

# A RIDE ON THE SUBWAY

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Japan correspondent

**T**HESE days, limousines and courtesy cars are the usual, and preferred, mode of transport for the world's leading golfers to and from tournament sites. At this year's Chunichi Crowns on the Japanese PGA Tour, however, Craig Stadler, David Frost, Lee Janzen, Gary Hallberg and Scott Simpson took a slightly less than regal ride to the course ... on the subway.

The interesting thing about this, though, is not that superstars do take the subway, but the fact that two former US Open champions (Simpson and Janzen), a former US Masters winner (Stadler), a current world top-10 player (Frost) and a well-known US Tour player (Hallberg) went by completely unrecognised by the Japanese public. This is all part of the package for the golfing stars of the West who come to play in tournaments in Japan.

Weighing 90 kilos and shaped like a water melon, Stadler, widely known as 'The Walrus', is one of the most recognisable characters in international golf. He has the forearms of a weight-lifter and a moustache that looks like a huge divot. Yet despite the fact that the Japanese gentleman seated beside Stadler was reading a golf magazine, he didn't have a clue who it was that was right next to him.

If this group of golfers had been made up of Isao Aoki, 'Jumbo' Ozaki and 'Tommy' Nakajima most of those on the train would have been clamouring for autographs.

"We ride the subway every day," said Stadler. "It's a piece of cake. Nobody seems to know us, but then sometimes it gets so darn crowded you can't see who's next to you anyway."

Every year tournament sponsors on the JPGA Tour invite many of the top names in professional golf to play in their events. Throughout the season Japanese galleries are able to watch Greg Norman, Curtis Strange, Seve Ballesteros, Tom Kite and many other great international players.

"It's a good chance to get away from the US PGA Tour for a week and play a little different golf," said Stadler. "I've been coming to Japan every year since 1978 and I really enjoy it. The golf courses are usually



I am The Walrus: Craig Stadler is one of golf's best-known characters, but he goes by unrecognised on the subway in Japan.

Picture by MATTHEW HARRIS/ALLSPORT

pretty good and the sponsors treat us very well."

The biggest complaint that most of the players have when they visit Japan is that they don't have any time for sight-seeing. From the moment they arrive in Japan their time is consumed with either commuting back and forth from the golf course, practice, play and dinners with sponsors and their guests.

Usually they arrive in Japan late on a Monday and then travel from Narita to wherever the tournament site is. All day Tuesday is a practice round and Wednesday is pro-am day. The tournament begins on Thursday and the only sight-seeing they have done is from the taxi or out of the window on the train.

"The first few days it's hard enough just

trying to get over the jet-lag and get used to the time difference," said Janzen, who finished fifth at this year's Chunichi Crowns. "It usually takes at least an hour to get to the course, seven or eight hours on the golf course ... and another hour returning to the hotel. I would really like to bring my wife here one day for a holiday so that we can see Kyoto and explore Tokyo."

For Hallberg, this year marked his 15th appearance in Japan. In 1982 he won the Chunichi Crowns. Last year he finished second and he has recorded many other top-10 finishes.

He said: "I find the golf courses are a little shorter than our courses on the US Tour. The fairways in America are so perfect it's like hitting off a tee every shot and the greens are usually soft and very large.

"In Japan the fairways are very sandy and often you are faced with a difficult lie. Hitting from the fairways here is almost like hitting out of the rough in the US. You can't really attack the pin and if you hit the green they are usually hard and the ball will often bounce over."

Hallberg looks forward to his annual visits to Japan. "It's just a real nice place to be. The people are friendly and polite and they respect their fellow man. Some places in America you can't say that," he said.

Of the galleries in Japan, Simpson, who has played in almost 30 tournaments in the country, said: "I think the Japanese galleries are pretty good. Some of the places we play on the US Tour end up being places for guys to come out, drink beer and look for girls. Here in Japan the people are generally quiet for every shot and they clap for everything and show their appreciation."

Most of the foreign players find their time in Japan to be very comfortable. The hotels they stay in offer Western food in the restaurants. Often they can have CNN and English-language movies. The sponsors supply them with translators and they have little or no problems.

Apart from the language difference and the grass on some of the golf courses their week in Japan is not much different from any other week on the US PGA Tour.