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ONE STEP AHEAD

We meet Steve 'SkyCaddie' Winstone, who maps courses on foot to give you the most accurate GPS distances

The majority of golfers use some sort of GPS device. Whether it's displaying basic or in-depth information, it's a critical tool in a golfer's armoury that many of us take for granted.

Steve Winstone is unquestionably one of the unsung heroes of our beloved game, a man you probably owe a debt of gratitude. If you're a

user of a SkyCaddie GPS device, that bunker you avoided or water hazard you carried is most probably down to him.

Without his countless hours mapping the position of every tee, fairway, bunker and penalty area, you wouldn't have the most up-to-date, accurate distance information in the palm of your hand or on your wrist, which helps you to play your smartest. ▶



A former nightclub owner and director of golf, Steve is now in charge of ensuring over 10,000 courses across Europe are accurately mapped. As you can imagine, this is no easy task. SkyCaddie is the only company that maps courses in person on foot, which provides a distinct advantage when it comes to updating course changes and accuracy.

Most other providers use satellite imagery, which has its limitations. Sometimes clouds creep into view, other times it is blurry, misaligned or distorted. But most of the time they're simply not up to date, with new images taken sporadically. The fact remains no tour caddie relies on satellite images or flyovers – they use course maps produced in a similar way to how Steve does it for SkyCaddie, and with good reason.

"If a pro's caddie used a satellite image for his information, he would be fired," Steve tells us. "He has to do the groundwork – accuracy matters. There's a reason why caddies go out there and walk the courses and to a certain degree that's what we're doing for the players of SkyCaddie. They're getting the benefit of someone like me and the people I train going out and mapping their golf courses for them like a tour caddie would do. You can be sure that what you've got is accurate. That's why we travel all over Europe doing it, there's no other way."

Tour proven

Until recently, this enhanced accuracy had only been utilised by amateur golfers, but this year players on the Senior StaySure circuit started using SkyCaddie's new SX500 GPS in conjunction with their lasers. "I used the SX500 in Italy and I'll be using it in every Staysure Tour event I play this year," says Gary Wolstenholme, who was one of five players to finish in the top ten of the Senior Italian Open using an SX500. "It is very useful, particularly when you are playing an unfamiliar golf course or where there are no landmarks to laser to."

So it's clear that Steve's efforts are reaping rewards. It is well documented, however, that SkyCaddie devices come with a higher price tag, specifically an annual membership fee that not many other companies charge. It's a sticking point for some golfers, but Steve believes it's more than justified.

"I don't understand why anybody would begrudge paying out less than half a Mars Bar a week to keep his golf GPS accuracy up to date," Steve says. "Anybody who knows anything about the GPS business knows there is no other way to get it up to date and accurate. Someone has to walk out here and physically update the technology. It's a fact."

"I've just done Royal Norwich's new golf course, which used to be Western Park but it's nothing like

him the ropes. While Google Maps currently shows it as the remnants of the course it used to be, SkyCaddie users will benefit from precise distances across this fun new layout.

Cutting-edge technology

To map each course, Steve uses a top-of-the-range piece of surveying equipment with built-in GPS and a mini computer, relaying messages via satellites. On it, SkyCaddie's software allows him to effectively see the shapes of the tees, fairways and greens he has mapped before uploading it to the SkyCaddie database. His backpack contains a second receiver, enhancing the accuracy to the nearest yard.

"The power of social media is amazing," Steve explains. "Back in the day, the only way we found out about course changes was through people phoning up SkyCaddie to complain that a bunker was missing. So we had to be proactive."

Now through Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, golfers and the courses contact me to let me know they're doing work to the course, so I can go and map it before it's even open for play. When it does open, SkyCaddie users have up-to-date info on their device."

Given his job, it won't surprise you to hear that Steve has visited over 5,000 courses since he started in 2006. While the appetite to play them has diminished, he still remains passionate about golf and his role in helping players enjoy the game all the more. The big question is, does he have a favourite track?

"I just love Scotland. There's a golf course at Skibo Castle that took my breath away when I first went there. It was the first time I ever saw grass carpet going to the tees. I was just so impressed with it. Now, Trump's course in Aberdeen has the same; they've made some fabulous changes there. It's just a stunning golf course."

So now you know the effort that goes into all the numbers you see on your SkyCaddie GPS device. The next time you play, you can be confident that the accuracy and level of detail is the best in the business.



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Steve makes sure everything is uploaded correctly

