



MIX A LOT

Callaway's new I-MIX Technology features a nice selection of some of the most desirable, high-performance driver shafts from top manufacturers, including Aldila, Fujikura, Mitsubishi Rayon, UST and Graphite Design.

You'll soon be seeing a new type of golf club on store shelves. Thus far, it's in the form of a standalone driver clubhead and interchangeable shafts that screw into it. These adjustable clubs are the buzz in the golf industry for 2008. Whether or not they become all the rage remains to be seen. The theory behind this development is that avid golfers and those who enjoy tinkering with their equipment can swap out shafts before a round to accommodate course or weather conditions. That is, on windy days you can drop a lower-launching shaft into your driver clubhead, or take your favorite shaft and screw in a lower-lofted clubhead. If it's a tight course where you need carry, plug in a high-launch shaft. You get the gist.

UNION

Piecing Together Your Clubs By Scott Kramer



BORE-THROUGH
Nickent's Evolver utilizes a system that connects through the hosel area of the clubhead. The Nickent package includes the 4DX clubhead and two UST V2 shafts, one for a higher trajectory and one for a lower ballflight.

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In case you're wondering, the weight of the fitting mechanisms is gracefully worked into the overall weight of each club. They'll feel and perform as if they were put together the conventional way, with epoxy.

These types of clubs are suddenly on the market, thanks to a new United States Golf Association ruling that allows golfers to play them after the USGA has approved each system on a case-by-case basis. The concept isn't new: There are plenty of putters today with interchangeable weights and faceplates. And TaylorMade has offered interchangeable weights in woods since 2004, while other companies have followed suit with swappable weight cartridges in their woods and even wedges. So it was just a natural extension that other club parts would eventually be allowed for quick swapping. So far, interchangeable driver-shaft systems from Callaway, TaylorMade and Nickent have hit the market. They're easy to use and the shaft installation process is quick.

Callaway's is called I-MIX Technology, which it touts as "a major breakthrough in do-it-yourself club customization." I-MIX FT-i and FT-5 clubheads—last year's popular model clubheads sold individually in tiny boxes—can accommodate a variety of popular shafts from the likes of Aldila, Fujikura and Mitsubishi Rayon, which are also packaged individually with screw-in tips. In fact, there are 1,600-plus I-MIX shaft/clubhead combinations. To fasten and unfasten the components, you'll need to use Callaway's wrench that lights up a tiny button when the shaft is properly fastened. You'll also hear it click into place. The system "gives golfers the same access and ability to experiment and optimize their equipment that Tour professionals have," says Jeff Colton, senior vice president of research and development for Callaway Golf. "No one's swing is the same from day-to-day—neither are the weather or course conditions. Our I-MIX Technology gives everyone the ability to quickly and easily customize their equipment, every time they play." Prices for the clubheads are FT-5 (\$435) and FT-i (\$500), while the shafts range from \$185 to \$435.

TaylorMade's entry is the r7 CGB MAX Limited, which also features movable weights in the clubhead and is a newer rendition of last year's r7 CGB Max



MULTIPLE CLUBHEADS

Callaway's I-MIX Technology allows for the choice of two driver heads, the FT-i and the extremely popular FT-5. Over 1,600 shaft-head combos are available with the I-MIX, a number that should make it possible for just about any golfer to find the right fit for their swing. Callaway's Opti-Fit weighting system is also included in I-MIX Technology.

driver. In fact, the driver comes packaged with nine weight plugs and three interchangeable shafts, which help you achieve 1,071 possible sets of launch conditions. The shaft-swapping capability is based off the company's SelectFit Technology that it uses in its fitting carts. "Because different shafts promote different launch conditions, TaylorMade SelectFit Technology gives golfers the power to customize the driver and optimize the character of their shots by changing shafts," says Sean Toulon, TaylorMade's executive vice president, innovation and product creation. The club-head is an all-new triangular-shaped titanium model with a deep clubface and three movable weight ports. The shaft is secured by one bolt using an included torque wrench (an extra bolt is included in the package). In fact, if you've ever changed weights around in a TaylorMade wood, you already know what the screws and wrench look like. These are just more heavy-duty. The shafts are a 75-gram Fujikura Rombax with a medium-firm tip, helping deliver low spin and a medium launch angle; a 65-gram Mitsubishi Diamana White Board with a firm tip and mid-section, and a softer butt-section, yielding reduced spin and a lower launch angle; and a 55-gram Matrix Ozik XCon with a medium-soft tip that adds kick through impact and promotes a high launch angle and low spin-rate. The entire package sells for \$999.



PRECISION TOOLS

Like many changeable weighting systems, most interchangeable shaft systems require the use of a specially designed tool, which is normally included with the purchase. The I-MIX system from Callaway features a unique torque wrench that lights up a small button when the shaft is secure. An audible "click" provides further verification.

For those who want to save some money but still try a premium driver in this category, consider Nickent's 4DX Evolver with Interchangeable Shaft Technology. Just \$479 will get you the driver, a UST V2 Tour Launch shaft, UST V2 High Launch shaft and wrench—all in one sleek package. The 460cc titanium driver has a super-thin 0.4 mm titanium alloy crown that's brazed to the body. The brazing process and weight positioning helps significantly raise the MOI. Nickent will also come out with adjustable iron woods and fairway woods in May. "This is the biggest change in equipment since the steel shaft came into play," says John Hoeflich, senior vice president and club designer at Nickent. "It's a huge opportunity to finally satisfy golf junkies. We believe clubs like this will account for 20 percent of the market in 2009. The packaging and price are key. I foresee a day in the not-too-distant future when all clubs will be screwed together like this instead of being glued together."

In case you're wondering, the weight of the fitting mechanisms is gracefully worked into the overall weight of the club, so that the swing weights are perfect on each of these clubs. They'll feel and perform as if the clubs were put together the conventional way, with epoxy. In theory, this USGA ruling opens the door for manufacturers to come out with other changeable aspects of clubs, although that might not come to fruition anytime soon. In other words, you'd be hard-pressed to find a company offering interchangeable driver clubfaces.

Adjustable clubs for consumers physically evolved from several clubfitting systems on the market with interchangeable components. If you've gone through Callaway's OptiFit fitting system or TaylorMade's SelectFit system in the past year, you've seen these types of concepts in action. The real magic here is that iron and driver clubheads easily screw together with shafts, locking in place quickly and securely, so that you can quickly test many club/shaft combinations in a relatively short time to find the one that works best for your swing. The assembled fitting clubs feel and perform identically to the finished clubs that are built for you. Any ambiguity is removed regarding the CG, Moment of Inertia, swing weight, etc.

Three other major manufacturers—PING, Titleist and Nike—have also debuted interchangeable clubfitting systems for 2008. None of the trio, however, has plans just yet to start selling adjustable clubs directly to consumers. PING's AFS (Advanced Fitting System) cart includes 20 driver clubheads (various models and lofts) and 20 driver shafts (various models and flexes), providing 400 dif-

ferent combinations of drivers. It also takes 32, 7-iron heads (various models and lie angles) and 30 iron shafts (various models and flexes) to generate 960 iron combinations. This is significant because PING, a pioneer in clubfitting, has used a relatively static and successful fitting system for decades. That original system will continue to be used as well. AFS employs the company's new nFlight fitting software.

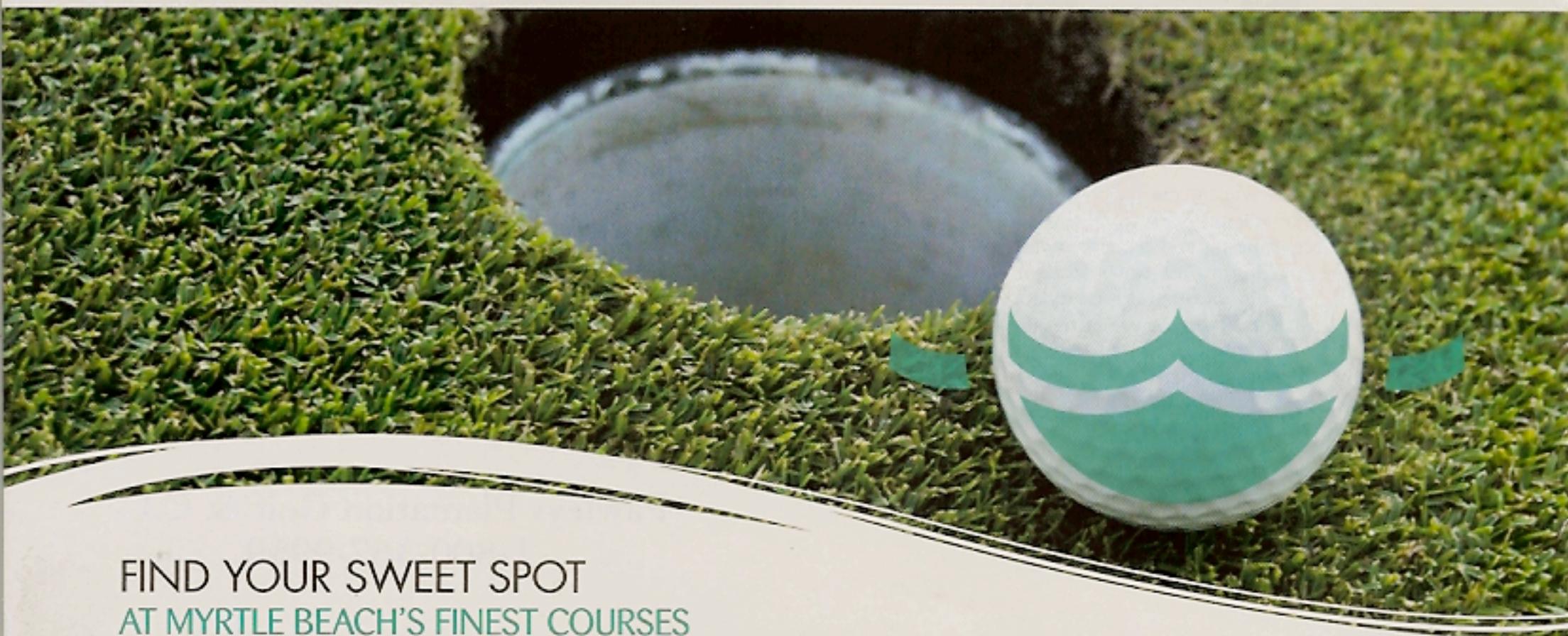
Titleist's new SureFit Interchangeable Iron fitting system, available at roughly 2,000 golf shops around the U.S., is being used with the company's new iron models. It combines 10 clubheads with 15 shafts, generating 150 unique combinations for consumers to try. The clubhead houses a female-ended hosel, while the shafts have prongs fastened to the end that fit into the hosel. The company also has a Website, fittingworks.com, dedicated to detailing the company's fitting program.

Nike Golf's 360° Fitting System employs the Nike IFS (Intelligent Fitting System) software and launch monitor, to custom-fit a full bag of clubs, right down to the lob wedge. It also addresses distance gaps between clubs and provides club type logic for golfers who aren't sure if they should be playing a hybrid, iron or fairway wood throughout the set. Like the other systems, shafts and clubheads connect through a mechanism, which in this case is coined Z-FIT Technology.



FITTING'S THE THING

A number of golf club manufacturers are using an interchangeable shaft system strictly for fitting purposes. Currently, Titleist utilizes the SureFit Iron Fitting system for just that, and it's available for fitting the company's full line of new irons. It wouldn't be a huge surprise to see some of these companies offer consumer products soon.



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Many other companies are carefully watching from the sidelines, to see if golfers become enthused about adjustable clubs and the concept of tinkering. "Adjustability is a great thing in a custom-fitting environment, but we've never invested in that," says Mark Christensen, business unit manager for woods and hybrids at Cleveland Golf. "It's awesome to have all these heads and shafts that can swap out quickly. But for consumer clubs, I'm less sure. We're not coming out with it, for several reasons. Once you find a club's optimal set up, why not have it glued in because you'll never change them. The average 15-handicap doesn't need to worry if he has a shaft with the right launch characteristics for windy days and one for still days. You just try your best to hit the club." Even TaylorMade officials admit that only a tiny percentage of golfers who buy their clubs with movable weights

(Cont'd on page 95)



UNLIMITED

TaylorMade's r7 CGB MAX Limited offers nine changeable weights via the company's Movable Weight Technology and three changeable shafts using SelectFit Technology. Company reps refer to it as a "tour van in a box."

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(Cont'd from page 83)

actually do change them around.

Then there's a legitimate safety concern: Just how secure are adjustable clubs? Manufacturers peddling adjustable systems concur that when the clubheads and shafts are locked together, they form a bond much stronger than conventional glue can. But because of the nature of screwing in one part to another, it wouldn't be unreasonable to wonder how soon it will be before someone tries swinging a club that he mistakenly thought was securely fastened. "For liability reasons, we don't sell components to anyone," says Christensen. "The first time one of those clubheads flies off and kills someone will be a big issue."

There's also a non-universality factor for consumers to consider. That is, in the legal-minded golf world, each of these systems is proprietary. This means that each screw-in system is unique and won't work with one another. Thus, the Aldila screw-in shaft from your Callaway clubhead won't also fit into a TaylorMade clubhead that you're considering. And with the entire category still in its infancy, you can certainly see potential lawsuits between manufacturers claiming that a competitor violated its component-joining mechanism.

One final question many golfers may have is how to know which shafts will perform best with a given clubhead. Of course, trial-and-error will help you decide—as it would with any club you've ever bought in the past. But you may very well find that you're going to need to learn more about shafts before buying adjustable clubs. That is, you'll need to better decipher shaft weights, flexes, torques, launch patterns and frequency properties before you buy. In the end, it will be up to you to decide what works best. GR

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