

Tobacco Road Sanford, North Carolina

Architect: Mike Strantz (1998)

	Yardage	Par	Rating	Slope
Disc	6304	71	70.8	142
Plow	5886	71	68.6	132

Overview:

Mike Strantz was one of the real artistic young architects out there. His tutelage under Tom Fazio gave him a real penchant for dramatic design. He built courses with enormous visual appeal and drama with so many memorable holes that the term "Signature Hole" seems to be frivolous when looking at one of his designs. His approach to designing golf courses was to walk the ground with his pastels and his sketch pad and draw the holes as he envisioned them. In spite of the nouveau look of his courses, he had a very old school philosophy about shot values and strategic design.

This course is like Royal New Kent on steroids-the challenges are daunting-often layered on top of each other for extra effect-very much in the Irish tradition of a good mix of strategic and quirky holes. You will not walk off this course with anything less than awe for the vision and effort it took to create it. If you keep your wits about you it becomes apparent that every hole has a safe way to play and scoring well here is a matter of carefully choosing which challenges to take on and which to ignore.

The par five first hole is a perfect example of this-he presents you with a series of pumped up challenges you just need to ignore. There is a conservative three shot sequence that needs to be heeded or else you can start off your day with a very bad number. All the par 5's are three shot holes to all except the testosterone junkies. The vast waste areas on these holes bait you to go for what appears reachable in two. Don't be foolish

The overall yardage is not overwhelming but the 71 par makes that a bit of an understatement. The par 3's are all very short so there is extra yardage available to the four pars and he uses it. Landing and layup areas throughout the course are much more generous than they appear to the eye-he has used the waste areas and adjacent mounding to mask the true depth of these areas. You will continually be saying to yourself after your reach your ball- "wow, there is much more to shoot at than it looked from back there". Good design.

There are many quirky holes out here-especially the three pars. Many will call them tricked up or unfair but neither of those terms has a place in the Irish golf realm from whence they come. You simply have to pick a target on the short holes and don't let the extraneous visual elements get into your head. These are really the holes to stack your card with pars so be disciplined and play for the fat of the these greens.

As with most courses across the pond, this is a course you have to play without scoring expectation. Play a match with your friends and forget the medal score. You can win some money and maybe, just maybe, be pleasantly surprised when you tally your score at the end how well you fared.

Hole-By-Hole:

#1 Par 5 547/521

Full quirky effect from the opening gun. You have to drive it through the Kyber Pass off the tee-about 200 to carry from the Disc tees. The real problem here is that if you fail to negotiate the gap the collaring bunkers will make double a given and triple a possibility. If you clear the hurdle the hole turns left and you now have another gap to negotiate. Either lay up in front of the cleavage at 140 or blow it through (that is preferable) to a monstrous landing area on the other side. Warning-the right side of the landing area over there is a tempest so be left for a flat stance and a good look at the opening on the left side of the green. The green is enormous and tilts front to back and left to right-feeding it on from the front left is the ticket. No way to be conservative on this hole you just have to Arnie hitch and be aggressive.

#2 Par 4 357/344

No let up here. The distance on the hole should make the apparent forced carry easier to handle. It is only 175 across the wasteland and it is playable from the far end of the sand to the green. Hit driver at the middle of the hole and you will have a short iron to a smart ass green. The green is raised slightly from the fairway and has a vaginal collection bunker just in front of the green-this gets way more action than it deserves. The green is very shallow with three distinct sections across. The right side is very pitched so most putts need to approach the flag from in front and center. The flavor of this hole will be in your mouth all day.

#3 Par 3 147/125

This can be interpreted as a breather hole though it is not easy. A short club is sewn through the framing trees-eight to the back and nine to the front-the green sits well below you and it is a half a club less. The green is two greens to me-huge tier bisects across about a third of the way back. The back of the green goes on forever to the left. The waste area that flanks the left is a no-no-there is really nowhere to hit it safely other than the mowed green area.

#4 Par 5 507/478

This is his typical par five. Short enough in distance to tempt you-broad enough in the forced carry to make you think twice about it. Drive it straight ahead along the left side adjacent to the beginning of the waste area you see on the left. Now you have half a Mohabi desert to negotiate at a shoe tongue green that slopes away from you. The layup area at 100 yards is amply generous and that is where you should go. Since the green feeds away from you a long club carrying the hazard and landing on the green is likely to leave you a loft club from the pitching area behind the green. The short club in-landing either short or on the front is the way to get close to the hole. This hole has a real Irish flavor to it.

#5 Par 4 322/315

This waste area thing is not going away-trust me. This is a truncated par four that demands two very well executed shots to avoid the fate of the sand. Three wood off the tee to center will leave you at about 100 yards-don't take it over the waste area at all. Now you have a short club to a major elevated putting surface

across the divide. Anything short is repelled and will tumble all the way back down the hill to the edge of the wilderness. The green is very shallow and falls off the back. He has provided two collection areas behind from which to pitch from-that is considerate of him. If fair is still in your vernacular after you play this hole than you are either Mother Teresa or brain dead. Get used to it-fair is not the object out here today. This is a great golf hole-RTJ senior would be proud.

#6 Par 3 143/133

You got tees, you got green, you got nothing in between. This is a short pitch-eight maybe nine to a long tether of a green that looks like a bow tie from the blimp. The center pin position has about 20 feet of depth between the front wasteland and the back bunker that humps the middle of the bow tie. You have to play to the left lobe and putt across to a center pin. The left lobe is the safest-deep with no flanking sand. The right lobe is more surgical-sand surrounding but adequate space to land it. For the faint of heart this looks pretty impossible.

#7 Par 4 401/383

This magnificent par four is like playing down the face of a waterfall. From the tee you drive it to center through a gap to a fairway that tumbles below you like the waters of Niagra. The fairway has a series of levels and you should end up far enough down to have a short iron to a shelved green set across a marshy waste area. In spite of the overly generous driving area the place to be is center because the wings have some serious undulating stances from which you do not want to negotiate your second shot. The green has a two story tier across the center about a third back-the front pins are the easiest because you can use the face of the garden apartment building as a backstop and let it feed back to the narrow front section of the green. The upper floor is wide and ambling-getting it close to the flag up there is a real task. Take a moment and look back up the hole from the green-this is a spectacular creation.

#8 Par 3 173/152

Middle to short iron at a green that doglegs right around the waste area in front. Noteable tiering again so the green is really two greens. The front and middle pins are accessible the back right is very difficult to find. The green actually falls off in the center so many second shots will be played chipping back at the flag. Another very memorable hole.

#9 Par 4 415/394

This one is like #9 on the Chief at the old Indian Spring with a serious attitude and a whole lot of sand. The drive is off a set of stacked tees across a bit of wasteland between a constricted piece of fairway to a very generous landing area. Balls not struck straight and solid will find sand or scrub that make this hole nearly impossible to play. From the perfect drive location you have mid to short iron to a green piece of fuzz stuck on the top of the Chrysler building. The elevation change to the green is off the charts and the green is no wider than the landing pad for the med-vac unit chopper at the shock trauma unit at the University of Maryland

Hospital. This is as intimidating as it gets since if you are timid in your approach or wander at all you will have a three story bunker shot from the right greenside wasteland that no one is capable of pulling off. The green is forty yards long so you can lay it on the front and let it run out or play it off the left hill that flanks the fuzz. The key on the second shot is to try to keep the line over green areas you can see and not cut across the waste area-this way when you miss hit the shot you may have a third shot you can play.

#10 Par 4 421/398

So after that breather front nine you are ready for a real challenge. The next nine holes are nothing short of spectacular. From the tee on ten you get a good look at this sweeping dogear right around a huge waste area. Drive it long to left center into the tumbling wake below you and the ball should correct to center. From here you have to aim at the left edge of the green side bunker that is actually nestled in the middle side of the green. That line will bring you on the right front and feed to center. Going out over the waste area with a draw seems like an act of futility-lots of sand granules in the socks. Green is very long-receptive to the long shot you are hitting in. This is a grand hole to look at and to play.

#11 Par 5 511/486

Grand is redefined on this next hole. This is an L-shaped sharp dogleg right around the most cavernous sand pit on the east coast. From the tee you drive it straight ahead at the two lonely trees you see on the horizon. Now you will be tempted by the number you see on the sprinkler head at your feet to think about taking it at the green that sits across the vast low maintenance area to a sliver of a shallow green wavering temptingly above it. Forget it-it is a good two club differential and the green will not hold it anyway. The layup is a short club across the edge of the hazard to a fat area at about 100 yards. From there you elevate a short club at a much more receptive angle to the green. Green is very shallow and you can expect to be pitching back if you impart one without due spin.

#12 Par 4 412/380

This hole is almost conventional compared to everything else you play today but it is really a wonderful hole. You drive from an elevated tee to a bit of a tourniquet landing area that is flanked on both sides by sand and waste. The second shot is into a green slightly above that is long and narrow and leans away from you like grandma's boot tongue. Right side and back of the green is a moated pitching area a good eight feet below the putting surface. Waste area protects the left side all the way in.

#13 Par 5 536/497

Convention ends in a hurry on this one. This is about as quirky and Irish as it gets on this side of the Atlantic. Drive from the elevated tee to a wide landing area below. The green is not reachable or approachable in two so play the left center of the fairway and don't look to cut off any distance by going over the waste area and being greedy. Now you need about 150 to 180 to reach the 100 yard mark where the fairway narrows. Note that the hole will turn hard to the left once you clear the bottleneck at 170. The green is tucked even further up to the left between Dollie Parton's cleavage and it maybe takes up about 900 square feet including the fringe. Needless to say you want a really short club in your hand for this little parachute you need to drop in there. Play into the gap and put across to the left-you cannot be more than 20 feet anywhere on this green.

#14 Par 3 178/152

A bit of RTJ here. Many tiered elevated tees that have a good club differential in each. The green is long and narrow and sits diagonal to the water hazard. The back pins have to be a bear. For front and center I would aim at the left edge and let it float in softly. For the back I might try to lower the trajectory, aim at the middle, and feed it back to the back. Anyway you look at this it is a beautifully terrifying shot.

#15 Par 4 387/351

All gloves are off from this point in. Nothing you see in the last four holes is anything like you imagine it from the tee. The first of these four is a drive to center across a wasteland into a very generous landing area. The place to be is left center since the last 100 yards of the hole is bisected by a wall that runs parallel to your flight line it. If you are on the right you will have to traverse this as well as the bunkers protecting short left. From the left you get a better look and a slightly-emphasis on slight-easier shot. The green is very shallow and set perpendicular to you so you will not have much to shoot at. The bottom left is bottom-a full story and a half below the center-it is probably the easiest to hold if not to see. Many thirds shots will be played from the back bunkers or short right.

#16 Par 4 321/281

This hole is as close to the Little Big Horn as you will ever see on a golf course. You want to hit your 200 yard club right over the bluff you see in the center of the fairway to land it in the gorge on the other side. Watch out for the Indians hiding on the ridge. From inside a hundred yards the hole turns sharp right to a green that is well above you, tiered across the center, and very steep. Front pins can be played off the center handball wall. Top pins must be carried to the top tier. This is a hole that would drive the big boys crazy. Very original in its Southwestern bushwacker theme.

#17 Par 3 134/127

From the super elevated tee it is only a 3/4 nine iron to a ribbon of a green that is set across your line of vision beyond the wasteland. You never get more than about sixty feet to shoot at anywhere on the green.

#18 Par 4 414/369

This one is pure Royal County Down. Drive from a low tee over a huge wall about 175 from the tee. You need to hit a regular solid driver and carry it over the center of the wall to a widening landing area on the other side. Don't hit three wood this is not a short hole. If you drive it far enough you get a peek at the green that is set beyond gap between the mounds. The green is set well back from the gap so do not be fooled. No bunkers to worry about but once again a bit of a moat effect if you miss on any side of the green. The green is long-46 yards long- and tipped away from you. It has distinct sections so try to get into the one with the flag.