



## GPS Innovation

*The University of Texas Golf Club  
in Austin addresses three important  
course-management issues with  
Club Car's new Guardian system.*

Prepared by Club Car, Inc.

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– Greg Garner, University of Texas Golf Club



Asked to name their biggest operational challenge, many golf course owners and operators would be hard pressed to choose just one. The golf business today is a multi-dimensional, 24/7 job that requires a vigilant approach to taking care of customers and overseeing course conditions while applying sound business practices to control costs and enhance revenues.

In that sense, the University of Texas Golf Club is no different from many facilities. The UT club prides itself on a distinctive golf experience built around the 7,412-yard, par 71 course in the Texas Hill Country outside Austin. Since the Bechtol Russell-designed course opened in 2003, club officials have identified three areas they felt could enhance the course and their members' golf experience further: pace of play, protecting native grasses and safety around the clubhouse.

### **Enhancing the Golf Experience**

Like many facilities, pace of play presents an ongoing challenge to the club's efforts to deliver an enjoyable golf experience for players of all ability levels. Since opening six years ago, the club has grown its local and regional membership to 730 while becoming a model of success. “But we've always felt pace of play was something that could reflect negatively on what has been a positive growth story,” says Greg Garner, head golf professional. “So it's something we're really focused on.”

The club has employed marshals positioned at various points on the course to encourage the elusive four-and-a-half-hour round. “But that's a little like what happens when you see the trooper on the side of the road,” says Steve Termeer, the UTGC general manager and director of golf. “You go the speed limit for a few minutes, and then you go back to what you were doing.”

The club also keeps a keen eye on course conditions, including the areas beyond the cart paths where native buffalograss was chosen for its ability to thrive in dry

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conditions. But the low-growing buffalograss does not easily withstand heavy traffic from golfers or golf cars. “It doesn’t stand up to the wear and tear like bermudagrass does,” says Termeer. “So we’ve had lots of worn areas on the golf course over the first few years.”

*“We absolutely detest putting up stakes and ropes, but sometimes you have to do it.”*

The UT club has tried most of the traditional tactics to protect the buffalograss, including posting cart traffic control signs and roping off areas to discourage golf car traffic. (“We absolutely detest putting up stakes and ropes,” Termeer says, “but sometimes you have to do it, particularly when we’re growing in the buffalograss.”)

A third concern the Austin club shares with most every other course is for the safety of its members and guests. While the club is a favorite practice site for PGA Tour professionals, its membership also includes a large number of families who enjoy golf, dining and social events in the 16,000-square-foot clubhouse. Family members include nearly 600 children under the age of 16. Club officials are thankful there have been no accidents involving youngsters and golf cars around the clubhouse, and they want to continue their perfect safety record.

## UT Club Targets Key Issues with Guardian System

Together, none of the issues was threatening the success of the club. But if the UTGC could find a way to accelerate pace of play, protect its native grass areas and better safeguard its younger members, it would feel even better about the experience it offers its diverse membership. The club’s solution to all three concerns has come in the form of the Guardian Satellite Vehicle Control system from Club Car.



Guardian incorporates the most desirable course management features of GPS technology – including limiting vehicle access, controlling vehicle speed, reviewing the history of where a golf car has been driven and monitoring and diagnosing vehicle performance – into a system that can be accessed from a computer with an Internet connection.

The Guardian system makes it easy for course managers to limit vehicle use or maximum speed anywhere on the course, including near lakes, bunkers, environmentally sensitive areas, steep downhill portions of the cart path and around the clubhouse. The system uses the GPS industry’s first Local Interconnect Network to enable the vehicle’s controller and on-board computer to communicate with the golf shop while the golf car is in the predetermined “hot spot.” When the vehicle enters a restricted area, Guardian displays a message (visible on an LCD panel mounted in the vehicle’s dash area) to return to an unrestricted area. The system can also be programmed to slow the vehicle’s speed or stop it altogether.

The same technology monitors battery use to alert staff that a vehicle's batteries need charging before it is sent back out on the course. Diagnostic capabilities also help course technicians remotely identify and correct potential vehicle faults. An optional distance measurement feature can pinpoint yardage to different spots on the green or to other points, such as bunkers or water hazards.

## An Affordable Solution

Club Car and GPS Industries, which provided the product's backend technical development, call Guardian the industry's most affordable GPS application. The system costs \$500 (plus a minimal technology licensing fee) per vehicle. Guardian's affordability results from its highly integrated design and use of existing satellite imagery to plot the course and designate restricted areas. The UTGC calls it a bargain.

Club officials estimate that they have speeded up play by at least 10 percent based on the distance measurement option. Adding that feature also allowed the club to eliminate the hand-held distance measuring devices it was providing members. "We were equipping all the golf cars with a laser gun, which we don't have to do anymore. That's saving us the initial cost of the gun (approximately \$250) and replacement costs," Termeer says.



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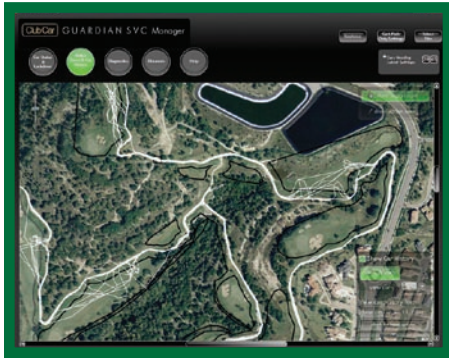
By defining areas that are off limits to the golf car fleet, the club is keeping golfers and golf cars away from the sensitive buffalograss, especially during grow-in periods. The club is also saving time and labor costs by eliminating the need to rope off certain areas from golf car traffic.

"We're controlling wear and tear in certain areas and improving our turf quality," Garner says. "It's hard to quantify the benefits of that, but we know there are some savings there. Just as important, we don't have to clutter up the course with ropes and stakes."

Slowing the speed of vehicles around the clubhouse and in areas where youngsters might be walking is also reassuring.

"I've been pleasantly surprised by the ability to control the speed around the clubhouse and parking lots," Termeer says. "It sends a message to our members that we are looking out for their safety."

The system's ability to troubleshoot potential problems in the car's electrical system is another reassuring benefit. "It's very comforting to know that I'm sending a cart out that's going to go 18 holes. That's saving on a cart mechanic who doesn't have to spend as much time diagnosing a problem or wondering how many carts might be affected with the same issue," Termeer says.



“This system is helping us lower costs in several areas,” Garner adds. “When you take all of the things it helps you do into account, you can justify the cost pretty quickly.”

### **GPS: From Amenity to Critical Tool**

When first introduced to the golf industry more than a decade ago, GPS was an investment many courses could not justify because the upfront costs to physically map the course outweighed the distance-to-the-pin benefits for golfers.

Now, as the Club Car Guardian system is proving at the University of Texas GC, the benefits of GPS have evolved far beyond what could be considered a player amenity to the point where most courses will see it as a critical management tool.

