

Course Review: Willow Run Golf Course

Willow Run Golf Course is a 9-hole executive course near Boardman along the Columbia River Gorge. Short even for an executive nine at 1800 yards, Willow Run is nevertheless a popular landing spot for both locals and the occasional nearby camper.

Designed in 1972 by Dallas Wilson and known for years as “Wilson’s Willow Run,” the course has since changed hands; by all accounts, the greens have flourished under current owner Rod Punches. More on those shortly.

Don and Pete visited Willow Run during Golf Week 2009, when we were based at a friend’s “extra” house in Pendleton and toured what we term “Near-er Eastern Oregon.” As soon as you pull up to Willow Run you can tell it’s a labor of love and a proverbial mom and pop operation — and we don’t say that in any demeaning sense. Men play five par 3s and four 4s for a total par 31; women get an extra stroke on what for them is a 189-yard par 4 first hole. The longest holes are Nos. 5 and 7, both just under 300 yards; No. 8 is the shortest at 122. So Willow Run is short, but it’s not a pitch and putt course, you do hit some real golf shots.

Willow Run is completely flat, so walking the course is no problem. It’s pretty wide open, so you’re unlikely to go OB. There are water hazards, which can lead to some tricky approach shots. If you’re in a hurry, that’s not an issue — you can typically play nine in an hour and a half; if nobody’s in the way, you can cruise through in an hour.

But the course’s calling card is its greens. They are small but extremely well kept, smooth and quick, making Willow Run an excellent place to hone your short game. The course also has a good local reputation for hosting tournaments.

And ... Willow Run has logo balls. Depending on where and how much you’re read on this website, you might know that we are serious collectors of course logo balls as we engage The Quest, and are irritable with courses without them. Now, people less generous than Don and Pete might describe the Willow Run balls as the “worst” logo balls they have.



Not us. They are, however (generously speaking), the funkiest.

Amongst our logo balls, we’ve got a lot of Callaways, a lot of Nikes, some Pro Staffs and Pinnacles, a handful of Top-Flites and even a Titleist or two. The Willow Run ball is none of the above — in fact, it’s none of any above, no matter what “above” is. These are generic balls stamped “Willow Run G.C., Boardman, OR” like you get out of a gift catalog — you know, “personalize your golf balls.” Their compression may be 30 or 300, who knows? Relatively speaking, they cost more than they should have. What do Don and Pete say to that? Bravo! Thank you, Willow Run, for having them. This is a small course played mostly by locals with no need of logo balls. Is it a lousy ball? We don’t care. Did we spend maybe a buck more than we should have? Good for Willow Run, that’s astute business sense. They undoubtedly have to buy these 50 or 100 at a time, it’s going to take awhile to recoup their investment. We have no problem at all with that. Again, our Willow Run logo balls are the funkiest we have to date — the “worst” ones belong to the handful of courses that didn’t have any.

Short but well maintained, excellent-but-small greens that make for good target practice and friendly, helpful people in charge. Willow Run is well worth a little of your time in Boardman.