

Golf skateboard aims to rejuvenate 'old man's sport'

December 20 2013, by Michael Thurston

Skateboarders and golfers may not normally have much in common, but a US entrepreneur hopes to appeal to both sporting types with a new device that lets you "surf" the fairways.

The GolfBoard, demonstrated at a recent charity event in California, looks like a large motorized skateboard but can comfortably carry a golfer and his clubs around 18 holes, according to its makers.

The innovative device aims to replace the [golf cart](#) as the smart way to get around a course, speeding up the game and offering players a snowboard-style work out in between playing shots.

"It will do for golfing what snowboarding did for skiing," said Don Wildman, a 80-year-old fitness club founder and Malibu resident who came up with the idea, giving a stark assessment of golf's current appeal.

"It's an old man's sport. I know if I had kids, they would really like to come out and play golf if they got to ride around on... an electric skateboard," he told AFP in the clubhouse of the Malibu Country Club.

Paul Hodge, who heads the company that makes the device, is even more blunt.

"If you really want the industry to grow, and to be accepted by the mass market, you need to kill that stodgy conservative attitude... and you need to make it fun... and attract the younger crowds," he said.

"Forward-thinking people in the golf industry right now realize you can't focus on what was the game like 100 years ago. You need to focus on, what's the game going to be like in the future?"

The board, 15 inches (38 centimeters) wide with 3.5 inch wide tires, can ride up to 36 holes without a recharge.

It is designed so that, even for a heavy golfer weighing more than 250 pounds (110 kilos) on a very hilly course, it can go at least 18 holes.

It can reach speeds of up to 12 miles per hour, roughly the equivalent of a golf cart.

Not everyone is convinced, even though the device has yet to be widely available for people to test out.

"This is at best a gimmick, and I can't think of a single course I play at which would even allow such a thing on the course," said one user of online golf forum thesandtrap.com.

'Don't get bored'

"Their liability insurance policies alone would prohibit it," he said, while another commented: "I'm not sure where you come from, but in NY most people can barely manage to get on an escalator without killing themselves and others."

But Hodge said he already has orders for 2,000 GolfBoards, and mass production of the devices—which retail at \$3,500 each—will begin in January, with a capacity of 1,000 a month.

"Now we're moving to mass manufacturing to fill the demand that we've created," he said, noting that the GolfBoard is made entirely in the

United States, in New Jersey, apart from a battery cell from South Korea.

The target users are aged 15-40, he said. "But we've had a surprising interest from golfers much older than that. The standup (handle) bar that we've added makes it easy for anybody to ride .. that's really opened up the demographic.

"So you don't need to have a really strong athletic background to be able to ride it," he added, while acknowledging: "It's certainly more challenging when you take the bar off."

The company was helped with funding and marketing by crowd-source investment website Kickstarter, where backers earned the right to get one of the first boards off the production line.

Beyond the market for individuals, Hodge says they are targeting golf courses with leasing arrangements, much like for golf carts.

Golf professional Chris van der Velde, who played on the European tour, owns a course in Oregon and is among the first to lease 20 boards initially for six months, to gauge interest from his club's golfers.

"I think it makes golf a lot of more fun, a lot more interesting between shots .. it will intrigue people who like to surf, or snowboard or skateboard. You certainly don't get bored," he said.

Wildman, founder of national health club chain Bally Total Fitness, said young people need to be lured onto [golf courses](#) again.

"They've got so many distractions, with all the GameBoys and videos and everything else. We've got to get something exciting for them that will get them away from the television," he said.

And he predicted boldly: "I think that eventually the majority of people will be playing [golf](#) on a GolfBoard."

But van der Velde was more measured, acknowledging that there could be skepticism from more conservative or older players.

"I'm not sure it's a traditional game-changer," he said. "Some people will push back. Some people won't like it because it's different. They didn't like going from wooden clubs to metal heads. So it'll push people back.

"But it's pretty cool."

More information: www.golfboard.com/

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