

Golf Car Batteries

Most golf cars utilize deep cycle lead acid batteries. Fewer deep discharge cycles will provide longer life. You may be able to go two or three rounds between charging (especially when the batteries are new) but you will shorten their life if you do so. Charge them after every round of golf.

In order to provide their rated life, they must be properly maintained. Maintenance needs to be performed on a periodic basis. Start with a monthly schedule until you understand how often water will be required. New batteries use very little water and may not need any for a few months. Older batteries may require up to one half gallon or more per service. After fully charging the batteries, remove the fill caps to check the water level in each cell. Never add water to a partially discharged battery as the level will rise as it charges and may result in acid overflowing and making a big mess. Add water (distilled only) as required to bring the level up to 1/8" below the circular collar that extends down into the battery cell. The battery manufacturer refers to this as the fill or vent well. A one-gallon plastic pump up garden sprayer with the spray end cut off works well as a tool to add water to the batteries. A flashlight is very helpful to see the water level inside the battery cell. Wear glasses while doing this as sometimes the cell will burp as you add water and expel a small amount of acid. This is a quite strong sulfuric acid and will burn skin and ruin clothes, so be careful.

Part of this routine maintenance program includes checking all battery connections. Insure each connection is tight. The most common wrench needed for this is 9/16". Hold your hand over the end of the wrench to make sure you don't short out the battery while you are doing this. You will notice each nut moves a small amount. They do get loose on their own. Don't over-do it, you don't want to strip the threads, just snug them down tight. If these connections get loose, the high current flowing through the circuit can create enough heat to melt solder, insulation and wiring – as well as cause fires.

Now use the hose and gently wash off the top of the batteries, the hold down rods and the battery box in general. Let it sit for a couple of hours to dry off. Drive it around the block to help remove any residual water before putting the car away. It is good practice to use an anti-corrosive spray on all the battery terminals once a year. The batteries should be clean and dry with not the hint of any acid or corrosion on them. Any corrosion can be removed with a paste made of baking soda and water. Do not get any of this inside the battery. If properly maintained, they should be clean enough to eat off of.

Modern golf car battery chargers are automatic and will shut off when the proper charge level has been achieved. Don't charge any battery if the lead plates are exposed. Add just enough water to cover the plates before charging. Some are designed so you can leave them plugged in when the vehicle is not in use and they will come on automatically as required. When left unattended, these batteries will lose up to 15% of their charge per month and will eventually go dead. This is absolutely the worst thing you can do to a set of golf car batteries and will probably require them to be replaced. When my golf cars are not being used I prefer to have someone charge them once a month. Since I typically only let the golf car sit for six months or so at a time, checking the water level during that time is not required.

A word about battery additives: some folks believe adding aspirin or other products to the water will extend the life of the battery. I am not a believer and neither are the battery manufacturers. In fact, it will void their warranty.

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