



As a former president of the European Institute of Golf Course Architects, Peter Harradine knows a thing or two about golf design. In this light-hearted article, he offers a different view on the curse of slow play, and perhaps gets to the route of the problem.

Etiquette the key to slow play

■ Why do people take such a long time to play a round of golf?

There are many obvious reasons that influence slow play, but the limited number of words allotted for this article are not enough to describe them all. As far as I am concerned the two main factors are: Golf Course Design and a complete ignorance of that most important golfing civility: the Etiquette!

Apparently, there is an ideal hole sequence that helps speed up play and this sequence is supposed to be par 4, 4, 5, 3, 4, 4, 5, 3, 4.

This is all very well but I would never sacrifice a great topography just to follow an "ideal" sequence. The topography must dictate the sequence, even if (sacrilege) one should start or finish with a par three! Should one sacrifice a great natural hole just to achieve an ideal sequence?

Actually, the formula is simple: Uncomplicated shorter courses: Faster play. Complicated, long "Championship" courses: Slow play.

Unfortunately, most clients, golf course committees, certainly the media and the exalted PR and marketing egg-heads all think that a par 72, 8,000 metre-long "Championship" course designed by a professional signatory is the ultimate marketing layout.

Media releases heralding a new course always talk about "Championship" courses and never trumpet a great resort or recreational course. Most

"Championship" courses designed by the professional signatories are usually great monuments to themselves and brilliant challenges to their professional signatory colleagues but are an absolute nightmare for the good old hackers.

Yes, they might be slow but they are the players who pay our fees!

They like soft greens, wide fairways, no roughs, no lakes, no bunkers and greens in the shape of a funnel.

But how can the marketing gurus use superlatives for a nice, friendly, uncomplicated resort or recreational course, especially as today's marketing doctrine is based on matchless greed, wholesale branding and unequalled, unique and incomparable bullshit?

They will convince the client that such a course cannot be marketed! So... Back to slow play!

We have been issued guidelines regarding the playing time one would like to see for each hole: Par 3: eight minutes; Par 4: 12 minutes, Par 5: 16 minutes.

But how was that calculated, and did one include the many bad habits displayed by most golfers such as pondering which club to choose or returning to the golf car once one has realised that it could be the wrong club.

Too many practice swings, adjusting the height of the tee (again), and the classic wetting your finger and sticking it up in the air to see which way the wind is blowing, only to realise that you had forgotten to take your glove off!

Adjusting your stance and looking at your intended landing area with a great air of concentration (three-to-four times appears to be the norm these days), wiggle, do the twist... pull up your socks and trousers, pull down your shirt, tighten your belt, tighten your shoe laces and blow one's nose just when your opponent is about to strike the ball are other favourites.

How many minutes pretending to look for the opponent's ball? Golfers will definitely use up the full five minutes and then proceed to clean the ball once one has finally found it.

Lost a club? Apologise and ask all the players one encounters whilst back tracking and zigzagging along previously played fairways. Oh, and don't forget to talk to the caddy for four-to-five minutes.

Sorry, no caddies anymore except in Thailand and everyone in Thailand is always in the woods looking for balls!

How many seconds (minutes - you must be joking!) does it take to rake a bunker? Anyway, nobody rakes bunkers any more, they use the rake to fish the balls out of the lakes.

Walk up to the green and return to your ball (two-to-three times), and don't forget to take your glove off before putting.

"It is about time that etiquette becomes an enforceable and integral part of the rules of golf."

Now figure out the putting line which will take at least two minutes especially on some roller coaster greens "designed" by some professional signatories, not forgetting to find the correct spot to place your cigarette (must not burn the grass!)

Three-to-six putts and then replay the putt that has just been missed. Return to the green to retrieve the glove as it slipped out of the pocket, and use a mobile phone to add up the score. Re-count the shots after protestations by the opponent. Look for the pencil. Walk back to the cart that is always parked in front of the green.

Etiquette in French also means label, and to most golfers it might just as well be a label on a wine bottle. Unfortunately, many teaching pros indoctrinate beginners with an incredible amount of mumbo-jumbo, so they have no time to teach such trivial matters as good behaviour and etiquette.

The beginner is so engrossed with all this new holistic (what the hell is that?) and theoretical codswallop that he even forgets his balls when he reaches the first tee! Run back to the pro-shop!

It is about time that etiquette becomes an enforceable and integral part of the rules of golf. All beginners should pass a test on the rules and etiquette before they are allowed on the course. That should speed up play!

An arguable deterrent against slow play is definitely the course police or "marshall", "ranger" or "pistolero." I wonder where those words ever came from? Did John Wayne play golf? Golf course police? How did this great game ever get to this pathetic situation?

I heard at the EGCOA conference in Berlin that slow players were actually rewarded with a tortoise on the roof of their golf cars! Poor guys they had the privilege of paying about 250 USD for a round and they had the honour of being chastised with a tortoise!

The R&A produced guidelines for "pistoleros". So I will allow myself a very liberal and personal interpretation of those recommendations:

You have to help the golfer go round the course in a safe manner and within the time specified by Management which is two and a half hours for 36 holes.

Learn to recognise each flight by what they wear, choose items that will not be changed during the round, for example: underpants.

Introduce yourself to as many flights as possible to show that you are there! Tell them that you are not there to chastise but you are there to help! An early contact is essential as you will be able to determine who in the various flights are handicapped. No, not the golfing handicap.

Look for any signs of heart problems, epilepsy or drunken behaviour. It is important to recognise such players as they could *really* delay play. Watch them closely so that you can transport them off as soon as there is a problem!

You must however always be correct. You must also be very sure that the flight you think is slow *really is* slow!

If you decide to say something you must know what you are going to say. To judge this you must observe the body language of the players: How many fingers did they hold up when they greeted you? Are they totally angry or only half angry? They might even be happy. If they are happy they are definitely drunk!

If they still do not play faster after your repeated warnings, show them the book and read them the rules on etiquette, and if necessary hit them on the head with it. But always remain friendly! **GME**

