



Course Rating: Play the Senator and play where the pros play

Published: Thursday, October 07, 2010, 6:20 AM Updated: Thursday, October 07, 2010, 6:46 AM



Kent Kasey -- The Birmingham News



The par-3 13th hole at The Senator. (Joe Songer / The Birmingham News)

COURSE INFO

Address: 2600 Constitution Ave., Prattville

Phone: 334-285-1114

Web site: rtjgolf.com/capitolhill/

Par: 36-36-72

Yardage: 5,122 to 7,697 yards

USGA course rating: 67.6 to 76.6

Slope rating: 111 to 131

Greens: Bentgrass

Green fee: \$45-\$64, plus cart fee of \$16

Date played: September 23, 2010

THE COURSE

Since many professional tour events are held at private courses, it's difficult to play the courses the pros play. Playing the Senator is one of those rare opportunities. The course has previously been the site for a Nationwide Tour event and still remains home to an LPGA event, the **Navistar LPGA Classic** being held at the Senator today through Sunday. Go watch the ladies in person or catch them each night (5:30-7:30 p.m.) on the Golf Channel. For a list of players in the event, click **here**. Then go play the course and see if you can match their play. The course, as close to a traditional Scottish links-style course as I've played in Alabama, is plenty challenging. More than 150 bunkers are scattered about the course, which stretches to 7,697

yards. A lot of dirt was moved to create the Senator, with mounds standing 20 to 40 feet tall. Those mounds do an excellent job of leaving you blind shots off the tee and sometimes even from the fairway. So many holes stand out in my mind, but I like two in particular - the par-5 10th and the par-5 17th. The 10th is a monster, playing as long as 616 yards and still a stiff 528 from the white. First-timers standing on the tee will have little idea where to aim, but a well-placed drive (I aim at the Lowe's in the distance) will give you a great chance at reaching the two-tiered green in two. When it comes to putting on this wildly sloped green, you're on your own. The 17th (376 to 559 yards) is a fantastic risk-reward hole. A well-placed drive will leave you with options - play safe to the fairway or try to carry a ravine and some unsavory rough to reach the green in two. But you better be accurate with each shot or you'll be staring at a big number. The par-3s are also quite solid, with the 16th being my favorite. Depending on which tees you choose, this is either a tough, long hole (222 yards from the purple) or a relatively simple short one (147 yards from the white). Three pot bunkers protect this severely sloped green. With a slope rating of 131, the Senator is a challenge, but it's not unfair and it's a different golf experience than you'll find at other Trail sites.

Score: 9 (out of 10)



The par-5 17th at The Senator. (Joe Songer / The Birmingham News)

THE EXTRAS

Capitol Hill has some of the best practice facilities I've seen in the state. A huge, 360-degree driving range accommodates groups of any size. There are several putting greens and short-game practice areas available, as well. The pro shop, like all of the other RTJ facilities, is well-stocked with top-of-the-line equipment and apparel. The grill/bar features a wide selection of sandwiches, salads and beverages.

Score: 5 (out of 5)

THE SERVICE

If there's anything you'll find especially to your satisfaction, it's the service at an RTJ course. We were met at the curb and our clubs were placed on a cart for us. Inside, the service was as expected at the front desk and grill. We received some good advice from the starter, and we saw a beverage cart a handful of times while on the course. Excellent. All the way around.

Score: 5 (out of 5)

THE VALUE

As with any Trail course, playing the Senator isn't cheap. But, if you're willing to pay the price, you won't be disappointed. With a Trail card, the fees are much more reasonable. The course is good enough to host the LPGA, and it's always in excellent shape.

Score: 9 (out of 10)



The par-4 closing hole at The Senator. (Joe Songer / The Birmingham News)

BOTTOM LINE

Of all the RTJ facilities I've played - and I've been to all but one - I like Capitol Hill the most. In addition to the Senator, Capitol Hill offers two other championship layouts in the Legislature and the Judge. With an on-site hotel, you could easily spend a weekend in Prattville and get as much golf as you could want. And the cool thing is the Judge and Senator are such polar opposites as far as design goes. It's one of the best golfing experiences I've found in the state.

Final score: 28 (out of 30)

Kent Kasey is a member of The Birmingham News' sport staff. Write him at kkasey@bhamnews.com. Bookmark this page to see future course reviews and other golf-related entries. And look for alerts on Page 2 of The Birmingham News' sports section.

© 2010 al.com. All rights reserved.