

**PGA West Arnold Palmer Private Course
Palm Desert, California**

Designer: Arnold Palmer (1986)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Black	72	6950	74	143
Blue	72	6492	71.4	133
Bl/Wht	72	6217	70.3	129
White	72	5995	69.3	126
Red	72	5226	71.2	133

Overview:

Built in the mid 1980's as part of the PGA West lavish vacation home development, the Arnold Palmer Private course nestles at the foot of the scenic Santa Rosa Mountains. This is an array of wonderful visual holes that weave among manmade water hazards and manufactured rolling desert topography to present a onerous challenge emulating the TPC design tradition propagated by PGA Commissioner Dean Beman at that time. The course has been a regular feature of the tour's Bob Hope Desert Classic (and it's later commercial iterations). You may remember it as the place where you saw David Duval shoot his remarkable 59 in the final round to win the 1999 event.

Arnold was obviously keeping up with the Dye's who created the neighboring the PGA West Stadium Course at the same time in following the TPC formula of cookie cutter driving areas, flanked by ominous water and deep bunkers, and tight green complexes with large undulating surfaces. It is not a track for the meek of heart or those who lack trajectory and spin in their game. For the pros the slope is an impossible 143 and mere mortals face a stiff 133 from the 6500 tees.

This course was designed to be taken on full bore. The only way to play it is Arnold's way, roll up your shirtsleeves and be aggressive. The biggest challenge is in the four pars and not necessarily the longest ones. The par fives are relatively mundane and similar in design except the finishing hole which has some chutzpah (Duval hit driver, 5-iron to 8 feet and drained it for eagle to cap off his 59). The par threes have lots of visual interest but not that much bite. The front nine works clockwise away from the clubhouse to the north and back. The back nine mimics the pattern in a counterclockwise direction which means that given the day's desert wind direction you should have the same difficulty factor on half the holes on each side.

The real treachery is in the multitude of forced carry cape par fours strewn throughout the layout. Holes like 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, and 16 all use the same combination of harrowing water adjacent the full length of the hole with a tight green complex cordoned by water as well. When you get deep into the back nine you reach the Venetian section of the course from the 14th on where the canals haunt every shot and the only thing missing are the voices of gondoliers humming a sad tune if your shots get wayward right.

These final holes are spectacular to look at, set up against the foot of the mountains with towering sheer rock faces looking over your right shoulder on every swing. At least the short holes are short and it ends with a Par 5 so maybe you can find some redemption for your scorecard at the end.

This is a high end facility so the conditioning of the course-fairways and greens-is impeccable. They keep them on the pacey end of the Stimpmeter so you will have to mind your approach position to try to leave yourself uphill putts you can handle. Cavernous bunkers throughout are real hazards as are some of the grass mogul fields that abut many of the green complexes. As I have seen on other TPC style courses most of your recovery game is with a sand iron or a loft club.

The rest of the facility is first class as well. They have a wonderful informal dining area that overlooks the staging area and sprawling natural grass practice grounds which you should take advantage of for a post game lunch and lick your wounds session.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis (Blue and Blue/White Combo):

#1 Par 4 402/373 yards Beginnings

Arnie gives you a gentle start to let you get your swing bearings in order. Drive is left center between the bunkers that begin at 180 from the green. The green is set slightly to the right behind a salamander bunker that stretches across it's cheek. A mogul field of mounds is left of the green. With a shortish club in hand you should make par here.

#2 Par 5 494/494 Breakaway

The five pars are easily the most boring holes on this course. This one is a series of jumps over equestrian bunkers. Drive at the one on the left and lay up to 100 inside the ones on the right. The green complex, that reminds me of the par five fourth at Bay Hill, is raised and sits behind one steep faced bunker front left. The front pin behind that bunkers is a phone booth shelf and very difficult to hold.

#3 Par 3 155/155 Lite Touch

This is a short to mid iron over rumpiled ground to a very deep green that sits diagonal to a major bunker on the left. Favors the right to left curve into a stepped putting surface.

#4 Par 4 371/356 Rembrandt

The first of a number of very difficult cape style holes that have water abiding one side of the hole the entire way. It is a beautiful visual but is one is virtually unplayable for a low trajectory player who cannot carry the ball a good ways. Drive is to right center off the second bunker but do not overcook a draw because the whole narrows quickly on the left. What is left is a full forced carry into a 35 yard green sitting on a diagonal to water on the left. Best play is over the right bunker into the heart of the green and putt from there.

#5 Par 3 204/162 Intimidator

I thought the last one was intimidating but this can be as well. A long club into a green that is nestled against the rocks and water on the left. Another monster long green that sets up for a draw off the bunker on the right working up to the flag of the day. If you can avoid a lost ball on these last two you are gaining on the field.

#6 Par 5 545/545 Palmer's Runway

Maybe the name should be Palmer's Bowling Lane since it is dead straight with bunker gutters up both sides. Very similar to #2. Drive to right center and then lay up to 100 left center to get a look straight up the long and narrow green. These two par fives are your best scoring opportunities on the front side.

#7 Par 4 416/372 Brutal

This time the water hazard is on the right so you want to move the tee ball right to left to try to approach the bunkers on the left at about 160. The canal ends at about 75 yards so your right to left approach does not have to deal with it but this is a shallow green so the shot must be measured properly to stay aboard.

#8 Par 4 314/314 Trapped

Definitely the most interesting hole on this side this short one will hold your attention. No real hazard danger but tight confines for both shots on the hole. Drive it right to left to pass the bunkers on the left and get into pitching range. The green sits diagonal to your approach position and is oreoed between a very deep finger bunker in front and two more behind. A left to right shape would follow the orientation of the target.

#9 Par 4 421/292 Tyrant

This one is pure Arnold and it is as authoritarian as it's name. Only one way to play this, hitch up your pants and be aggressive. Right to left drive working down the hole will leave you a medium to long club in across the water and the boulders that define dry land. Again it is a draw shot working up a long ramped green to the day's pin. A couple of bunkers right will provide orientation of the target. You make a par here you deserve a double Arnold Palmer at the half way bar.

#10 Par 4 433/418 Monster

Yes it is...this side begins with another very difficult cape style hole similar to the fourth. Forced carry drive over the water to right center leaves a long club across the corner of the body of water that dominates the entire length of the hole on the left. The green is beveled against the water on a 8 to 2 angle and sandwiched between low bunkers for good measure. Once again this is a scorecard survival hole...just avoid the high number.

#11 Par 5 497/497 Breather

All the five pars have air bags are so you can relax on this one. If it reminds you of the first two I am not surprised. Drive is center and another lay up to 100 on the left-you are used to this drill by now. Table top green complex is set to the right behind some bunkers. Make a good score and move on.

#12 Par 3 195/164 Stretch

The first of three par threes on this nine it will remind you of the third just with the green set to the left. A quasi-redan feel with a holding back stop about 1/3 up the green on the right you are playing a draw once again.

#13 Par 4 422/402 Challenger

Primed for a disastrous launch this is the beginning of the technical part of the course-both hands need to remain firmly on the wheel.. Drive is across the hazard at the bunker on the left-the landing area is generous. Approach is to a pinched narrowing right kidney shaped green defined by hurdle bunkers front left and the water on the right. Once again goal is survival of the scorecard.

#14 Par 5 520/470 Venice

Now you are entering the full Venetian section with the ever present viaduct haunting every shot over the next four holes. He kind of eases you into this concept with a three shot par five that is playable. Drive to center between the bunkers and you have a mid-iron lay up to 95 and a fat area on the left that gives you a good look at the funky green complex sitting at the foot of the mountain. No bunkers fronting this small green so trust your measurement. You must have a short club in hand to hold this putting surface.

#15 Par 3 122/122 Confusion

The name comes from the uneasiness of trying to pick the right pitching club on what should be a very simple hole. The long and narrow green sits a ½ a club down from the tee perched in a horned sheep mountain habitat. An outcropping of boulders obscures the front edge to enhance your confusion and the bunkers front and left of the green with the canal behind complete the effect. There may be wind that is masked by the mountains to your right so be aware. Sure looks like a hole you should par every time but you won't.

#16 Par 4 345/345 Double-Cross

Maybe the hardest in the Venetian stretch this is a double cross over the canal. Not a long hole but you need to drive aggressively toward the end of the last bunker on the left to give yourself the shortest club in hand for an approach. This leaves a short pitch approach across the water to a ribbon of a green nestled below a sentinel massive boulder complex with a Jerry Garcia piece sign prominently on top. No bunkers between the green and water this time so do not overcook a right to left approach. Another scorecard survival effort.

#17 Par 3 116/116 Panoramic View

Very similar to 15 just less boulder static and a much longer green with three distinct sections. Aim at the right edge of the green and watch your shot float out of the clouds to the green below. Once again club selection is tricky.

#18 Par 4 520/520 Temptation

Arnie was good enough to give you a par five to finish so maybe you can redeem one of the high scores earlier in the day. But beware this is a very unforgiving hole if you get out of position on any shot. Drive is center between the bunkers from where you need to calculate a lay up to about 100 yards on the right. From this angle you get a good look at one more cape green setting hovering over rocks and water. One bunker on the right helps to frame the target. It is another 40-yard long green so getting to flag high is very important to avoid a three-putt at the end of the day.