

in the bag

Irons IN THE Fire

The latest crop of irons may not look much different, but they pack plenty of subtle improvements **BY SCOTT KRAMER**

From an aesthetic standpoint, irons don't seem to change much from one year to the next. There are several reasons for this, one being that the clubheads aren't large like drivers and thus there isn't a whole lot of wiggle room for design advancements. Plus, many models on the market help you hit the ball pretty well as they are.

That said, manufacturers are always fine-tuning their products' performance. The latest crop of 2010 model irons feel more solid and offer more forgiveness. When shopping for irons, you should hone in on three major categories: game-improvement irons, which feature cavity backs, heel-toe weighting, and larger clubheads; super game-improvement irons, with even deeper cavity backs and ultra-low centers of gravity to help you get the ball airborne; and a new generation of better-player clubs, which is where most of the recent performance enhancements have been made.

For decades, better players used forged blades that offered little or no forgiveness—a major reason they appealed to only a small segment of the market. But things have changed.

Over the last five to 10 years, advances in design and technology have resulted in irons that still bear some of the minimalist design of blades, while discreetly packing in downsized game-improvement features. Previous attempts to achieve this combination of looks and performance did not catch on, but now, even Tour players are using irons that somewhat resemble the ones we play. If your Handicap Index is about 15 or lower, you'll surely notice the improved feel and performance—and the sleek lines that you prefer.

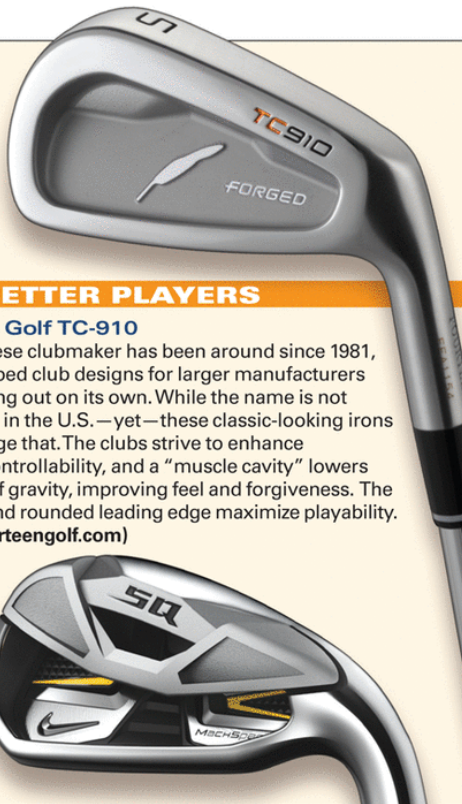
Another thing golfers may—or may not—notice on irons this year is whether they conform to the new USGA guidelines on grooves. Some manufacturers offer the new grooves as an option in 2010; starting in 2011, all new irons will have them as a standard feature. So this year is your last chance to buy new irons that still utilize the old groove design, which for most non-tournament rounds will still conform to USGA specifications until 2024. ■

MGA Equipment Center Goes Live

This month marks the launch of a new website geared toward golf equipment enthusiasts.

The MGA Equipment Center is accessible through our home page, mgagolf.org, and features a variety of equipment-related stories and links. The new site includes exclusive content such as clubfitting advice from Met Area PGA Professionals, a look in the bag at the equipment used by the area's top players, and commentary on equipment trends from veteran golf writers and experts.





FOR BETTER PLAYERS

Fourteen Golf TC-910

This Japanese clubmaker has been around since 1981, and developed club designs for larger manufacturers until breaking out on its own. While the name is not well-known in the U.S.—yet—these classic-looking irons might change that. The clubs strive to enhance a golfer's controllability, and a "muscle cavity" lowers the center of gravity, improving feel and forgiveness. The wide sole and rounded leading edge maximize playability. (\$1,199, fourteengolf.com)



Adams Idea Black CB1

Forged from soft carbon steel for satisfying, tactile feedback, these black-finished irons are geared towards skilled players seeking a penetrating ball flight and soft feel—it's no wonder Tom Watson has been playing them. A precision milled cavity and precisely located center of gravity offer long, consistent distance with improved accuracy. Milled grooves comply with 2010 USGA competition requirements. (\$1,099.99/graphite, \$899.99/steel, adamsgolf.com)



GAME-IMPROVEMENT

Nike SQ MACHSPEED

Proving the principal that faster ball speed off the clubface translates directly to more distance, these employ a new weld construction method and a responsive, thin alloy face that results in a hot center area that extends low on the face. The patented PowerBow and deep undercut create a deep center of gravity to help the ball get airborne and land softly. (\$839.99, nikegolf.com)



Callaway X-24 Hot

The manufacturer bills these as its longest, most-accurate X-Series irons ever. The clubface generates peak ball speed thanks to variable thickness (it's meaty where it needs to be). More weight is positioned in the clubhead perimeter for impact stability and forgiveness. A rich-looking finish provides a distinctive look that minimizes glare. (\$899/set with graphite shafts, \$699/steel, callawaygolf.com)



SUPER GAME-IMPROVEMENT

Tour Edge Bazooka HT Max

One look at the long irons proves that every club attribute is geared toward higher handicappers, including longer blade length, wider sole width, and the generous undercut cavity that allows plenty of forgiveness. As the irons get shorter, you'll see progressive face height, top line, offset, and bounce that all optimize distance, trajectory, and spin. (\$259, touredge.com)



Cobra S2 Max

These irons aim to maximize forgiveness and heighten launch for mid- to high-handicappers. They bear a low-profile, wide-sole design, which helps you get through the turf easier. The clubface's expanded sweet zone promotes consistent power, so that off-center shots will still fly close to your expected distances. (\$630/graphite, \$500/steel, cobragolf.com)