

A good walk spoiled? That's no longer true

PLAYING GOLF BY FOOT GAINS MOMENTUM
WITH IMPROVED, MODERN PUSH CARTS

By **James Achenbach**

On most U.S. golf courses, the forces that wage war against walking are mighty.

Many courses depend heavily on the revenue generated by riding carts. Some modern course developers have built layouts with marathon distances between greens and tees. Resorts and high-end daily-fee courses often require golfers to ride.

Regardless, walking has received a huge boost from hand carts with two, three or four wheels. Most of these carts are correctly called push carts, although a European fascination with self-propelled, battery-operated carts is slowly spreading to the United States.

Whether carts are powered by hand or battery, they have breathed life into the concept of playing golf by foot.

"We have all these baby boomers," said Steve Aiken, director of golf at Aspen (Colo.) Golf Club, ranked by *Golfweek* as one of the nation's top 25 municipal facilities. "Many of them are exercise conscious. They want to walk when they play golf, but they don't want to carry a bag like maybe they once did. So they put their clubs on a cart."

"The carts are light and well-balanced. They work really well. We see remote-controlled carts here. I would say the signs for walking are very encouraging."

When Peter Hanneforth took his battery-propelled

Bat-Caddy to the PGA Merchandise Show in January, he expected to receive plenty of exposure but didn't necessarily expect to become a cart supplier to Golfsmith, the golf superchain. To his surprise, that's exactly what happened.

By the way, that's Bat as in battery, not Batman. Hanneforth does, however, tell an amusing story of being contacted by an agent who claimed to represent the Batman franchise. The agent said Batman would consider an endorsement contract. Sorry, but this Bat flies on its own.

As for the modern three-wheel push cart, Sun Mountain founder Rick Reimers is credited with that invention.

"It was a dozen or so years ago," Reimers said. "We looked at all the pull carts. That's what they were called. They were all pretty much the same – all pretty bad. I thought to myself that pushing it would be a lot better, and that proved to be the case."

Why? The main reason: Pull carts don't have centerline capability and tend to twist from side to side.

On the other hand, a push cart's center of gravity lines up with the

user's center of gravity.

In the process, Reimers invented another phenomenon: Golfers allowing their three-wheel carts to cascade freely down hillsides.

Pete Line, general manager at Carl's Golfland in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., has watched the evolution of hand carts with fascination.

"I think of some of those awful things we used to pull," he said. "They were heavy, with those really bad wheels. It's a world of difference today."

Bat-Caddy's Hanneforth says he sees American golf becoming more like golf in Europe, where virtually all golfers walk.

"Back in 2004, when I started the company, the market was very limited," Hanneforth said. "We were laughed at . . . that has changed dramatically."



Sun Mountain Speed Cart V2 (\$239)



Bat-Caddy X4R (\$795)

The new breed of cart is perhaps best exemplified by Clicgear, an Oregon company that had the good fortune of introducing its distinctive all-white Clicgear 3.0 push cart at the same time TaylorMade was making a splash with its new collection of white clubheads.

"Our entire mission has been quality," said Clicgear national sales manager Todd Hansen, whose sturdy three-wheel cart folds into a small cube that measures (in inches) 24-by-15-by-13. "The reaction to the white cart was so overwhelming, the first day after the (PGA Merchandise) Show we contacted the factory and told them to do an entire shipment in white."

Clicgear carts, which come in a variety of colors, are sold by major retailers such as Golfsmith, Edwin Watts and The Golf Warehouse.

Some battery-operated carts come with a remote-control device that looks like a TV remote. Maneuvering these carts can be tricky, but most golfers get the hang of it. Other carts with batteries are operated with controls on the cart handle.

In the U.S., the Cadillac of battery carts is the e-motion cart, imported



Battery-operated
e-motion E3 (\$2,099)

from Germany. The three-wheel e3 model is top of the line, sophisticated and electronically advanced. All of the electronics are internal. There are no wires. The small lithium magnesium battery can go up to 36 holes on one charge.

"In Europe, they call it a caddy," said e-motion CEO John Pierandozzi. "We don't have a remote. We found that people spend too much time fiddling with a remote. It can take away from the enjoyment. The simple act of putting your palm on the grip is much easier, much simpler and much more intuitive."

The e-motion cart has a variety of user-controlled speeds. It can cruise down the fairway at a slow jog, if desired. Pierandozzi says more than 20,000 of the carts are in circulation in Europe.

Looking ahead, some advocates of walking see a potential revenue stream from the rental of these carts, particularly those with batteries.

"We've just been approached," Bat-Caddy's Hanneforth said, "and we're evaluating all the factors. I believe a course could charge between \$10 and \$15 per round. For the course, there would be less cost, less storage space, less maintenance."

Walking, anyone? ○



Clicgear 3.0 (\$199)

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