chart system, or a series of daily phone calls to get information that's entered into a computerized log.

"We have a logbook in which we keep track of any problem with a specific car, and also keep track of the cars' maintenance records," says Giannetto of Ames CC. "When a car is flagged, in most instances, it's because the battery is dead. We note the car in our logbook, and have a mechanic check the battery and charger. Because it's all entered in the book, if something happens again, we know there's a problem with that car."

Logging car usage and performance also helps to ensure cars are charged and rotated properly on the course. Making sure that no one car gets used excessively will increase a fleet's overall duration.

"We try to make sure every car is used equally and we don't have the same cars going out everyday; that extends the life of all of the cars," Giannetto says. "It's important for trade-in value; you want the fleet to have the same amount of use on all of the cars."

On the Charts

Hershey Country Club has also instituted a detailed tracking and labeling system that gets put into play as soon as new cars arrive.

"We've marked the cars with electric tape, in places where you can't really see them, with numbers and six colors," says Holloman. "There is also a color code on the ground [denoting where to park]. The color coding came out of my concern when we got the cars; I thought, I do



not want a member out on the course with a car that's not fully charged, so we would have to tow them in halfway through their round."

Hershey's chart is updated frequently by its outside operations manager, and the director of engineering regularly makes sure all chargers are working properly. The carts are plugged in overnight, with staff required to check for the green light in the morning, to make sure they are charged. If there is an issue with a car, the director of engineering is notified via a work order filled out by the staff.

Holloman has found the chart can help track rotation needs as well.

"Let's say it's Monday—then the chart says that on that day, you must start with the purple cars," she says. "They need to get a certain amount of holes in before recharging. Then next week, we start rotating a different color."

Wash it Out

Members' cars may not get washed every day, but you'd better believe they like their golf cars to be.

"We have golf shop service attendants in charge of daily cleaning and upkeep of cars," says Giannetto. "We follow a specific routine to keep them up; every night, they are washed down and dried and cleaned. We like to keep them looking as best as they can for the membership."

That includes making sure new staff members know the routine, and that old ones haven't forgotten it.

"We have, as far as daily upkeep, golf service staff and maintenance staff constantly being trained [on how to do it]," Giannetto says.

Hershey Country Club's new golf storage space

that came with its recently renovated clubhouse also includes wash pad cleaning areas for its golf cars, which are wiped down daily and washed thoroughly after storms.

"Just as you train your food servers, you also have ongoing training [for car maintenance]," Holloman says. "You've got younger people coming in [as workers] and retirees who have never worked at a club, and we have them 'buddy up' at first to learn proper procedures.

"Then there are spot checks," she adds. "Myself, the golf staff and others are consistently out there making sure the cars are lined up and looking beautiful."

For the Members, By the Members

The future of golf car technology may include some exciting options. "You might see self-adjusting brakes, so fleet customers don't even have them touched during the course of the lease," says an executive with one car manufacturer. "There's talk of maintenance-free batteries so you'll never have to worry about the water level—you'll just charge them. Unless someone damages it, you could have cars that are fairly maintenance-free during the course of their lease."

Until those upgrades become reality, though, steps should still be taken to protect your fleet—and as you educate your staff about golf car maintenance, it never hurts to gently inform your members, as well.

"We have a basic golf car policy posted for safety issues—two people and two bags per car, responsible driving, etc.—that all of our members can see," says Giannetto. "We've found this helps our members take good care of the cars, too." C&RB

For more tips on golf car maintenance and safety, go to www.clubandresortbusiness.com

Golf Car Maintenance Checklist

Electric and Gas Models

▪ **Quarterly:** Inspect suspension for axle damage, loose hardware, leaking shocks, spring cracks, and alignment; check park and service brake linkage and catch mechanism for wear.

▪ **Semi-annually:**

Clean and wax all painted surfaces; inspect, adjust, and lubricate all moving front suspension parts.

▪ **Annually:** Check rear axle for abnormal noise, leaks, loose hardware, and axle nut torque; clean and adjust entire brake linkage system; replace brake shoes as required.

Electric Models

▪ **Daily:** Charge battery.

▪ **Every 2-3 weeks:**

Check battery electrolyte levels, adding approved water if

required.

▪ **Monthly:** Clean batteries with baking soda and water solution.

▪ **Quarterly:** Listen for audible click from solenoid and micro-switches.

Gas Models

▪ **Weekly:** Check fuel gauge operation and clean fuel cap.

▪ **Monthly:** Clean battery with baking soda and water solution.

▪ **Quarterly:** Check engine wiring for insulation, loose hardware, or corroded terminals; inspect fuel system for leaks or line deterioration.

▪ **Semi-annually:**

Replace engine oil with correct grade.

▪ **Annually:** Verify exhaust system, fuel filter, replace spark plugs, check timing belt, and adjust valves.

SOURCE: E-Z-GO



Room to Recharge

KEEPING CARS in perfect working order also means first providing ample parking space. As more clubs switch from gas cars to electric because of environmental and noise concerns, as well as the rising price of gas, this can entail either constructing new facilities or updating older ones.

When Hershey Country Club scheduled its 31,000-square-foot clubhouse and aquatic center renovation, completed in 2006, it included new storage space in the plans, even though the club didn't purchase new cars until March 2007.

"When we went through our major \$20 million renovation, we also built two car barns," says General Manager Renee Holloman. "In them, you'll find our power packs, and we are able to plug in the new electric cars."

In some cases, a new facility isn't needed. When Ames Country Club purchased 40 electric cars two years ago, the club added storage changes to its to-do list.

"We have a storage facility here," says Jay Giannetto, Assistant Golf Pro. "It's not new by any means, but we modified the area for the electric cars."

Modifications to existing parking areas can include adding charging outlets, dividing areas into specific parking spaces, and posting information about cart usage and tracking. —E.B.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HERSHEY COUNTRY CLUB