

## Sun City's Oldest Golf Cars – Signs of the Past by Ed Allen

An attempt back in 2009 to find the oldest golf car in Sun City led to two additions to the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum. Both are three-wheelers -- the most common type in the 1960s. They sit in the carport at the museum and offer a popular photo op for visitors.

The “His” and “Hers” decals reflect the movie shown in the museum’s theater, “The Beginning.” In it, a retiree in a northern state relishes his new freedom – until snow cuts off his ability to golf and to garden. His wife comes to the rescue, suggesting they visit friends who moved to a place in Arizona called “Sun City.” There, they find people living an active life, not stuck at home by snow-covered roads and freezing temperatures. Golf cars offer cheaper transportation and their friends own two – one for her, one for him – differentiated by the decals.

This photo of the club house at the North Course in the early 1960s, shows the prevalence of 3-wheeled cars, and a couple of models just like the Cushman and Marketeer models at the museum.

Years before Sun City, golfers walked the golf course, carrying their golf bag or pulling a hand cart with the bag on it. Country club members had one more option – a caddy. The first cart appeared about 1935 in Clearwater, Florida. Lyman Beecher, an electrical engineer, put together a non-motorized cart that required two men to pull it. People said it looked like a rickshaw with its seat and two wheels. Beecher played golf on hilly terrain and was afraid he couldn’t walk the course on his own. Hence the need for a pulled cart.

Within five years, Beecher had modified the cart to be powered by car batteries. It took six car batteries to give the car enough power to last 18 holes.

In the 1950s, the first U. S. patent for a three-wheeled, gas-powered cart was issued to a Texas oilman. Dubbed the “Arthritis Special,” it was marketed to older and disabled golfers. At first, sales were brisk, but the car was noisy and produced a great deal of smoke.

The company responsible for the golf car as we know it was Marketeer in Redlands, CA. In 1951, the company began manufacturing the first electric car designed for golf. Other companies emerged in the 1950s, but the first cars were expensive. Many courses did not allow electric cars, while others required a note from a physician.

It didn’t take golf courses long to realize there was money to be made from renting golf cars. Another benefit was the use of cars sped up play! Golfers liked the reduced time for a round of golf, and courses could schedule more golf rounds in a day. A win-win!

By the time Sun City got under way in 1960, several companies were producing both electric and gasoline-powered golf cars. While many refer to them as golf “carts,” the correct term is “golf cars” as a cart is towed and a car is self-powered.

*Google “First golf cart community” and up pops Sun City! As the oldest active adult community in the nation, it was first to use golf cars for much more than golfing. The increasing number of golf cars plying local streets caught the attention of the Motor Vehicle Dept. Alongside the two cars in the carport, you’ll find an amusing display of the various ways the MVD tried to regulate golf cars in those early years.*



Visitors Dane & Stephanie Allen from Ft. Myers, FL

