

Club Rentals - A Pricey Alternative to Pack n' Haul

By Susan Bairley

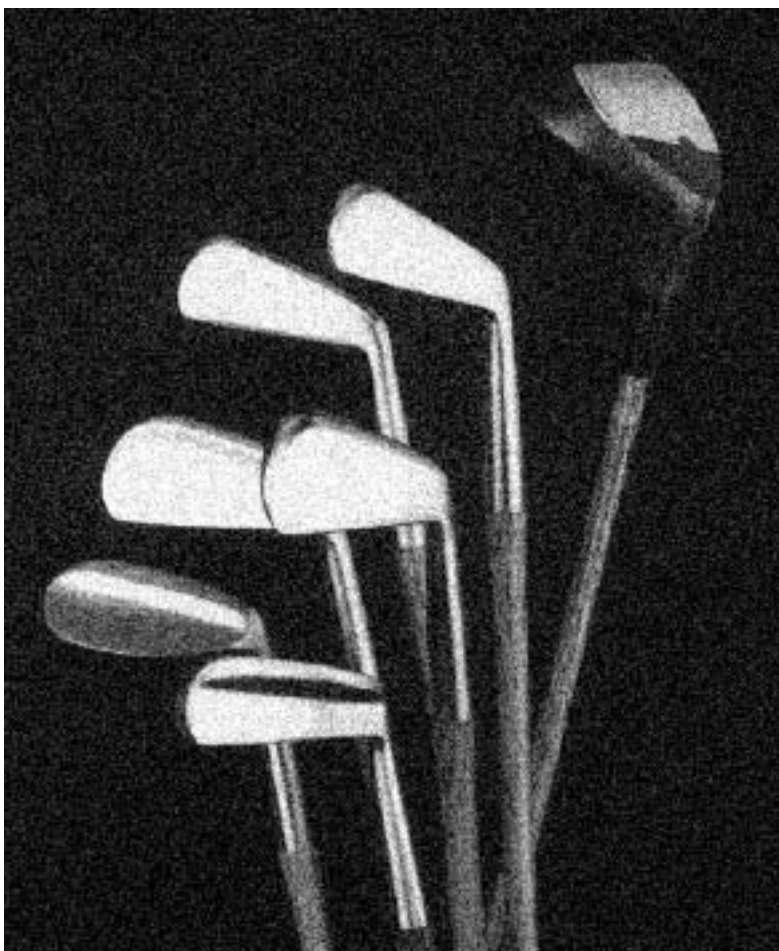
Knowing I'd be at nine golf courses and five hotels/condos in six days as part of the Florida Writer's Cup tour last October, the thought of hauling my golf clubs around seemed cumbersome and daunting. So I decided to board the rental-club train, and essentially borrow clubs at each location.

There were two benefits to this. One, the obvious, no pack n' haul. And two, I could test out new clubs, which I'm actually in the market to purchase soon.

At first I was nervous. Nine new courses, nine different sets of clubs? What would that do my average-at-best golf game? I packed my shoes, my choice of balls, my trusty old putter (which was starting to fail me), my tee bag and spare glove....my 12-year-old daughter had 'borrowed' my better glove and not yet returned it. That cost me one 'confidence' demerit. But with that bit of 'my stuff,' I was ready

to tackle the club rental adventure. What I learned was surprisingly interesting, game changing and worth sharing!

First of all, daily rentals are not cheap. Priced at \$35 to 40 or more



at each course, total rentals for our nine-course tour would have easily cost me somewhere around \$400. That's a good entry to the purchase range of a new set of

quality clubs! However, because I was 'comped' on the rentals for this trip, cost was luckily not an issue, and I could focus on the clubs themselves

Only a couple of rentals included one or two sleeves of balls. With water and hazards abound, one sleeve wouldn't have been enough for me. Two? Maybe. But I ended up buying a dozen more balls at one of the pro shops. With the nine or so that I brought from home, I'd be good to go. I could lose balls and take a few risky shots with peace of mind.

The best part about my rental experience is that every course we played offered me a quality set of clubs. I played with Nike, King Cobra, Taylor Made, Ping and Callaway sets, and Titleist,

TaylorMade, Cobra and predominantly Odyssey putters. Most of the clubs were in nearly new condition.

Previously shy of trying a new putter, I used the rental putters with grand curiosity - and they served me well. My old 'Baron' stayed in the bag while I mastered the greens - and improved my putting - with the benefit of newer designs and technology, balanced weighting and better grips. I basically found all of the putters acceptable and better than my old standby.

On the full set side, random clubs were a little more risky for me. I found the Callaway X-18 Gems to be too whippy and short for my game. As a result, I splayed the ball with miss-hits. One of my playing partners, Scott, with his fabulous Canadian accent and 'ehs' told me he'd never seen a golfer hit sideways like I did, eh?! Yikes! For me those clubs were a total mismatch - and I had to play with them twice, by default, on the tour.

On the other hand, when clubs worked for me, they really worked. The TaylorMade set helped me hit more solidly. And while using them, I improved my distance considerably - impressing my male teammates, who said they'd want me on their scramble team any day!

My favorite clubs were the King Cobra M Speed driver www.cobragolf.com and 3100 I/H irons and Taylor Made R7 Draws <http://www.taylormadegolf.com>. I hit the offset Cobra driver a country mile - OK, not a country mile, but

consistently in the 180 to 20-yard range, which for me, is really far. And the rest of the Cobras worked well for me, too.

I also found that I wasn't a hybrid club fan. I like 'me mashie'!... just give me irons and woods. Because of this, I was often at a disadvantage as a set often didn't include a three iron, instead opting for some kind of hybrid mix.

At one course, I played with plastic wrapped demos, which was annoying. And at another I was missing a pitching wedge - again one of my stronger short-game assets.

My club rental experience was really variable - but overall, very positive. My game changing lessons were that 1.) Equipment matters; and 2.) New is good. And with the plusses and minuses of each set, I think overall, I played better than I usually did with my own clubs.

My Baron putter will probably never forgive me its now permanent retirement, but the White Hot Odyssey XG (www.odysseygolf.com) really is hot. And I now have another big decision to make... Which new club set do I want and when?! MG

