

Oakmarsh Golf Course
Amelia Island, Florida

Architect: Pete Dye (1972)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Gold	72	6580	72.2	136
Blue	72	6019	69.6	122

Overview:

Oakmarsh was created by Pete Dye in 1972, around the same time his more famous Harbour Town Golf Links in Hilton Head came on line. This wonderful layout weaves it's way through winding salt marshes and old oak trees draped with hanging moss has many of the design features as it's more famous cousin so be prepared for a day of the full Dye challenge. Built in the beginning of his "railroad tie period" many of the water hazards you experience on 14 of the 18 holes are framed with this accent. The native flora and the marsh grasses around the preserved natural wildlife habitats just make this a spectacular visual as well as golfing experience.

The outward nine is set among the heritage oak trees that frame almost every shot you play. Anything off line seems to get swatted by their limbs so you have to play position golf off the tee to have any chance to score well. It begins easily enough with a few routine challenges but when you get to the short par four third you will feel your heartbeat start to pick up rapidly. It is something out of Merion demanding focused execution on both a position tee ball and the approach into a undulating tight green complex. Starting at the sixth you enter the Venician part of the course-holes tightly framed by a series of canals that define the playing lines. Beware on this side that if the wind is blowing the trees may mask it's effect-so you need to concentrate on your club selection to avoid disappointments.

The inward half is an entirely different tale-the oaks back off but you get the full force of marsh golf and all of it's exigencies. Ten is a short hole that will have you shaking your head walking off the green if you do not play carefully. When you step on the 12th tee and feel the wind off the marsh on your left you will understand what the rest of the day is all about-trajectory control and proper club selection. It is really from fifteen to the end that will define your day because here you can play well or simply toss the scorecard into the rubbish bin if you are careless. Standing on back tee on the par three 16th is worth the entire green's fee. You will swear there are Sirens calling your name across the marsh. The last two holes put a premium on sense over bravery but I must admit the approach shots present a risk reward challenge that may be hard to resist.

These nines are extremely tight-demanding accuracy from the tees and to the greens, but are extremely fair in what he demands of you to score well. You will find each of distinctly different in flavor and trappings. As is the case with most Dye creations there are real obstacles to deal with and a whole lot of deceptions woven in between. He is a master of either suckering you into a gamble that is much more stacked against you than it appears or a bit of bravado that is really more intimidation than real threat. You have to look at each hole carefully for the best line to take for the achievable result-you score will depend on your ability to sort out the strategic choices and consistently make the right one.

On most days play from the Gold tees-the course need that for it's teeth. If the wind is howling then pocket your manhood and a step up to the blue tees so you will have a chance to enjoy your day. If you are a fan of Pete Dye then this is a course you must add to your scrapbook.

Hole-By Hole Analysis:

#1 Par 4 404/347

This is a demanding opening hole because, in spite of the apparent openness of the driving area, you really must keep this drive left of center to have a clear shot up the heart of the green. As will happen all day on this nine the huge oaks that flank the fairways have a devilish way of encroaching on your line to the green. With a long to mid-iron in your hand you now have to elevate you approach to a slightly raised green protected in front by a deep bunker on the right. Do not be fooled-the bailout is into that bunker since over and left leaves a really difficult pitch back up to the raised stepped green. This is a good par if you make it.

#2 Par 5 540/506

This par five is not really reachable in two so you can take a little off the first two shots and play for position. Hit driver or three wood to center just off the bunker on the left about 190 from the tee. From here the second shot position is quite important. Your layup is to about 100 yards where the fairway opens up slightly just past the right bunker at 150. You need to end up on the left here because there is a tight grove of palms on the right at about 80 yards that will get in your way if you are on the right. The short iron you will hit up into a narrow shoe tongue green needs to be precise to get a pet shop tweeter here.

#3 Par 4 317/301

This is a Merion-like pure finesse par 4-as beautiful of a hole as you will play in Amelia. The alcove appearance from tee to green is straight out of North Carolina-this hole is pure golf inspiration. I like a hybrid off the tee here-hit it hard to left center to avoid the influence of the lone oak on the right. Now your short iron must be elevated to carry the two bunkers in front of this raised, deep green. Your problem here is that the green is very undulating and segmented so your iron must be precise to avoid the three putt or give you a birdie chance. The front pin is really problematic since the front bunker really confines this area of the green. I love this hole man!!

#4 Par 3 169/155

Nice mid size par 3 that clearly favors left to right shot. Probably a five iron to center with a little left to right move to slip up the green that sits 7 to 1 to the tee. There are bunkers in front and back that sandwich this target and the green has some undulations in it. The tee shot has a narrow appearance to it but reality is actually less confining than it looks.

#5 Par 4 397/351

This is quite a technical par four-the beginning of a very demanding run of holes. From the tee you will determine that the hole turns slightly right around a bunker and some overhanging trees. It looks like you want to hit it tight to that corner since the fairway seems to dip and lean that way but this is smoke and mirrors. If you stay tight to that corner you will either end up in the bunker or closed out by the trees. Take a wider left center line from the tee and hit it hard. If you clear the corner you have a short club across a bit of a dip to a narrow, rudely tiered green that sits 5 to 11 and is protected by double bunkering in front on the left. This second shot is very demanding-it must be high, spinning, and accurate. You hit two good shots and get a putt at it here and you have done well.

#6 Par 4 428/382

Welcome to Venice-next three holes play around and across a series of quaint canals. This is the longest of the three but is a fairly simple hole if you do not make any big mistakes. Pump a hard slider left to right from the center of the bunker you see in the driving area-don't overdo your slide or you can get closed out. Now the second is a downhill long iron at another long and narrow green that leans away from you and to the left. The entire left side of the hole is now flanked by the canal but you have a border bunker from 100 yards and in to keep a roller out of the hazard. The front pin position is quite accessible but the back and left positions can only be reached safely with a ground hook-so hit it up the middle of the green and let the slope do the work. If you are into real estate there are some real impressive home sight lines behind this green.

#7 Par 3 184/147

This hole is much harder from the back than the front tee-it becomes a 3 to 4 iron instead of a 7 back there. The hole sets up with a very intimidating tee ball since the canal is on your left from tee to green and you must traverse it, but there is actually quite a bit of land out there and the carry is no big deal. The green is shallow front to back and sits 5 to 11 behind a long bunker that buffers the green from the canal. An ideal shot would be a draw from the front right edge up the green-but it may not be a comfortable shot for you with the hazard on the left. You can hit a straight one at the back right bunker and hope you find turf before crushed granular substance.

#8 Par 4 342/329

You now have two more par threes built into one with this hopscotch style short par 4. If you look at the map the line from tee to green is dead straight but that carry Bubba Watson only. You have to hit a fairway metal over the hazard as straight up the landing area as you might go. Do not lean back right off this tee or you will get vacuumed into the canal. Now you have a wedge or sand iron back across the hazard again at a small putting surface that is perched up against the canal again-the water is on three sides of this green-you will have to be very precise here. Missing right is no bargain either-it is dry but the next pitch will be quite dangerous. This is a real Pete Dye psycho-hole from tee to green.

#9 Par 5 527/494

Pete ends this side with a rather mundane straight away par five that is quite windy since the entire length of the hole has an expansive marsh bordering on the right. Drive it straight ahead and then hit a fairway wood straight again. The short iron is to a narrow target with lots of pitch and undulation. Should make a par here for sure.

#10 Par 4 307/280

This nine will be decided different than the front because of the added dimension of the huge array of marsh throughout. The wind will be very influential-even when the marsh is not visible and you will have your share of forced carries. You must be aggressive on this nine because the doubles are out there and only balancing birdies will make a good score achievable.

The opening hole on this side is really short, but do not be fooled it can eat your lunch. It sort of reminds me of his short hole on the back nine at Harbor Town in the two types of shots you need to hit to be successful. You can hit a long iron off the tee to layup at about 110 to 120 near the bunker on the right for best attack angle in-the bunker is about 130 to 100 from the green. Now you will have to elevate a short club to a very shallow hourglass shaped green set at a 7 to 1 angle the your line of approach. No room for error here-water in front and on the right-two devilish bunkers long and in the center of the hour glass, and a big tree blocking short left. There is no bailout on this approach-even deep right has a series of pot grass depressions that are much hard to pitch from.

#11 Par 5 500/480

This is a finesse type par 5 that baits you to go for a green that is likely out of your reach. Drive it to left center to avoid the bunkers on the right. Now your best play is a layup to 100 at the neck of the pinch in the fairway created by the pond on the right. Going for the green in two means a right to left play over the edge of the water to turn up the neck of the narrow opening in the green. The water is not the problem since it ends at 65 yards from the green-but the trees right and left make this shot questionable. You are more likely to make birdie here with a wedge in your hand. This green is plenty deep and has bailout room to the right-bunkers flank the left.

#12 Par 3 193/171

This is a ferocious par three that always plays into the wind that comes off the marsh bay that totally fills your landscape view to the left of the hole as far as the eye can see. It is likely to play almost two clubs longer than you calculate on the card. You need to stand a hard long iron into the wind and carry the ball to the center of this generous green no matter where the pin is. The bunker front right is ferocious so that is no bargain. Much like the first there is no room for error here.

#13 Par 4 359/287

From here out all the par fours are real doglegs-no imitations just the real thing. This one is quite short-you can probably hit 3 wood off the tee for position to right center. Now you elevate a short iron to a tight J-shaped green that is wrapped around a bunker. This again should not be a difficult hole-but less than "A" position off the tee makes it quite a bit more challenging.

#14 Par 4 401/362

This is a great looking driving view from the back tee which is set back in a chute behind a pond with trees encroaching from the right and left. The entire length of the hole is bordered on the left by a waste bunker to keep you out of trouble if you have the lefts. You have to hit a bit of a slider to get back to the right center of the fairway and get a good look down to a shallow green. The mid to long iron must either grab the front left of the putting surface or carry the front right bunker which has about 10 feet of green behind it. There is a little room to miss long here-Pete is a just that kind of guy. This is a much harder hole from the back tee driving angle.

#15 Par 4 377/351

This is a medium sized par four with a good dose of intimidation. Drive across the hazard to center-aiming at the bunker you see straight through the driving area. The hole turns slightly to the right but the green is tucked left so your best angle of approach is from the right side of the fairway. The next shot is to a really small green with a couple of nasties encroaching from the left.

#16 Par 3 171/167

The full force of the marsh influence will be felt from here to the house. Huge difference in the challenge if you are playing the back tee here. If you are standing on that tee you probably will have some thoughts of large wallet textured animals reaching up to snatch you into the grassy oblivion. Don't let those thoughts bother you. A full forced carry over the marsh is required to a green that sits 5 to 11. He provides some containing sand back and left. The best line is a draw aimed at the front right edge turning up the green. Picking the right club, especially if the wind is blowing, is the challenge here. Once you are standing on the next tee you will realize how cool a hole this was.

#17 Par 4 441/407

Monster par four with the marsh all the way up the left from tee to green. You drive over a piece of it to right center to get a look at the cape style green setting tucked to the left. He gives you a collaring bunker short and left but any hook on the approach is alligator bait. If you do not feel comfortable with the shot you need to hit be a man and lay up short right and pitch a wedge in. You won't be the first person to take that approach.

#18 Par 5 523/502

This side ends with a very technical sucker par five. Again the marsh dominates your concern up the left all the way-hit the drive to right center. The green may seem reachable from there but it likely is not-you want to lay up to 100 right center and have a look across the marsh that spaces the end of the fairway from the green. An aggressive pitch from there and you could end the round with a birdie that would make the ice tea taste really sweet.