



(Clockwise from top left) Western Model 400, Hummer H2 and Custom Cruiser Golf Carts

BRIDE IN STYLE

BY LAURIE LEE DONEY

WITH TODAY'S LATEST GOLF CARTS

WHETHER IT'S A VIPER,

a classic Corvette or a 1957 Thunderbird, if ownership of your dream car continues to elude you, why not try what many other golfers have done and incorporate your dream car into your golf game? By customizing a golf car with a replica body, you'll soon be able to smoothly maneuver curving pavement at nearly 20 miles per hour as you make your way to the center grounds of golf holes where long drives carry on the wind and settle

in the short grass.

Of course, like the real thing, your new set of wheels won't come cheap.

"Most people think they can get a golf car for \$500 to \$1,000," says Matt Glendon of Club Car. "You can't if you want a car that runs and is hassle-free."

New, nicely equipped and customized golf cars can crest the \$14,000 mark, while basic refurbished fleet cars fall into the \$4,000 range.

"Consumers don't realize that most golf cars are built for commercial stan-

dards, for daily use over three to five years," Glendon reports. "When the car comes off the course, even after being well cared for, the vehicle generally needs some reconditioning before it can be transferred to an individual's garage. That ups the ante significantly but is also essential to golfers who want to enjoy years of service from their vehicle."

If you're considering purchasing a used golf car, it's important to understand the different segments within the market. Factory-authorized dealers

offer used cars that have been refurbished by the manufacturer, inside and out. Independent dealers usually sell what-you-see-is-what-you-get used cars or cars refurbished by non-certified mechanics/personnel.

Reconditioning means starting with a basic fleet car, checking functionality, making necessary repairs and parts replacements, refurbishing the exterior and accessorizing to meet personal tastes. The latter is usually a function of the individual consumer, who can order special accessories before purchasing the car or have them installed later.

All reconditioning programs are not equal, so be sure to ask what each program covers. At Club Car, the Gold Standard means the car has been completely stripped down to the frame and rebuilt, often with many new components.

When buying used, especially from independent dealers, it also pays to ask questions about the car's history.

"Do a background check on the car before you buy," Glendon suggests. "Find out how old the car is and where it was used. All cars have a serial number that corresponds to the year it was manufactured."

If purchasing a used car from a golf course, consider the amount of rounds played at the course, as some courses see 10,000 rounds a year, while others see 65,000. That can be a huge difference in wear and tear on the car.

Also, determine vehicle run time. Many newer electric cars have an infrared sensor that allows dealers to determine use (hours), while many gas cars are equipped with a gauge.

Inquire about the components, too. How new or old are the batteries? One to three years is the normal warranty, although many perform much longer. Be sure to check the tires and pay close attention to the seat covering. Its condition usually depends on the level of previous care and how the car was stored. If it was stored in the sun, UV issues can arise. Most factory reconditioning programs do include seat refurbishing.

"Most consumers focus on comfort," Glendon says. "Don't forget safety. It's paramount. Inspect the car's safety components. Check the braking system. Make sure the gas pedal operates smoothly. Be sure the tires are properly inflated, show even wear and have good tread. Make sure the bumpers are in good condition and check the state of the hip restraints."

SELF-PROPELLED WALKING CARTS

Several self-propelled bag carts were unveiled this year for golfers who love to walk but can't or prefer not to carry a golf bag.

Stewart Golf's X1R is a futuristic-looking cart designed for optimal convenience, including handy storage for balls, tees, sunglasses, towels, scorecards and a drink. The cart offers cruise control and a range exceeding 50 yards.

A compact handset allows golfers to move the X1R forward, backward, faster, slower, left and right. The off button cuts the power to the motors and slows the caddie to a gradual stop, while the emergency brake brings the X1R to an immediate stop. An integrated anti-tip wheel allows the remote caddie to negotiate hills with ease. High-grip tires reduce wheel spin and protect the course.

Golfers can play 18 to 27 holes before recharging the X1R. In the unlikely event the battery runs out of power, the five-spoke rear wheels release quickly to engage the free-wheel mode, enabling it to be used as a pull cart. For more information, contact Stewart Golf USA at 1-877-STEW-USA or www.stewartgolfusa.com.

Unlike most self-propelled bag carts, Sun Mountain's Speed E Cart doesn't use a hand-held remote control, making cart maneuvering easier to master. The system also speeds up play.

With the Speed E Cart, players utilize buttons conveniently placed on the cart's handle and walk with the cart. Golfers can automatically send the cart 15, 30 or 60 yards along an intended path with the push of a button as they walk to the green or next tee box.

In addition to power on/off and start/stop buttons, the controls include buttons to increase and decrease speed for a comfortable walking pace, which the motor is programmed to maintain across varied terrain. When powered off, the Speed E Cart can be pushed as easily as a manual Speed Cart to eliminate the chance of being stranded on the course with an out-of-charge battery.

For more information, contact Sun Mountain at 1-800-227-9224 or www.sunmountain.com.



Deciding between a gas and electric car is easier than ever before. In the past, consumers stayed away from electric cars due to power, battery and speed issues. However, battery and electric technologies have significantly improved over the years. In fact, there are many more options in the electric segment. Gas is best for people who don't have easy electric-charging access, but it's still messy. Electric is also less expensive to operate.

Programmability is another aspect to consider. Many cars have a hidden on-board computer that allows reprogramming of the braking system and car speed. If you want to reduce the amount of motor braking, you can. Most consumers also want more zip out of the car than they get from a course fleet car. Electric cars can be programmed to the legal limit of 19 mph. That's a big increase over the 12 to 14 mph setting on most fleet cars.

Also, test-drive several cars before buying. Car condition and history have a dramatic impact on the performance and ride quality. Manufacturers use different suspension systems, and some hold up better than others over time. Whether or not the course where the car was originally used had cart paths or not, as well as the terrain, can affect performance.

During the test-drive, also think about car storage. If space is tight, the turning radius will be important. After testing, you'll likely have a preference for one car over another.

Once you have the basic car selected, most car dealers offer a wide range of options that allow you to incorporate your own style into the car. From custom dashes to special windshields and private code keys for keyless use, the options are wide-ranging.

Upgrades typically fall into three categories — mechanical items (headlights for driving at dawn or dusk), weather protection (a canopy, windshield or full enclosure) and style (interior and exterior color, wheel upgrade, custom dash, graphics/pin striping or even full-body replica customization).

Finally, although most golf cars are pretty much maintenance-free, an annual checkup is a good idea. Service plans are available for some cars sold by dealers that provide an annual on-site inspection. **GI**