

Course Review: Red Tail Golf Center

For the first 30 years of its existence, the RedTail Golf Center — known then as Progress Downs Golf Course — was the quintessential Portland area “muni.” Progress Downs was completely overrun with people (most of whom weren’t good golfers), pace-of-play was horrendously slow, the course design was fairly pedestrian with multiple parallel, back-and-forth holes and maintenance was a challenge given the heavy play. In 1999, Progress Downs reopened as RedTail. A complete course redesign by John Zoller is a huge improvement; the course has character and offers a completely different routing. Alas, the facility still struggles with too many people, slow play and some maintenance issues.

Pete only knows RedTail as RedTail, but Forest Grove native Don played Progress Downs numerous times in his teens and 20s. RedTail is owned by the City of Portland (along with Eastmoreland and Heron Lakes), an oddity in itself given the course property is not, and never has been, located in Portland. Originally in unincorporated Washington County, it’s located near Washington Square within the Beaverton city limits.

RedTail is a very challenging course, and therein lies a major issue: reasonably priced municipal courses tend to draw a lot of inexperienced golfers, and RedTail is far from the ideal layout for hackers. Whereas Progress Downs was flat, RedTail nicely incorporates the native terrain, which includes rolling hills and wetland areas. The course measures nearly 6300 yards from the white tees; 6700 from the blues and 7100 from the black tees. The holes here are very long; many feature distinct, mounded fairways. There are six ponds laid out to come into play on half the holes, plus the property includes stands of nice mature trees and sand traps both in fairways and greenside. The greens themselves are fairly large but putt inconsistently due to the heavy play and frequent lack of ball mark repairs. Several



greens also suffer from the presence of geese and their natural deposits.

No discussion of RedTail would be complete without mentioning No. 7, affectionately known as “the par 6.” It’s 589 yards from the whites and stretches to 646 from the tips. No eagles here, this is a true three-shot par 5. You need a good drive because your second shot has to carry a lake. Accomplish shots one and two and your approach shot will be fairly straightforward, but pay attention! The large green features three distinct tiers, so you’ve got to find the pin and identify which level the hole is on to avoid a three-putt or worse.

The best time to play RedTail is late spring or early fall. It has many areas that don’t drain well, so winter play tends to be fairly-to-very mushy. We played in mid-March 2012, and it was a bog. As noted, RedTail features many long holes, made all the longer when every tee shot hits the ground and stops or plugs. Even “short” holes in the 325- to 350-yard range play long with zero roll. Conversely, the course gets pretty hard in the summer, and the greens suffer from overplay; literal bare spots aren’t uncommon by August. That’s not a criticism of the maintenance staff, the course simply gets overused and doesn’t have the opportunity to recover.

In addition to on-course play, the RedTail Golf Center is properly known for its excellent, double-decker driving range (photo left), other practice amenities and its huge, well-stocked pro shop. The on-course Bunkers Bar & Grill is a great place to grab a sandwich or snack on the turn.

