

THE
TECH
ISSUE

Board games

Could you see yourself using one of these in future? It's tipped to be the new way round a course - so we put it to the test

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Surf's up
Golf Board
has been
designed by a
former surfer.



If you take *Back to the Future* as a reliable forecast of technological advancement, we should all be buzzing around the course on hoverboards by now. Sadly, the scientists and tech wizards are a bit behind on that one, but they have come up with the next best thing: an electric-powered skateboard known as GolfBoard.

It is the brainchild of big wave surfer Laird Hamilton, and Miami businessman Don Widman, who said: "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."

When it was first unveiled at 2014's PGA Merchandise Show, GolfBoard took the crown of 'Best New Product'. It has since been introduced to over 100 courses in America, with 300 more expecting delivery. Eight UK courses have also got on board, so we visited one of them – Essendon Country Club in Herts – to see what all the fuss is about.

With the promise that GolfBoards can cure slow play (one club in the USA has gone as far as implementing a GolfBoard-only rule after 2pm, as people in buggies and on foot were holding up the boarders) and attract youngsters to the game, we set a fourball loose on GolfBoards to see how they got on.

But this wasn't a simple day in the sun, swerving around the course. We wanted to find out whether walking, buggies or GolfBoards would offer the quickest and most enjoyable way around the course. Our test team played the same nine-hole stretch three times in one day: once on foot, once in buggies, and once on GolfBoards.

We timed each round, tracked their scores, and interviewed the four golfers – of varying golfing prowess – to find out how each mode of transport affected their performance and enjoyment of the round...

SO IS IT ANY GOOD?



Phil Dormer, scratch

"GolfBoards could definitely speed up the game"

I normally walk around the golf course. You get a bit of exercise, and it's good to socialise with your playing partners.

I don't like using buggies. You don't get any exercise, and I find it a bit unsociable as you only get to talk to your buggy partner, not the other two in your group.

I've used GolfBoards a couple of times now. At first it's a bit awkward and takes a bit of getting used to, but once you get used to them they're good fun. They're quick and fun, so I'd highly recommend them. There's not a lot I don't like about them.

I thought buggies would be quicker than walking, but that turned out to be a bit of a myth. GolfBoards were significantly quicker, by about 20 minutes, so it's something that could definitely speed up golf.

Fairway travel

They're fast, fun and environmentally friendly... what's not to like?



THE TIMES

(Nine holes)

Buggies: 1:51:15

Walking: 1:48:34

GolfBoards: 1:34:49

(18-hole equivalent)

Buggies: 3:42:30

Walking: 3:37:08

GolfBoards: 3:09:38



Andy Brooks, 13 handicap

"I was surprised by how much quicker they were"

I usually walk and use an electric trolley to carry my clubs. The exercise aspect of playing golf is part of the enjoyment for me; I'll only use a buggy if I'm playing 36 holes in a day. I'm not surprised that walking is quicker than buggies, because you get the option of peeling off in different directions. If you're in a buggy, you're both going in the same direction all the time.

I love the GolfBoards. They're easy to get used to and really fun to use. I was surprised to find that they were so much quicker. I'd definitely use it again in future. The only downside to them is that it removes the exercise element from playing golf. It also might not be the most practical thing when it's raining because there's nowhere to put a broly – if you attached one to your bag you might struggle to see where you're going!



Cedric Pez, 14 handicap

"A fourball could get round in two-and-a-half hours on GolfBoards"

I always walk; I hate buggies. I like the exercise, and I find walking quicker than a buggy because you can go straight to your ball and get set,

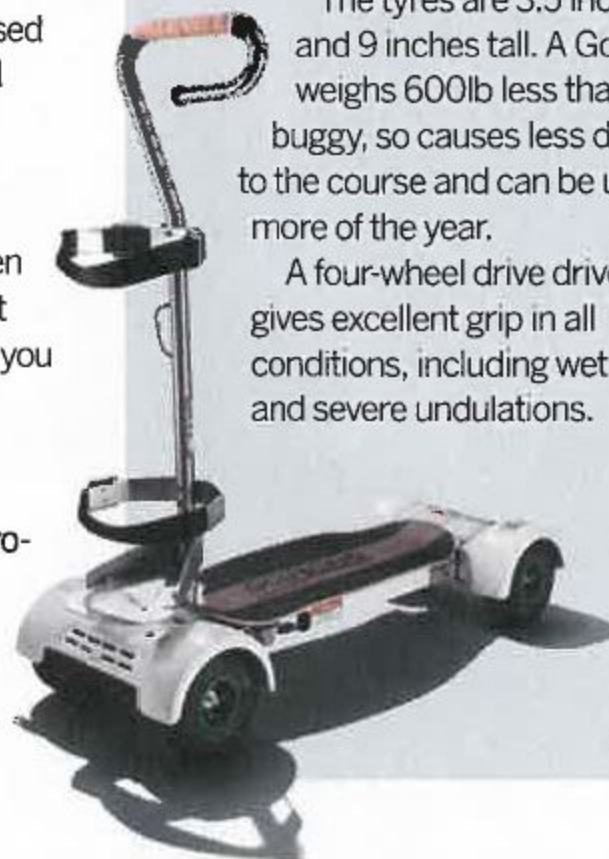
HOW IT WORKS

Powered by the same kind of lithium battery you'll find in the latest electric cars, the GolfBoard offers a top speed of 11mph. The battery can be charged in two hours and will then last for 36 holes.

The handle/bag support is detachable. Without it, you wear your bag on your shoulders as normal, and tilt your body to turn left and right, as you would a snowboard.

The tyres are 3.5 inches wide and 9 inches tall. A GolfBoard weighs 600lb less than a buggy, so causes less damage to the course and can be used for more of the year.

A four-wheel drive drivetrain gives excellent grip in all conditions, including wet rough and severe undulations.





Course friendly
Those fat tyres mean no damage to the grass.



Balancing act
They're easy to get the hang of.

'GolfBoards were significantly faster than buggies... they could definitely speed up golf'

independently from the other players. It leads to quicker rounds and helps me play better.

The GolfBoard was fun. It wasn't that comfortable to start with, but you get used to it very quickly. I thought it would be just like a buggy where you don't get any exercise, but you do use your body and balance, so there is a sporty side to it. I'll stick to walking, but I'd use GolfBoard again if I needed to play a particularly quick round. I think a fourball could get round in two-and-a-half to three hours using them.



Liam Bailey, 8 handicap

"They're a lot more efficient than buggies"

I normally walk because it's good exercise and you get a bit of time to think about your next shot. I was a little bit pessimistic about the GolfBoard to begin with,

but I really enjoyed it. It's really direct and they're quite liberating to be on. I got the hang of it quickly. It felt quicker than walking and buggies, but I was a little bit surprised by how much quicker it was.

ARE THEY THE FUTURE?

The GolfBoard proved to be a much quicker way of navigating the course, even with three of our four testers using them for the first time, adding weight to the manufacturer's claims that the average round on a GolfBoard takes two hours, 37 minutes.

As a way to speed things up, there's no denying that the GolfBoard beats walking and buggies. Whilst a buggy may offer a slightly higher top speed, the inefficiency of two people sharing one mode of transport causes problems, unless both passengers are hitting every single shot dead straight down the middle. Which, let's face it, doesn't happen often. GolfBoards may also help golf attract more youngsters to the game. One prominent golf magazine in the US said: "If every golf course offered GolfBoards, it would be the most popular sport in the world." We're not expecting them to replace walking in the UK – nor would we want them to – but as a fun and fast alternative, and a device to lure new players, GolfBoards are a fantastic option.

WHERE CAN I TRY ONE?

These UK courses now offer GolfBoards for hire

1. Hanbury Manor, Hertfordshire
2. Essendon Country Club
3. The Grove
4. Cheshunt Golf Club
5. The Nottinghamshire
6. The Hertfordshire
7. Paultons GC
8. Sherfield Oakes GC

