

Should Private Golf Clubs Embrace Single Rider Golf Cars?

Single rider golf cars will be in the news in upcoming months as the Department of Justice attempts to finalize regulations regarding ADA accessibility and its application to recreational facilities and programs. Private Golf Clubs may or may not be affected by the regulations but there is one topic that I believe Private Golf Clubs should embrace. Thus my question: Should Private Golf Clubs endorse single rider golf cars for their Members?

What Is A Single Rider Golf Car?

In simple terms, a single rider golf car is a specially designed golf car for an individual with a disability that allows him/her the opportunity to participate in the game of golf.

Why Private Clubs?

Generally, individuals belonging to Private Golf Clubs have already demonstrated a passion for the game of golf. Those individuals obsessed with the game would do just about anything for an opportunity to play one more round. Because full golf Members generally pay the highest amount of dues, Private Clubs benefit when a Member remains in full golf status. Downgrading to a social Member, due to a disability, reduces the amount of income a Club receives in dues and other golf related fees. Would a single rider golf car assist Members in resuming their golfing activities, adding value to their Club Membership?

What Is A Disability?

Disabilities come in various forms and fashions. Clearly, a person who requires the use of a wheelchair outwardly demonstrates they have some form of disability. Private Golf Club Members may experience any number of temporary or permanent disabilities during their Membership tenure at a Club. From a cast on a broken ankle to knee and hip replacements, from bi-pass surgery to having a stroke, and from recovering from an automobile accident to simply aging, Members occasionally find it difficult to continue their golfing experience with their comrades.

How Are Disabled Individuals Helped?

Some individuals with disabilities are unable to walk great distances or need some support when swinging a golf club. Others may have use of their upper body but not their lower body. Single rider golf cars are designed and equipped to be operated by individuals with disabilities and to be driven to the ball, no matter where the ball is located, some even onto the putting green. (Yes, onto the putting green.) Manufacturers state that the pounds per square inch of some single rider golf car tires are less than that of a human's foot print. Thus, with proper usage, driving up to and on the teeing ground and putting green should be acceptable for the disabled using a specially manufactured single rider golf car.

Introduction Of Single Rider Golf Cars To The Club

As with anything revolutionary and new, there needs to be a process of introduction of single rider golf cars to the superintendent, golf staff and Members of a Private Golf Club. After the superintendent, I would suggest that the bag staff may be one of the most important groups to learn the benefits of a single rider golf car. Most often, they have the pulse of the golfing membership, knowing and observing who is coming and going and discussing ailments with Members. If the bag staff understands who a single rider golf car would benefit, they can suggest and encourage the proper use to the appropriate Member or guest.

Experience Single Rider Golf Cars

The only way to fully understand the potential benefits of a single rider golf car is to actually use one on the golf course. Golf staff employees, as well as Club Board Members should be encouraged to take one of these golf cars out for a test drive, attempting to use the car exactly as a person with a disability would. Drive the car to the driving tee, up to the green and even onto the green to learn first hand how the car handles and that it does not damage the course. This would also be useful in providing instruction to a new user before a Member embarks on a new experience.

Golfers will undoubtedly be skeptical at first. Clubs may want to plan a specially designed event to introduce these cars and give Members the opportunity to try one, even though they are not currently disabled. Whether it is during a club demo day or designating a golf hole during a charity scramble golf tournament for the longest drive while sitting on the single rider golf car, the golf staff must be seen as extremely positive about single rider golf cars. Eliminating the stigma that can be associated with a person using an aid to play golf will go a long way in making the game all inclusive. Occasionally allowing single rider cars to be used by singles or in threesomes will assist tremendously in reducing the stigma that they are only for golfers with disabilities. Set some ground rules for their use and then track the reactions by your Members. See if single rider cars are truly an added benefit to your Membership.

Consider The Possibilities

- **Broken ankle** – A Member has cast on right ankle and would have trouble putting the pedal to the medal of a standard golf car. Additionally, hopping from the cart path to the putting green can be dangerous to the golfer and course. Single rider golf cars have hand controls for the gas and brake and can be driven up to the putting green.
- **Aging** – A Member, and former multiple year Club champion, has aged significantly and shuffles himself around the course, moving ever slower. Getting to the golf course is, however, the absolute highlight of his day. Simple pleasures are all a person can ask for. A single rider golf car would speed up his play and allow him to drive as close to his ball as possible and keep the person active.
- **Paraplegic and Quadriplegic** - Spinal cord injured golfers, similar to my friend, trick shot artist and PGA professional Dennis Walters, can play out of the car, sitting or bracing themselves while swinging. With adjustable, swivel seating, one does not need to be able to actually stand by themselves to enjoy the game of golf. Thus, the game can be experienced as all inclusive for Members and their guests.
- **Medical Issues** - Member's encountering debilitating events, such as by-pass surgery, strokes, etc., are encouraged to begin normal activities as soon as possible. What better way for Members to work themselves back into a regular routine than to resume their golfing activities. A Private Golf Club that demonstrates their willingness to take the extra step to accommodate their Members is a Club a person is interested in belonging to.

Dismissing To Quick?

Will a Private Golf Club dismiss single rider golf cars to quick? My initial observations tell me that they may because Clubs already let their Members drive up to the greens if they have a medical need. This assists the person that cannot easily walk from the cart path to the green. Single rider cars provide benefits far beyond the issue of not being able to walk a long distance. Hand controls can bring additional individuals to the game while a swivel seat makes for easy

entrance and exit. Additionally, there is a whole segment of society that may consider Private Club membership if they are now able to play the game with their disability.

Should A Club Own Single Rider Golf Cars?

Should Private Golf Clubs view the single rider golf car as an added value to an already exceptional Club experience? I believe that it can be. I am not suggesting Clubs need to purchase a fleet of single rider cars. Clubs should accommodate Members and their guests that need some assistance due to their disabilities. Even if a Private Club elects not to purchase a single rider golf car, they may want to consider allowing Members to purchase their own specially equipped car to be used on the course. Clubs may want to inform Members and prospective Members of the new technology in golf equipment that can make the game even more inclusive. While selling longer distance golf balls and larger faced drivers, golf pros could educate Members about golf car advancements to keep the Member or prospective Member in the game.

Concluding Comments

The ADA laws may not require Private Golf Clubs to make their golf facilities any more accessible than they now are. Taking the lead in going the next step to provide a golf car specifically manufactured with special features could assist a Private Golf Club in obtaining and retaining Full Golf Members.

Mitchell L. Stump, CPA is a Board Member of the National Alliance for Accessible Golf and encourage the Private Club Industry to embrace actions that make the game of golf even more inclusive. NAAG's Board is made up of representatives of major golf and disability focused organizations with names you will recognize:

- *CMAA; GCSA; LPGA; NGCOA; PGA; PGA Tour; The First Tee; USGA;*
- *Clemson University; Indiana University; University of Utah; The Claremont Colleges*
- *American Therapeutic Recreation Association; National Recreation & Parks Association; National Therapeutic Recreation Society*
- *City of Las Vegas*

Visit NAAG's web site www.accessgolf.org/news for additional information regarding single rider cars.