

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR NEXT PUTTER

Does the latest tech actually work? Do you go for a mallet, or a blade? How much should you spend? Here are some answers.

The last decade has seen putters go from being one of the least technical clubs in the bag to probably the most scientifically studied of the 14.

For years putters were simple, cast clubs with no story to tell. Then came inserts and the promise of better feel. Now we have moveable weights, adjustable shafts and all sorts of technical benefits which claim to help you hole more putts.

"Ten years ago inserts were everywhere," says John K Solheim at Ping. "Now putters use multiple materials, weights, adjustability, etc. Everyone can get their hands around a story that promises a better roll on the green and more forgiveness on mis-hits."

Still, the putter market remains tricky, because the flat stick is still the least quantifiable club in the bag. Manufacturers tout a driver's distance and how much their wedges spin, but with putters there's just one thing we care about – does the ball go in the hole?

That has led to a drastic increase in the number of choices as putter-makers seek to create a product for every stroke imaginable. In 1999 Golf Datatech tracked 29 putter models. In 2008 that number doubled to more than 60. What is brought to market, too, is a bit of a guessing game. "The breakdown of blades versus mallets is cyclical and difficult to predict," says Solheim. "The same holds true on some

designs. Consumer preferences evolve, and then it gets to a point where there is pushback. We saw that with the size of mallets, which is why many are not as large as they were a few years ago."

The fickleness of consumer preference is also why some putter lines have expanded in the past decade. "We design putters to satisfy the personal preferences of golfers," says Paul English, director of brand marketing for Odyssey. "It takes many different head styles, hosel treatments, finishes and insert types to do that."

And manufacturers are quick to point out that the expansion is far from over. "There's still a lot of room to grow in putter technology and creativity," said one.

10 THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN A FLATSTICK

By Yes! Golf's Phil Kenyon, who works with the world's best players to find their perfect putter.

LENGTH

The length of the putter will affect your posture and eye positioning, which in turn can affect the path of the putting stroke and how much rotation there is in the clubface. If the club is too long, unless you bend your arms substantially you will stand too tall to the ball and your eyes are likely to be too far inside the ball-to-target line, which can cause you to miss-align the clubface.

LIE

A poorly-fitted club in terms of lie will affect the sweetspot. When the heel or toe is substantially in the air, it can make it difficult to consistently strike the ball out of the middle of the clubface. Off-centre strikes affect distance control as well as causing side spin, meaning the ball starts neither on line, nor at the right pace.

LOFT

Loft is important, not just combined with the lie angle to influence where the face points, but in terms of affecting the quality of the ball's roll. The optimum loft depends on your stroke, and people can have the tendency to deloft or add loft during the swing. If you strike the ball with a slight upstroke, a minimum amount of loft (at impact) is needed of about one degree, though this depends on green conditions. Getting the correct loft is important to help "your stroke" roll the ball as well as it can.

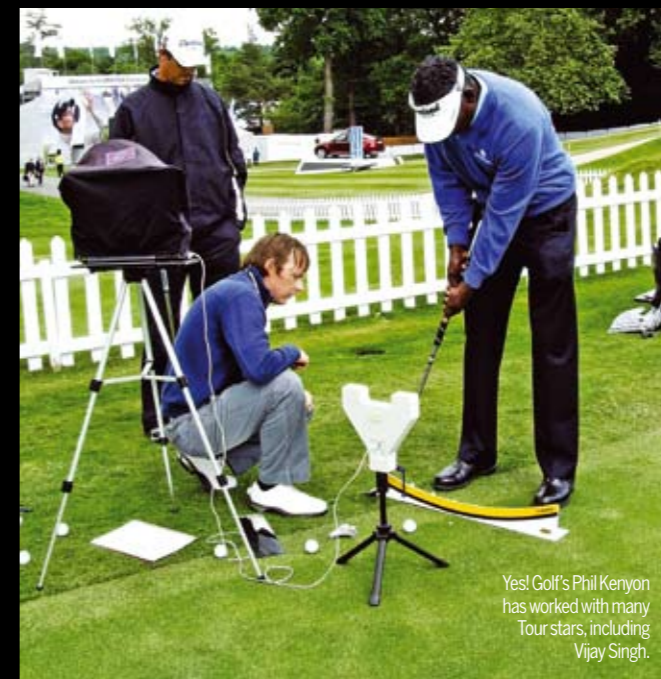


TOE OR FACE BALANCED?

In certain cases the weighting of the putter can affect the rotation of the face during the stroke. A toe-weighted putter can cause the toe to lag behind the heel when the club accelerates, and then bring the toe past the heel when slowing down.

MOMENT OF INERTIA

If your putts are inconsistent in terms of strike, a putter with a higher MOI can help give you greater stability with "off-centre hits", which can cause direction and distance control errors.



Yes! Golf's Phil Kenyon has worked with many Tour stars, including Vijay Singh.

SHAFT WEIGHTING

Players with certain performance traits can benefit from how a club is weighted. Shaft weighting can help stabilise the stroke and influence the player's acceleration profile. If you suffer from inconsistency from stroke to stroke, and are more of a hitter than a swinger, shaft weighting can help you become more consistent and improve your touch and distance control.

GRIP SIZE

Grip size can help alter the way you set up and swing the club. There are more and more guys switching to oversize grips on Tour as they can help you grip the club more in the palms rather than the fingers, so reducing hand action and also helping square the shoulders up at set-up.

MATERIALS

Different materials will offer different feel. It's important to try and test the different materials to make you sure you are comfortable with the feel. From a performance perspective the materials will make very little difference, apart from if they are grooved or non-grooved. Grooved putters like the Yes! C Groove help the

ball roll as soon as possible, helping your accuracy and consistency.

HOSEL/OFFSET

How much offset the club has, or where the club is hoseled (centre shaft/heel mounted), can affect how you set-up to the ball, not only in terms of hand position, but also in terms of clubface alignment. This is a complex area that needs to be tested by an experienced fitter to ensure that the putter you choose will maximise your alignment and position your hands in the optimum set-up position for your stroke. A player's eye dominance is also important here, as left or right-eye dominant people can often be suited to different offsets.

ALIGNMENT AIDS

If you struggle with alignment, or use a line on the ball or the sight-line of a putter to line up, a model with a strong sight or elongated sight line can be a useful tool. If you prefer to "square" the face up to the target, a putter with less of a line which offers a great view of the face may suit.

■ Phillip Kenyon is the Director of Instruction at Harold Swash Putting Ltd. www.yesgolf.co.uk

WHAT THE PROS USE

Of all the clubs in the bags of the world's best players, the putter is the one that changes most often. This is what the world's top 10 were using in May:



TIGER WOODS

TYPE: Blade

MODEL: Scotty Cameron Studio Stainless Newport 2



PHIL MICKELSON

TYPE: Blade

MODEL: Odyssey White Hot XG



SERGIO GARCIA

TYPE: Mallet

MODEL: Extended-length TaylorMade Rossa Monza Corza



GEOFF OGILVY

TYPE: Blade

MODEL: Scotty Cameron by Titleist prototype



HENRIK STENSON

TYPE: Hybrid mallet/blade

MODEL: Yes Golf! Donna



KENNY PERRY

TYPE: Mallet

MODEL: Ping G2i Craz-E he bought from a member at his club



PAUL CASEY

TYPE: Blade

MODEL: Nike Victory Red



PADRAIG HARRINGTON

TYPE: Hybrid mallet/blade

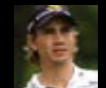
MODEL: Odyssey White Hot 2-Ball



VIJAY SINGH

TYPE: Mallet

MODEL: Never Compromise GM2 Exchange #7 Proto belly



CAMILO VILLEGAS

TYPE: Blade

MODEL: Scotty Cameron by Titleist Circa 62' #6

20 MODELS WORTH TRYING

Modern putters come in a bewildering array of shapes and sizes. So many, in fact, it's difficult for the average golfer to know where to start when choosing a new one. On the previous page we revealed how important it

can be to get fitted for a putter, because that can often dictate whether you need a mallet, a blade, or a mix of the two, which shaft is best, which alignment aid will suit you... To get started, we've selected a range of 20 new-

for-2009 putter models, all of which we believe are worthy of your money. We've not tested them, or rated them, because putters in particular are so individual, but it does serve as a guide to some of the technology on offer.

BLADES AND MID-MALLETS



CLEVELAND CLASSIC #2

PRICE £59

www.clevelandgolf.com

TECH First, the heel-shafted head is cast from 17-4 stainless steel, and then the face is computer-milled. The gooseneck hosel flows forwards to provide a full shaft's width of offset. For alignment, a white line extends to the back of the rounded flange and is framed by a shallow rectangular cavity. The hand-polished satin finish is designed to be durable and reduce glare. Three models in the range.



MIZUNO BETTINARDI C-SERIES

PRICE £170

www.mizunoeurope.com

TECH Milled from a single carbon steel block for consistency. Bob Bettinardi's patented Honeycomb Face helps consistent ball striking. Six heads in the range feature a heel-toe shape and have a satin pearl finish. The feel is still soft, yet the metal gives a solid click sound. There are two standard lengths (34 and 35in), the shorter putter being 10 grams heavier.



ODYSSEY BLACK SERIES I #6

PRICE £199

www.callawaygolf.com

TECH The combination of a milled carbon-steel body to a dense tungsten flange moves the centre of gravity (CG) low and deep for a better roll. Two head weights are used to accommodate different shaft lengths, and the dual-layer face insert features a resilient elastomer back and a urethane outer surface that's thin but firm. The finish is black nickel. Also available in #1 (Anser-style) and #9 (mid-mallet).



PING I-SERIES ANSER

PRICE £149

www.pingeurope.co.uk

TECH The heel-toe-balanced, stainless-steel body is cast and then heat-treated. The machined face has an insert that combines a thick, urethane piece with a softer central layer, to produce a firm response with a soft feel. Ping's online Web-Fit program calculates the proper length, lie and grip size based on static measurements provided by you. Also available in the higher MOI Craz-E, ½ Craz-E and ½ Moon designs.



RIFE ABACO

PRICE £109.99

www.rifeputters.co.uk

TECH This computer-milled stainless-steel head features a T-shape alignment aid which is formed by the intersection of two white lines. A notch on the topline allows you to check if your eye and hand positions are correct. Like every model in the line, the face has horizontal grooves designed to grip the cover of the ball at impact, lift it out of its depression and impart forward roll.



SEEMORE FGP2 STAINLESS

PRICE £129

www.seemoreputter.co.uk

TECH The distinctive asset of this milled stainless-steel head is Seemore's "RifleScope" alignment. The bottom of the shaft is painted black to conceal a red dot located between two white aiming lines on the heel. Seeing the dot indicates your set-up is incorrect or your head is not releasing properly during the stroke. A new option is the "whistle" offset shaft that lets golfers with forward presses to use the red dot idea.



SNAKE EYES TOUR PLATINUM

PRICE £129

www.snakeeyescustom.com

TECH The face on the stainless-steel head features what the company calls ARC (Advanced Roll Control), which is a pattern of semicircular scales milled at an upward angle of 44°. The width of each scale is 0.4cm and is designed to consistently enter the space of a traditional 0.5cm-wide dimple to grip the ball's cover. The design objective is less skidding with quicker forward roll. Four styles with different neck options available.



TAYLORMADE DAYTONA TP-KIA MA

PRICE £219

www.taylormadegolf.com

TECH There are five models available in this new range from in-house (and Sergio Garcia's) putter designer Kia Ma (three blades, one mallet and one mid-mallet). Each is milled from soft 1020 carbon steel. Six five-gram tungsten weights in the heel and toe help lower and deepen the centre of gravity, as well as provide a crisper feel. The toe hang across the three blade models ranges from 40 degrees to 54 degrees.



TITLEIST CAMERON STUDIO SELECT

PRICE £225

www.titleist.co.uk

TECH All three blades in the line – the Newport 2.6 (near centre-shaft), 2.7 (double-bend shaft with offset) and the traditional Newport 2 – are milled from forged stainless steel. The topline curves slightly up from heel to toe, to raise the toe and reduce the tendency of aiming left. Studio Select H models feature a heavier head (+10g) to provide a heavier feel preferred by some players.



YES! TRACY III PLUS

PRICE £299

www.yesgolf.co.uk

TECH During the fitting process, you can choose from four interchangeable hosel designs. As well as a different look, this changes the balance (from face-balanced to 60° of toe hang). Hosel switches are quickly made with a spanner that fits a small locking fixture on the sole of the putter. C Groove technology is a bonus, too; concentric grooves, milled in 20-degree upward slants, are designed to grab the ball at impact and impart topspin.

MALLETS



GEL PAUL HURRION SERIES PONDERA

PRICE £185

www.gelgolf.com

TECH A heel-toe weighted mallet with a crank neck hosel and full shaft offset. It's fitted with a True Temper Dynamic Gold S400 iron shaft rather than a standard putter shaft to help increase the size of the sweet spot on the face. It also features horizontal grooves that are milled at a precise angle onto a soft aluminium insert, to create instant forward roll on the ball.



NICKENT PIPE DREAM

PRICE £139

www.nickentgolf.com

TECH To achieve an MOI of more than 5,000, mass is placed in the side wings via two tungsten weights. The face features the company's "alternate-groove technology." There's eight putters in the range, all of which feature a cylinder pipe backweight which is the diameter of a golf ball. It aims to provide a 3D view of exactly where your putter is aligned, while helping to create a low centre of gravity.



NIKE IC SERIES

PRICE £120

www.nikegolfeurope.com

TECH The green head (20-20A model shown), shaft and grip are designed to optically blend into the putting surface, so the white alignment stripes stand out. The most significant change from last year's introductory mallet is that the open spaces in the head have been filled in, creating a solid green shape. The benefit of the large, square design is a high MOI that mitigates twisting on off-centre strikes. Five models.



ODYSSEY BLACK I 2-BALL

PRICE £229

www.callawaygolf.com

TECH The head is constructed of multiple materials and includes a urethane bridge between the top and sole. It has a 58g tungsten plug that pulls the centre of gravity deep. According to Odyssey, in a comparison of mass properties against the White Hot XG 2-Ball, this putter's MOI is 25 per cent higher, and the centre of gravity is 28 per cent deeper at 1.58 inches back from the face.



ODYSSEY WHITE HOT XG SABERTOOTH

PRICE £139

www.callawaygolf.com

TECH Two dense, semicircular fangs account for 132g, which spread 37 per cent of the head's weight away from the centre of gravity to increase stability on off-centre hits. The soft, elastomer-backed insert is meant to complement multi-layer balls and features a textured sweet spot to enhance feel. Parallel bars and two aiming dots assist with your set-up.



PING iWi CRAZE

PRICE £140

www.pingeurope.co.uk

TECH The shape places weight along the perimeter to increase MOI. An elastomer backing is designed to improve the feel of a machined stainless-steel face insert. The black-white-yellow alignment aid is raised to sit even with the topline to avoid the two-dimensional look of the original model. Two ports in the heel and toe accommodate 12, 20 and 28-gram weights, allowing for nine customised possibilities.



RIFE BARBADOS

PRICE £109.99

www.rifeputters.co.uk

TECH The computer-milled 304 stainless-steel head has a notch cut into the back of the topline directly above the sweetspot. When the central white aiming line appears in the notch, you know your eyes are over the ball. Because the horizontal grooves are designed to grip the cover of the ball and lift it from its depression on the green, the face has a strong loft of two degrees.



TAYLORMADE ITSY BITSY SPIDER

PRICE £139

www.taylormadegolf.com

TECH The 303 stainless-steel frame and lightweight aluminum core save weight, which is concentrated into heavy screws in the rear. The screws are moveable, so total weight and face balance can be changed. At first glance it appears to be a shrunken version of its older sibling, the Spider, but the black wings have been pulled inwards, and the white alignment pattern has a more simple look.



TITLEIST CAMERON STUDIO SELECT KOMBI

PRICE £225

www.titleist.co.uk

TECH Available in five shaft lengths of more than 35 inches, the putter's heel and toe weights are specifically matched to fit each one. The red "T" sightline aid is designed to make alignment easy. A third weighting point (factory adjustable for Kombi Mid or Kombi Long) pushes the CG deep to stabilise the putter throughout the stroke.



YES! MADISON

PRICE £149

www.yesgolf.co.uk

TECH The technology behind this putter is similar to a metal wood. The enlarged mallet incorporates a hollow head with extreme perimeter weighting to create the highest MOI of any Yes! model. The head is made of 304 stainless steel and has a titanium carbon finish with a head weight of 360g. The alignment lines are a ball-width apart on the top of the putter. Ashley and Athena are other new Yes! mallets for 2009.