

Course Review: Emerald Valley Golf Club

For a course that serves as the home links for a Division 1 college team (the Oregon Ducks) and has hosted many prestigious events, including a recent U.S. Open qualifier, Emerald Valley Golf Club (and RV Resort) in Creswell is still surprisingly unknown amongst Oregon golfers. We honestly think the “and RV Resort” words might scare some people off, which is a shame. If you’ve never been there, it should be a top priority.

Emerald Valley is set on 170 acres that border the Coast Fork of the Willamette River. The course is known for its tree-lined fairways, frequent water hazards, numerous bunkers — and fast, consistent, tiered and/or sloped greens.

Built in 1964, Emerald Valley by all accounts really took off under new ownership in 2002. We played there in 2011 as part of our “Greater Eugene” golf week, so by then the host of improvements — a new drainage system, state-of-the-art sprinklers, rebuilt and lengthened tee boxes and around 30 new bunkers — had taken root and Emerald Valley today presents itself as a well maintained, mature golf course.

White, blue and bronze tees are set at about 6200, 6500, and 7100 yards, respectively, so Emerald Valley will offer you a stiff (but fair) test no matter your handicap. We are wimps and always play the white tees at a new course. You can easily walk Emerald Valley, it’s flat riverside property. The course features many meandering doglegs, lots of old-growth trees, and, as mentioned, some of Oregon’s most-sloped, trickiest greens. As if the natural hazards don’t make Emerald Valley difficult enough, none of the course’s bunkers are there for visual appeal — they’re all strategically placed to be in just the wrong spot for errant shots.

If you’re an astute golfer at all, one of the first things you learn at Emerald Valley is to pay attention to the pin placement! Many greens — which are somewhat undersized to begin with — are double- or even triple-tiered, and virtually every one rolls downhill from back to front, so you don’t want to be above the hole. (Not that we’re always good enough to avoid that even if we know.) In particular, you can



hit a par 3 green and triple putt in a hurry if you’re not careful — especially if you’re playing the tips, which stretch three of the four par 3s to over 200 yards. The greens are true, but they run pretty quick for Willamette Valley dance floors. The Ducks, one would think, must enjoy a tremendous “home green advantage” in matches played at Emerald Valley (they also play occasionally at the Eugene Country Club).

There are several significant holes at Emerald Valley, but the best back-to-back twosome is 13 and 14. No. 13, 472 yards from the whites and a whopping 610 from the tips, is a dogleg right with the Willamette running parallel left the length of the hole. Deer frequent this hole, though we didn’t see any; they could have been hiding behind the huge trees lining both fairways. No. 14 is a 418-yard par 4 from the whites. It doglegs left, is also tree-lined on both sides and, once you battle your way near the end, you’re greeted by an elevated green perhaps 20 feet above fairway level. If Emerald Valley already has you beaten up a bit, these two holes can deliver the KO.

Locals will tell you that Emerald Valley is in great shape all year long — not always easy for a riverside course — and features grass tees on the driving range 12 months a year as well. If we have any criticism of Emerald Valley it would be the pro shop and adjoining restaurant: “small but decent” describes both, they could use an upgrade.