

Course Review: RiverRidge (SuttonRidge)

The RiverRidge Golf Complex in Eugene features something for everyone. There's a good practice facility, an 18-hole regulation course, a 9-hole executive course and a 9-hole pitch-and-putt course, all located a couple of miles north of Valley River Center. We played all three RiverRidge courses in one day, part of our Golf Week 2011 that found us headquartered in Springfield at a friend's home while we toured every course in the greater Eugene area.

RiverRidge is a family owned and operated facility built from scratch on farmland purchased by Ric and Debbie Jefferies in the late 1980s. The property was originally flat, but Ric Jefferies had spent some time as a golf pro and met noted course designer Robert Cupp during that time, so even though he was somewhat of a novice course architect, Jefferies learned enough from Cupp to know to add some mounding and other topographic features.

The RiverRidge complex is one of Oregon's handful of Audubon Sanctuary certified courses, so it goes without saying there's wildlife about and the course emphasizes its natural setting and environmental stewardship. There's a "natural" feel to the place — while the main course, in particular, is well maintained, you wouldn't call RiverRidge "manicured" by any stretch.

You can walk any of the three layouts; again, it was originally farmland. Given the heat and the fact we were playing 36, we rode, though we looked silly tooling around the pitch-and-putt course in a cart.

SuttonRidge Course

SuttonRidge Golf Course is a 9-hole, par 32 layout located right across the road from the RiverRidge track. It's one of two alternate courses to the regulation course, sitting adjacent to ShortRidge, a pitch-



and-putt course. SuttonRidge and ShortRidge are collectively known as "The Nines," though why they need individual names as well as a joint name is a mystery. Three names, really — technically it's SuttonRidge at The Nines at RiverRidge (we think).

Somewhat unusual for an executive course, SuttonRidge has two sets of tees, so you can play from 1679 yards or 2044. SuttonRidge is cut out of a beautiful stand of mature fir trees. There's not a hole over 300 yards, and the fairways are very narrow, so generally speaking a 3-wood (or even less) off the tee is a better option than driver. Any club you can hit straight 200 yards or so will do off the tee at SuttonRidge.

RiverRidge is home to Lane County's First Tee program, so SuttonRidge offers young golfers a great opportunity to learn the game. If you grow up playing SuttonRidge and learn to hit it straight off the tee, you're certainly going to have a leg up in your golf career.

Unfortunately, we must report that SuttonRidge was very much in disrepair during our visit. The level of maintenance was considerably less than RiverRidge, the main course. The greens were hard and very much in need of a good watering; ditto the fairways and tee boxes. The fairways, in fact, featured a number of bare spots with no grass at all. It was disappointing, because we really liked the course otherwise. Again, the setting was beautiful. It was very tight and challenging, and the trees were great. We understand that for most courses, our reviews are snapshots of one single visit, and hope this was an anomaly for SuttonRidge.