

Streamsong BLACK

by Graylyn Loomis

PHOTOGRAPHY BY L.C. LAMBRECHT

Walking Streamsong Black before it opened, I was struck by its size and scale. The fairways were wide, the greens huge, and everywhere you turned were long views across thousands of acres of central Florida. It took me more than a year to return with my clubs and actually play the course and, trust me, nothing has shrunk. The Black is still big—very big. And very much worth playing. >>





The Black is also very different from the original courses at the Streamsong Resort—Tom Doak’s Blue and Coore & Crenshaw’s Red. Those two feel intimate and charming thanks to holes set between dunes and framed by hills. The Black is much more exposed and rugged—featuring big sandy blowouts and greens that spill into enormous bunkers—and demands more of players in the way of forced carries and heroic, do-or-die decisions. It’s also more of a links course, both in design and the required style of play. Architect Gil Hanse and partner Jim Wagner worked nods to links golf throughout the round: template holes from the British Isles, green complexes reminiscent of Australia’s famous Sandbelt, and the ability (sometimes necessity) to play the ball along the ground. The firm, sandy base ties those elements together.

Also true of many links, the Black’s greens are large, contoured, and surrounded by closely mown runoff areas. They’re also the most common source of visitor complaints, particularly first-timers, who think them too extreme—too contoured, too difficult—for average players. I don’t agree, but that could be because I’ve played so many UK courses. The Black’s greens force players to make strategic decisions, even about where to hit their tee shots and when to not go for the putting surface, which adds interest and challenge. Many of the greens are surrounded by raised ridges and mounds, cut at green height,

that spill off, repel balls, and are especially bedeviling to players who try hitting lofted wedges and flop shots: Mentally subtract those areas from what's playable and aim for the center.

The Black also features a number of blind shots, which can frustrate golfers. The most dramatic example may be the 9th hole, a healthy uphill par four with a giant Punchbowl green, a marker on the tee indicating the pin position, and a blind approach over a hill. It's a template hole taken from the Macdonald/Raynor playbook, and although a difficult challenge the first time, you immediately want to head back to the tee and play it again. As the Scots say, "a blind hole is only blind once."

What the Black Course demands most is time. Like any new course, it will take some time for the sand and soil to settle and the grass to grow in properly. It will also take time for the golf world to understand the design and discover its true character. But maybe most crucially, it needs to be played a few times to be appreciated. It's a wild and windblown links that doesn't reveal its charm after only one round. It's visually huge and intimidating, too much to take in with one glance. Its size provides countless ways to play each hole, meaning a good round is a few hours of complex decision-making. The frustrations and mistakes of the first round should give way to fun and interesting thought exercises in subsequent visits.

My advice: Play the Black Course at least twice. As with so many great courses, it will reveal itself more and more with every round.

