

By Scott Kramer, Contributing Equipment Editor

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Hot Trend

The Latest, Greatest Gear for 2010

Some of the more notable products from the larger manufacturers include Callaway's FTiZ driver, Ping's G15 irons and Titleist's DT SoLo balls

You can't help but notice how a handful of large companies tend to dominate the equipment market. You know which big names are there year in and out because chances are pretty good that they also account for a good percentage of equipment sales in your golf shop, as well.

PGA Magazine recently examined data in equipment market reports from independent research firm Golf Datetech, based in Kissimmee, Fla., from 2003 and 2009, and noticed that the same companies were basically still leading the individual equipment categories. In fact, when we grouped the top six companies together, their collective market share actually increased in that time span.

For the top six companies, wood sales, for example, amounted to 82.65 percent and 57.15 percent for on- and off-course shops, respectively, in 2003. This past year they jumped to 89.51 and 69.95 percent, respectively. In irons,

this Just In

The Royal & Ancient Golf Club has developed an online, searchable club database that's produced in conjunction with the USGA, which lists all clubs with lofts of 25 degrees or higher that were in production prior to Jan. 1, 2010, and which have been submitted to, and evaluated by, either The

R&A or the USGA.... Club Glove debuted the Train Reaction Device (\$19.95), a universal luggage stabilizer that allows travelers to connect and roll two pieces of wheeled luggage of any size and combination with half the effort.... Titleist reported that two Illinois men were arrested for a scam that resulted in at least 88 victims

and \$400,000 in damages. Using business names Iconic Concepts and Bellamax, the men allegedly sent e-mail blasts to businesses and consumers offering logoed Pro V1's at extremely low prices, and then accepted numerous orders, including advance payments, but did not deliver the balls.... Lee Westwood has signed a

multi-year contract to continue playing Ping equipment.

Popular Science magazine honored Callaway's uPro GPS device with a 2009 Best of What's New Award. Callaway just released the uPro Go full-color GPS device.... Puma has formed Puma Golf North America – a distributor and

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DRIVERS

It's all about speed this year, as in increasing any golfer's clubhead speed. Callaway is billing its new FTiZ (\$399) as the longest and straightest driver the company's ever designed – thanks to its polar weighting, chemically milled hyperbolic cup face and aerodynamic body. Callaway is also offering the Diablo Edge (\$299) titanium driver that's designed to reduce drag for faster clubhead speed.... Among Nike Golf's new drivers is the adjustable SQ MACHSPEED (\$359.99) that boasts a tapered heel and a toe-side "PowerBow" design to smooth airflow around the clubhead for quick acceleration. Nike's Victory Red (\$479.99) boasts a Compression Channel on the sole that increases ball speed.... Cleveland Golf's Launcher DST (\$299) has 10 grams of weight removed from the grip, 15 from the shaft, and two from the clubhead – compared to its previous iteration – which translates to a higher clubhead speed. The shaft is a quarter-inch longer than standard, which also increases clubhead speed by leverage.

Adams' sleek-shaped Speedline FAST 10 (\$399.99) reduces aerodynamic drag, stabilizes airflow around the clubhead and, thus, bumps up clubhead speed.... Bridgestone's titanium J38 460 (\$499) features a rigid sole for higher launch and lower spin with improved feel and sound, as well as Enhanced Face Thickness for additional forgiveness.... Srixon's Z-TX (\$499) has a low-density, high-elasticity titanium clubhead with variable face thickness.... Cobra's ZL (\$349) has an adjustable hosel to alter face angle, a carbon composite crown and sole, and titanium clubhead and clubface.... Tour Edge's Exotics XCG3 driver (\$349.99) packs 28 grams worth of tungsten sole weights and an amorphous carbon crown. Meanwhile, the 430cc CB3 (\$349) has a classic shape and comes with a money-back distance guarantee.

Ping's forgiving G15 (\$350) has an elongated 460cc titanium head that produces higher trajectory and reduced spin, while its fade-biased i15 (\$405) sports a bulge crown to optimize energy transfer for more ball speed and solid feel.... TaylorMade has debuted two new drivers. The high-MOI 460cc Burner SuperFast (\$299) is lightweight, has a large face, dual crowns, 46.5-inch long Matrix Ozik Ex-Con 4.8 shaft and a new bulge-and-roll design that's optimized to maximize forgiveness on off-center hits. Meanwhile, the R9 Super-Tri driver (\$399) combines Flight Control Technology with three movable weights into a 460cc head. The reshaped crown reduces wind resistance, while the Fujikura Motore 60-gram shaft helps launch the ball higher and at a higher spin rate.

those same manufacturers jumped from 75.24 (on-course) and 41.52 percent (off-course) in 2003 to 85.28 and 63.21 percent, respectively, this year. And in golf balls, the same top brands that accounted for 74.5 (on-course) and 58.5 percent (off-course) in 2003 today account for 97.9 and 89.8 percent, respectively.

"That's nothing new – it's always been the large brands that have made up the bulk of the market share," says Tom Stine, co-founder of Golf Datatech. "But there have always been small companies, as well, that had their niche, designs on getting bigger and increasing their market share. The golf industry has always been an incubator for those kinds of companies. You could pick many points in time when the market share has been more or less for the largest companies. But they're always right there, which is why they're big companies."

Here's a sampling of some of the more notable products from the larger manufacturers in several categories.

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licensee of Puma Golf in the U.S. and Canada.... **Summit Golf Brands, Inc.** – parent company of Fairway & Greene, EP Pro and Zero Restriction – named Christopher Heyn its CEO.... **UST Mamiya** granted its public relations duties to Buffalo Communications.... **Ogio** debuted its 2010 bag styles and colors that were inspired by diverse items such as tattoos, baggy surfer shorts and crew cuts.... **PowerBilt Golf** added five veteran independent sales reps – Mike Nicholson (Fla.), Don Schultz (Northern Illinois/Iowa), John Parson (Virginia/Northern North Carolina), Jeff Saldutti (Indiana/Southern Illinois) and Randy Denzin (Kansas/Missouri).

SkyCaddie has added three features – IntelliGreen Pro, HoleVue and QuickVue – to its SG5 handheld unit.... **True Temper** completed its financial restructuring plan in which a group of investors led by Newport Global Advisors and Providence Equity Partners joined together to acquire a majority equity interest in the company.... **SRI Sports** launched a Web site for its Miyazaki shafts brand at www.miyazakigolfshafts.com.... **Oakley's** new Staff bag (\$350) features a 10-inch x 9-inch top with a six-way divider, soft brushed top for club protection, tumbled synthetic leather and added strap with brushed shoulder pad.... **aboutGolf** installed a customized PGA Tour Simulator in the new studio set for Golf Channel.... **keri golf** launched its 2010 Newport collection of women's golf bags, showcasing a "new shape and lighter-weight construction in a contemporary, casual chic aesthetic.".... **LT Golf** debuted the Eazy cart bag that allows golfers to remove clubs from the front of the bag and not have to pull them over the top of the bag, as with traditional models.

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IRONS

Golf's top iron makers are at it again with new models that feature improved weighting. Mizuno's forged MP-68 (\$1,100-\$1,200/set, depending on shaft) has a rear muscle pad to lower and center the CG. Three other irons new from Mizuno are the MP-58 multi-material forged irons (\$1,200), compact MX-300 with game improvement technologies (\$900), and the game-improvement MX-1000 with maraging steel face (\$1,200).... Wilson Staff's compact FG Tour (\$999.99) is forgiving, while the forged cavity back helps stability, playability and workability. Wilson's irons lineup is rounded out by the mid-size Ci9 plus the Di9 game-improvement iron that features low/deep weighting and a wide-tip shaft.... Among Bridgestone's new irons is the J38 Forged Cavity Back (\$899) with a magnesium composite insert that accentuates perimeter weighting for more forgiveness and vibration dampening.

Callaway's stainless steel Diablo Edge irons (\$799/graphite, \$599/steel) are configured for distance with stronger lofts, variable face thickness and 360-degree undercut channel in the rear. There's also a Diablo Forged iron (\$1,199/graphite, \$999/steel).... Srixon's Z-TX forged stainless steel irons (\$899) have notches on the sole, a longer blade appearance, and 5g tungsten heel and toe weights.... Taylor-Made's R9 TP (\$1,125) has a compact head with a semi-square toe, and thin topline. The long irons incorporate Velocity Control Chamber behind the clubface, to hike COR and distance.... Titleist's revised AP1 (\$1,000/graphite, \$800/steel) has weight pads for forgiveness, improved vibration-management, and more stability than the original.... Ping's G15 (\$135/club with graphite shaft, \$107.50/steel) provides the high launch and maximum forgiveness for the masses, while the mid-size i15 (\$142.50/club with graphite shaft, \$115/steel) is for better players and fea-

ask PGA Professionals

PGA Magazine asks PGA Professionals: What mistakes do customers most often make when buying golf equipment?

■ **Laurence Auer**, PGA head professional, Azalea City Golf Course, Mobile, Ala.: "I notice that golfers will often buy a putter because a friend putts well with a certain type. The logic is: It must be a good putter for me if it works for him. Instead of going through some type of fitting process, they will purchase a putter based on word of mouth.

"With drivers, the golfer will take a demo model onto the course or practice tee, and depending on how they play that day, will make a decision. After doing this two or three times, they will buy the driver that they played well with for that day. If the golfer had tried several drivers on the same day, they would have had a similar experience with each driver."

■ **Brad Bachand**, PGA head professional, Man O' War Golf, Lexington, Ky.: "The first mistake many golfers make is they get in a hurry and make a rash decision instead of hitting demo clubs for themselves and going through a good fitting. Just because their friend has one that he loves doesn't

mean it's the best club for them. Second, when they do go for a fitting, they do not bring their own clubs. As a clubfitter, I prefer to see them hit their own clubs first, and show them how much better they do with the new properly fit club. Or I tell them that their old clubs fit them very well and let them make a decision from there."

■ **Lefty Barba**, PGA head professional, Eagle Haven Golf Course, Norfolk, Va.: "The biggest mistake many customers make in buying equipment is spending too much money on equipment prior to spending any money on instruction. We offer clubfitting services, but I can't tell you how many times I have taken the customer out to the tee only to find there is no ball flight to observe. Spending enough money on instruction to acquire a consistent setup and reasonable ball striking skills will make spending money

on equipment a much more positive experience."

■ **Joe Galan**, PGA general manager, Great Gorge Country Club, McAfee, N.J. and Minerals Golf Club, Vernon, N.J.: "Most customers make the following mistakes when purchasing new equipment:

"They don't understand the difference between what they need and what they want; they are set on a particular brand; they are set on a particular flex of shaft, loft or lie; they don't understand the value of clubfitting; they don't do enough research; they listen too much to brand marketing; they think there isn't a big difference between their 10-year-old equipment and the newer equipment; they think they can purchase a better game, when in many cases, if they took a series of lessons for the same amount they

would spend on that new driver, they would see much more improvement. And with a better sense of what they can do better with their swing, we can then fit them with equipment to best match that player.

"Of course, this isn't everyone, but when looking into most players' bags at the course, I'm amazed at how many players have old equipment that has grooves filled with dirt, a shaft that doesn't work for them, grips that are slick and worn, etc. The biggest challenge we have as PGA Professionals is to market ourselves as the experts in equipment fitting and selection. Many players don't believe they're good enough to be fitted for equipment. But with a proper



Laurence Auer



Brad Bachand



Lefty Barba



Joe Galan



T.J. Gomez



Jim Hajek



John Marquardt

tures a tungsten toe insert.... The Exotics XCG3 irons (\$499) from Tour Edge feature an advance dampening system made of two different TPE inserts with varying firmness in the rear cavity.

WEDGES

The new USGA groove Rule is no doubt sparking an interest in this category for 2010. Many wedge models are now offered in both aggressive and non-aggressive groove versions. Cleveland Golf's CG15 (\$119) is available with either aggressive ZIP or non-aggressive Tour ZIP grooves, both laser milled into the face.... Titleist's Vokey Spin Milled Condition of Competition Wedge (\$125) is an all-new, USGA-conforming version of last year's aggressive-groove model.... TaylorMade TP xFT (\$129.99) is offered with optional interchangeable faces – aggressive and not – sold separately for another \$39.99 apiece. See the Focus on Wedges article in this Equipment Section for further details.

PUTTERS

The putter market is saturated with many exciting new models. This is perhaps one club category where smaller companies really do make a difference. Ping's high-MOI Wack-E model of its 10-model IN Series (\$160) has a strong, lightweight insert with a firm impact feel similar to steel putters. Meanwhile, two new JAS putters use multi-metal technology and a lightweight nano-nickel insert, and the Craz-E Moment and Craz-D feature a patented alignment design.... Scotty Cameron by Titleist has several new California Series models, including the Coronado blade (\$325) made of soft, milled stainless steel and featuring a double step flange and flow neck design.... Yes! Golf's Morgan blade (\$360) boasts a multi-material head construction – stainless steel body, aluminum face and tungsten back – with the company's patented C-groove technology. The company also debuted the Donna II featuring a plumber neck hosel.

Of Odyssey's many new models, the Black

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Champ has introduced the Golf Dual Brush 2 (\$6.99) that features brass bristles on one side (to clean dirt and mud from irons) and nylon bristles on the other (to clean golf shoes and woods)....

Zenio Sports unveiled a putter training and fitting system that provides immediate and accurate data. The tiny, lightweight device attaches to any putter and uses sensor technology to measure impact, rhythm, face angle, and face loft/deloft and then transmit that data to a smartphone or PDA via Bluetooth....

Bionic debuted the Performance Series men's glove (\$29.95) that features a Triple Row Finger Grip for enhanced feel, maximum breathability, and increased durability.... If you've wondered which golf GPS system is featured in the new iPhone TV spots, it's the new **Golfshot** software from Shotzoom Software for the phone (\$29.95 one-time fee, no other fees ever) that encompasses 25,000 fully mapped courses around the world.... **Fourteen Golf** has debuted the UT-409 utility wood, forged TC 910 irons, PC-66X game-improvement irons, MT-28 V5 wedge, and an ultra-light stand bag. ●

fitting and selection of equipment, even average players can benefit and maximize their potential. This is why professionals at a green-grass facility should have an advantage over the big box stores as they can demonstrate the value of properly fitted clubs/balls at the facility outdoors by offering a thorough selection of demos and fitting carts.

"Educating the consumer is the best way to break through and help them understand the best opportunities to get themselves into the right equipment. Demo days, custom fitting programs, use of launch monitors, PGA Free Lesson Month, Play Golf America Days, Get Golf Ready are some of the opportunities in addition to daily exposure at the facility that can help the PGA Professional break through and help the consumer learn what will work best for them."

■ **T.J. Gomez**, PGA head professional, Shadow Valley Golf Course, Boise, Idaho: "The main mistake we see them make at our facility is that they don't take the time to get custom-fit, which ends up causing a whole myriad of mistakes down the road. They end up with a series of compensations just like they would have in their golf swing. For example, if they have a driver that doesn't fit them, they end up using their 3-wood for their tee shots and then they aren't realizing

the extra distance off of the tee that they would be able to realize with a well-fit driver. And then, because of their lack of distance off of the tee, they are doing things from the fairway and on their second shot that they wouldn't have to do if they were realizing their max potential off of the tee.

"We see this in new golfers, especially because they are the category of golfer who is most likely to be playing with hand-me-down equipment that isn't selected with any type of plan in place. If they would take the time to get a fitting or two from a qualified PGA Professional, they would be able to save themselves time and money in the long run and hopefully realize more enjoyment out of the game.

"A testimony to a quality fitting: I had a guy in here the other day who actually didn't buy a new driver because the specifications that we read on the launch monitor lead us to the conclusion that his current driver actually is serving him well and there was no change needed."

■ **Jim Hajek**, PGA head professional, Fossil Trace Golf Club, Golden, Colo.: "The biggest mistake new equipment customers make is that many don't use the resources available to them to ensure a quality and proper fit, to secure the best piece of equipment for their specific needs. For example, we offer complimentary launch monitor fittings, yet many

customers are satisfied with hitting their buddy's driver twice and deciding that it works best for them. Take advantage of the services of a qualified PGA fitter and know that you have the best solution in your hands."

■ **Kevin Maginn**, PGA head professional, Partridge Run Golf Course, Canton, N.Y.: "Most customers consider three options when purchasing golf equipment, which can be a mistake. First, they let their golf ability ego buy too much technology that may not fit them. Second, sometimes they look for deals on the lowest priced equipment that does not fit them. And third, they rarely – but should always – seek out a PGA Professional who's qualified on purchasing equipment suited for their swing and game."

■ **John Marquardt**, PGA director of golf, Paradise Pointe Golf Complex, Smithville, Mo: "One common mistake I see is golfers not getting clubs properly fitted. Or they're afraid to spend the amount it would take to do it right and instead buy the clubs at the cheapest place or over the Internet. Also, many golfers think they are a "standard fit" when there really is no such thing as standard. And they fail to compare several brands side by side on the range in an effort to see which ones perform the best for their swing." ●

Series Tour Design #2 (\$269) is a squared-off, heel-toe weighted blade with a crank-neck hosel and a full-shaft offset. It features A.R.T. (Advanced Roll Technology), urethane-dampening layer between carbon steel head and tungsten flange, milled face, and glare-free finish.... Odyssey's White Ice putter line (\$179/progressive shapes, \$129/core models) features a dark nickel finish and a multi-layer insert with an inner core that's 19 percent firmer and 92 percent stiffer than previous models.... Bettinardi Golf's five new 2010 BB Series putters (\$275) – led by the BB1 heel-toe weighted model – are plated with a black nickel finish, milled with a single sightline to aid with alignment.... Rife's Deep Blue (\$169.95) has weight deep in the rear corner for extreme stability and a high MOI, while the 460 Mid Blade and 400 Mid Mal-let (\$99.80 apiece) feature patented RollGroove Technology that promotes a no-skid roll.

Equipment market reports show that the collective market share of the top six equipment companies has increased since 2003.

Heavy Putter's Q2 MID-WEIGHT putter (\$119) is a toe-droop blade with a plumber's neck hosel and a full shaft offset. The company's offering three weights – Lite, Mid, and Heavy with total weight of 600, 750 and 900 grams, respectively.... Slotline's three high-MOI SSI-600 Series putters (\$199 each) incorporate multi-metal construction and a heel-toe weighting system, and have 15-gram tungsten weights in the heel and toe.... Coutour Golf's Arrow (\$299) is a high MOI putter that is 100 percent CNC milled from a block of high grade nickel. Weights in the toe, heel and tail are carbide, while the face insert is aerospace titanium.... Cleveland's Classics 4 and 4.5 models (\$69.99 each) are for better players and feature CNC-milled faces.

FAIRWAY WOODS/HYBRIDS

The newest fairway woods and hybrids are seemingly all designed to help the masses get the ball airborne easier. The Tour Edge Exotics XCG-3 (\$299) features a lightweight titanium face and body plus a heavy tungsten sole that accounts for 63 percent of the clubhead's total weight.... Cleveland's Launcher DST (\$179) has a "low-drag" sole that improves ball contact, and lower weighting to help the ball get up higher.... Cobra's Baffler Rail F fairway metal (\$169) has a small clubhead, an inch-shorter shaft, and a rail sole for easy turf interaction from any lie.... Nike's Victory Red Hybrids (\$203.99) are for better players, with

Tour-inspired design and physics.... Callaway's FTiz fairway woods (\$299) feature polar weighting, ultra-thin VFT face, carbon fiber crown, steel body and a weight chip.

Mizuno's MPFLI-HI hybrid irons (\$140) feature a Hot Metal face and Hollow Technology construction that helps launch the ball high.... Wilson Golf's FYbrid utility club uses a 76g Half-and-Half steel/graphite shaft.... Bridgestone's J38 (\$299) steel fairway woods boast a rigid sole, shallow profile, and enhanced face thickness.... Adams' high-MOI, thin-faced Speedline Fast 10 fairway woods (\$299.99) have sole curvature for better ball striking, and weight pads to optimize flight.... Srixon's Hybrid has heel and toe tungsten sole weights and a custom 450 maraging steel face with variable face thickness.... Ping's offering G15 and i15 hybrids (\$160-\$210) and fairway woods (\$230-\$265).... TaylorMade's Burner SuperFast steel fairway woods (\$199) have an aerodynamic head shape, are lightweight, and have a deep face.

BALLS

There will be plenty of golf balls to choose from with familiar labels this year. Titleist is offering several balls, including the DT SoLo (\$28) with a soft compression, solid core, and soft cover. The company has also unveiled new-and-improved versions of the NXT and NXT Tour balls.... Callaway is offering several new models, including the Tour i(z) (\$42.99) with a new urethane ball cover that cuts through wind with a piercing, penetrating flight. Other new models include the Tour i(s) (\$42.99), which is soft and has great feel around the green, and the HX Bite (\$29.99) that emphasizes control around the green. The company's Top-Flite brand has also released the Gamer V2 (\$19.99) and XL 7000 (\$12.99/15-pack) models.... TaylorMade's Penta TP (\$45.99) has five layers (core, inner mantle, middle mantle, outer mantle and cover) that each optimizes performance in key shot categories.

Nike's two-piece CRUSH (\$30) combines a softer compression core, high-energy core, optimized cover design, and new coating that reduces unwanted side-spin.... Bridgestone debuted at the Show its soft Tour B330-RX (\$56) distance ball with urethane cover and ionomer inner cover; and three-piece B330-RXS (\$56) with soft urethane cover and soft core.... Srixon has two new models: the firm AD333 for high/Mid swing speeds and the Soft Feel for mid/low swing speeds.... Wilson Staff's FG Tour is a multilayer, soft urethane ball, while the low-compression, multilayer C:25 ball optimizes spin from within 150 yards; and the two-piece, low-compression D:25 ball is designed for distance. ■

Heating Up Your Golf Shop

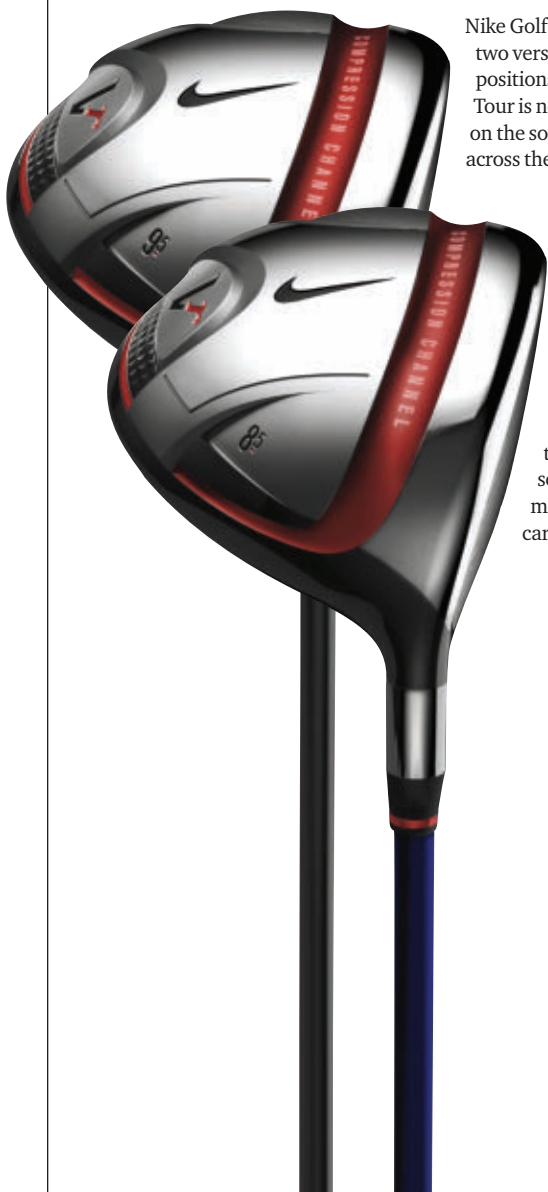
New offerings from Sun Mountain, Nike, Titleist and Oakley can boost early 2010 sales

Spring may not yet be in the air, but you can almost feel the winter thawing. And new products from Titleist, Nike, Sun Mountain and Oakley will help bring a sense of warmth to your golf shop.

Sun Mountain's 2010 Monsoon jacket (\$85) is made of comfortable, lined windproof and waterproof microfiber. Shoulder gussets, adjustable cuffs, zippered side pockets, an external chest pocket, shock-cord waist, and locking zipper pulls complete the jacket.



Nike Golf's new Victory Red (VR) driver (\$479.99) comes in two versions. The VR STR8-FIT Tour offers 32 clubface angle positions for workability, while the smaller, pear-shaped VR Tour is not adjustable. Each has a red Compression Channel on the sole that produces increased, uniform ball speeds across the face.



Titleist's new DT SoLo (\$28/dozen) is the result of the company streamlining its DT micro brand (DT Carry and DT Roll) into this single product offering for 2010. This ball features soft compression, a solid core and a soft, responsive Ionomer cover. Its mantra: long distance with exceptional feel.



Oakley's Banger bag (\$150) sports a 7-inch x 11-inch top with six-way divider system and putter pit. Built solid, the bag features a wide-stance stand mechanism, Izzo Dual Strap deluxe swivel buckle carry system, and zippered slip pockets.



For expanded coverage on new products, log onto www.PGAmagazine.com for weekly updates

Focus on Wedges

New Groove Rule Impact

Many manufacturers are offering aggressive-groove wedges, plus others with new softer-edged grooves

By Scott Kramer



The biggest story in wedges this year is no doubt the implementation of the United States Golf Association's new groove Rule. PGA Professionals and club manufacturers anticipate that because this is the last year retailers can order aggressive-groove wedges, some consumers may wind up stockpiling them – particularly later in the year as supplies potentially become scarce.

And many manufacturers are offering their popular models in two versions: one with aggressive grooves, the other with the new softer-edged grooves. But they're also leading consumers toward the aggressive version because it will help the short game of the masses more than the newer version. By the way, you can't see any differences between the two types of grooves with the naked eye. They're distinguished from one another by defining logos somewhere on each model, which spell out that they conform to the new USGA Condition of Competition Rules. Which version you lead customers to is up to you.

But there are other developments going on with wedges for 2010. One is self-customization. Yes, it's a result of the new groove Rule. But TaylorMade has put what is believed to be a revolutionary product on the market in its TP wedges with xFT (Exchangeable Face Technology). Using the same torque wrench from the company's popular R9 adjustable drivers, golfers can quickly and easily swap in and out wedge faces bearing aggressive or non-aggressive grooves, or replace a worn-down face with a fresh one. The rougher surface of a fresh face helps promote maximum backspin and control. In this case, the face is also fully CNC-milled, meaning it's perfectly flat before texture is milled into the face. A thin urethane layer behind the clubface ensures that the face fits precisely into the milled pocket and enhances the softness of impact.

"Though the face of a typical iron is sturdy, it isn't impervious to wear," says Bret Wahl, TaylorMade's senior director of iron, wedge and putter development. "A wedge's face wears from contact with the ball and from the dirt and sand that's often sandwiched between the ball and the face at impact. Every time you explode from sand with your wedge, it's like rubbing a piece of sandpaper on your clubface. Over time, the face wears down and the edge-radius of the grooves becomes dull.

"It can also be nicked and damaged in a variety of other ways such as when clubheads bang together when you put your bag down or when you walk or drive your golf car, or when you hit out of waste areas, or when you

unintentionally scrape the clubface against debris when hitting the ball from poor lies off the fairway.”

Thus, the grooves lose the ability to grip the ball properly at impact, and golfers lose much-needed spin by the green.

How big of an issue is worn-out wedge faces? TaylorMade officials say that after about 1,000 shots, the edge-radius of each individual groove changes and the roughness of the face surface is worn away. Many better golfers who are emotionally attached to their wedges – and get accustomed to their look, weight, feel, sole grind and performance – frequently get the face surface roughed up in a golf shop rather than buy a new wedge. So the potential for this new wedge is big. Tour professionals replace wedges often (every four weeks is common), solely to get fresh grooves and a rough face surface. Dustin Johnson and Jason Day reportedly ask for a new 60-degree wedge every month.

Cleveland Golf is attacking the same issue from a different perspective – using a laser to mill maximum surface roughness of the wedge face in its new CG15. But that wasn't the original purpose of the laser.

“A couple of years ago, we developed a laser marking application on our signature black pearl finish – basically using it and a proprietary calibration method to laser mark wedges with logos, text and names in a couple of colors,” recalls Scott Carlyle, Cleveland Golf's business unit leader for wedges. “Our second evolution was to take this same technology into three dimensions by laser marking the entire back side of a wedge and sole with a camouflage pattern in a few different colors – specifically for Boo Weekly.

“We calibrated the laser to etch the pattern around the graphics, insert and contours of the wedge, proving the accuracy and consistency of this technology. Naturally, we flipped over the head and starting marking patterns on the face with different geometries and depths. We conducted most of our initial testing on grooveless wedge samples to determine the design that would maximize spin within the allowable surface roughness range. The precision and flexibility of the laser method allowed us to make a lot of samples quickly, iterate, and etch surface roughness to a very precise depth. The laser is so accurate that we actually laser mark the face as the last step.”

Renowned clubmaker Jesse Ortiz claims that his Bobby Jones Black Nickel wedge faces are all about durability, and he believes he has trumped his competitors. “The main point of the wedges is that they are the only ones that will not wear out, so they will maintain their spin for many years,” says Ortiz. “These wedges are much more advanced than what is out on

Five to Try

PGA Professionals interviewed by PGA Magazine recommend the following wedges:

- **Bobby Jones' Black Nickel wedge (\$149)** has a face milled from Carpenter 440XH steel, which the company claims is harder and tougher than carbon steel or 17-4 stainless steel.
- **Bridgestone's J38 Black Oxide (\$109)** conforms to the new C-C rules. Its dark finish gives the ball more bite, especially after it starts rusting.
- **Callaway's X Series JAWS wedges (\$109)** feature aggressive Mack Daddy grooves – named after company poster boy Phil Mickelson, who likes to impart plenty of spin on the ball.
- **Mizuno's MP T-10 wedges (\$120)** feature a classic teardrop head shape, and the choice of a durable plated white satin or raw black satin finish.
- **Tour Edge's Xtreme Spin Tour Black 2010 (\$119.99)** features a 1025 milled and 1.5mm-thin forged face that's backed by a core filled with a thermal plastic elastomer.

the market. I just don't have the hype machine that my competitors have.”

Ortiz makes his wedges from a carpenter steel that's used for bearings in many NASCAR cars because it's so wear-resistant, he says.

Another interesting wedge out this year is Mizuno's MP T-10. The patented “Quad Cut” groove design aims to spin the ball at a high rate. Like other top companies, Mizuno has a manufacturing process that allows for the precise control of the width, depth, draft angle and shoulder radius of each and every groove. The result is an extremely aggressive and consistent groove that provides maximum spin control and ball stopping power in all playing conditions.

“Like any good player knows, nowhere is feel and control more important than in your wedge game,” says Dick Lyons, vice president and general manager of Mizuno USA's golf division. “Every golfer is looking for superior touch, feel, and consistency on their chip, pitch and sand shots, which is why a forged wedge is superior to an investment cast model... with the addition of these high-spin Quad Cut grooves, players of all levels will be able to make the ball spin and stop in ways they never have before.”

With or without the new groove rules, the wedge market will surely heat up as the year continues. ■

