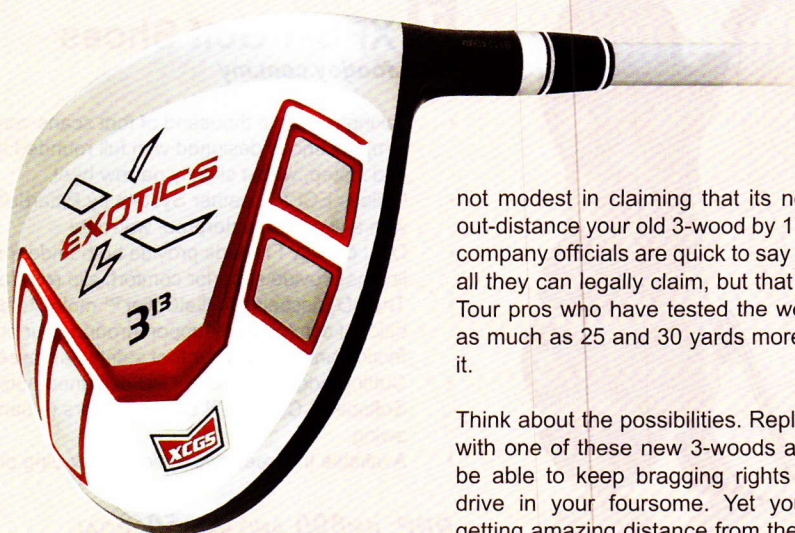




Scott Kramer is a veteran golf writer based in the golf equipment capital of Carlsbad, California. In his 20-plus years covering the golf industry, the former senior editor of GOLF Magazine has lowered his playing index to 5.1, raised his IQ on the sophisticated technology used to make golf clubs, and stayed even keel on his propensity to miss short putts. But he always brings game to his columns.



While great new golf clubs are introduced every year, one category has suffered attrition: fairway woods. Think about it.

Just about a decade ago, manufacturers began introducing easy-to-hit hybrids that gradually replaced most fairway woods in golfers' bags. The clubheads were smaller and the shafts were shorter. That translated to shots that were easier to get up in the air and with more controllable ball flight. Sales of fairway woods had already been slowing down, because golfers just do not replace theirs very often. There was no need to. These were probably the least-used clubs in your bag.

Brands are still coming out with higher-lofted woods, such as 5- and 7-woods each year. In addition, to be honest, many closely resembled their sister hybrids so much so that it was hard to discern what was a fairway wood and what was a hybrid. Many companies actually shied away from lower lofts, however. After all, who can actually hit a low-lofted 3-wood directly off the grass, get the ball nice and high, and have a lot of control over where the shot travels?

Well, this year I am seeing a re-emphasis on fairway woods. Some sort of a revival in energy. In particular, technology borrowed from sophisticated drivers has finally translated into easy-to-hit long and strong 3-woods that have lower lofts, larger low-profile clubheads, savvy CG locations, scooped-out sole slots, intelligent weighting schemes, and longer shafts. Those characteristics collectively equate to driver-like distance, higher trajectory and more playability than other comparable lofted drivers, all in a 3-wood-sized package.

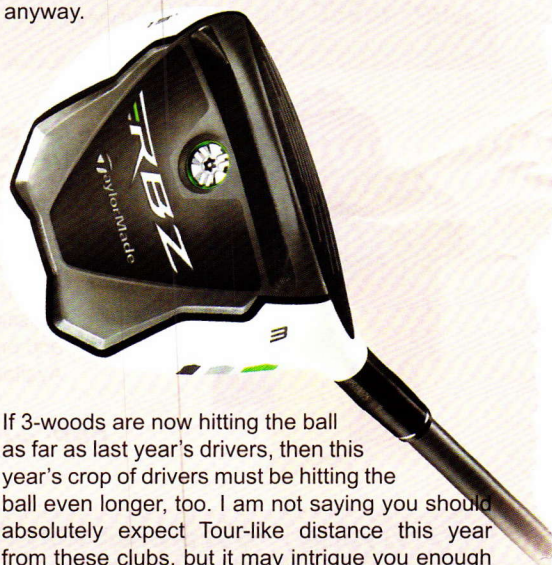
Three perfect examples are Tour Edge's new Exotics XCG 3-wood, Cobra Golf's Baffler T-Rail 3-wood and TaylorMade's highly-touted Rocketballz 3-wood. You set them up behind the ball and suddenly realise hitting the ball a mile should be no problem.

In fact, some brands have been quietly claiming that their new 3-woods can flat-out beat any 2011 model driver for yardage. TaylorMade is

not modest in claiming that its new 3-wood will out-distance your old 3-wood by 17 yards. In fact, company officials are quick to say that 17 yards is all they can legally claim, but that the many PGA Tour pros who have tested the wood are getting as much as 25 and 30 yards more distance from it.

Think about the possibilities. Replace your driver with one of these new 3-woods and you will still be able to keep bragging rights to the longest drive in your foursome. Yet you will also be getting amazing distance from the fairway. And if this club can replace both your current driver and 3-wood, well that means that there's room for an extra club in your bag – maybe at the short end where you can add an extra wedge to dial in your short game.

Manufacturers, however, are really just trying to get you to buy one of these new gems to replace your current 3-wood. However, that might be a difficult proposition, as adding distance only to that particular club in your set will surely trigger a ripple effect on the distance gapping throughout the long end of your set. Then you will need to upgrade your other woods, too, as well as your driver. Chances are, it might be time to do that anyway.



If 3-woods are now hitting the ball as far as last year's drivers, then this year's crop of drivers must be hitting the ball even longer, too. I am not saying you should absolutely expect Tour-like distance this year from these clubs, but it may intrigue you enough to add some of these clubs to your bag.

I recently tested several of these new 3-woods. Like many golfers, I have trouble consistently hitting a 3-wood directly off the deck. However, these new models generally got the ball flight higher for me, with less effort. Moreover, off a tee, I was achieving jaw-dropping distance and ball flight. Your results may differ. Nevertheless, trial-and-error may unlock a completely new element to your game – and to the golf industry.

The Wood-s Revival