



GOLF TODAY MAGAZINE

PGA Merchandise Show 2006

By Bob Fagan

Attending the PGA Merchandise Show since 1975 is an experience that never gets old for me. It's like anticipating and opening presents on Christmas morning. Once again, there are lots of interesting new products awaiting golfers. As golf is an optimistic sport, so are the business people that support the game. Here are some of the more interesting products that caught my eye.

Best New Clubs. With absolutely no pressure on me from Golf Today Magazine because the product were featured on the cover of the January, 2006 issue, I found the clubs made by Element 21 Golf Company to be the best, and perhaps the only truly revolutionary clubs at the 2006 PGA Merchandise Show. While other manufacturers are busy moving weight around, E21 has introduced the next generation of material for golf, Scandium, into both the shafts and heads of their clubs (Scandium is the 21st element on the chart of elements, one ahead of, and stronger than titanium). Golf Today's January article explains in more detail the club's advantages, but suffice it to say that they promise to provide more distance, better accuracy, and less irritating vibrational shock to a golfer. Hitting them, I agreed!

Best New Golf Ball. While there were no new blockbuster product announcements with regard to golf ball performance, haven't we all wished for a type of sensing system in which we could locate our lost golf balls? Well, that day has finally arrived with Radar Golf balls, and that's revolutionary! These USGA-conforming balls feature an implanted chip so small that it does not impact the performance of the ball in any way. A hand-held radar device sends out a radio frequency that searches for the ball. The closer you get to your ball, the louder the audio signal becomes until you find it. \$349.95 gets the radar device and a dozen balls. Additional balls are \$39.95 and available from www.radargolf.com, a California company.

Least Expensive - Best New Product. My vote for the best, least expensive product goes to "Tee-Up". This ingenious little gizmo eliminates the need to bend over to pick up your tee. Attached into the hole at the end of your rubber grip of your driving club, its sturdy fingers wedge your tee roughly in a similar fashion as those suction cup devices on the end of putters pick up golf balls at the bottom of the cup. You simply spear the tee and the fingers retain it for you to easily remove it. The other attractive features are that it does not impact the play of your club, and when sitting in the bottom of your golf bag, it keeps your club above any moisture and grime that might occasionally accumulate there. The product is expected to retail at \$5 or less. Consult: www.tee-up.com.

Most Expensive - Best New Product. The **Vibraflex 500** really caught my eye and juggled my body. You see this is an \$11,900 vibrating platform that quickly vibrates your entire body while you stand on it. Developed in the medical field, it strengthens and conditions your body without taxing your cardiovascular system. It is also a great way to loosen up for a round or rejuvenate tired muscles and aching bones. After walking more than 15 miles each day through the Show aisles, a one-minute session in mid-afternoon on the Vibraflex 500 really refreshed my legs and soothed my back! Don't fret, a "personal model" should be out later this year for a mere \$4-5 thousand. Check out: www.vibraflex.com.

Best Range or Distance Finder. With the USGA now allowing optical range finders, this is sure to be a hot item. I liked the "Optic-Logic Laser Rangefinder" the best. Previously a manufacturer of these products for others since 1987, they now offer their own conforming model that provides a distance-only reading and another non-USGA model that includes also includes "effective distance" for uphill and downhill shots.

Both are easy to use, and furthermore, are priced below most competitors in the \$300-400 range.

Most Important New Product. One of the quiet, but very real hazards of golf is our constant harmful exposure to the sun. Intense, sporadic exposure to the sun is closely linked to skin cancer later in life. Famed instructor David Leadbetter is heading a nationwide sun awareness campaign intended to educate golfers about the importance of protecting and preventing sun damage before practicing and playing. To that end, he is endorsing three products of natural advanced skincare system called "Revenir" designed to protect, prevent, and preserve. The cost is comparable to better skin care products found in fine stores. Whether for just rolling back the aging process or having the best skin protection available, I purchased this product myself and will be reporting on its effectiveness in the future.

Worst Product. In the worthless, tackiest tradition of the "Big Dick Driver" a few years ago, you can now play with "Schwetty Balls". What would possess some investor to support this is beyond me, but you can take a pass on this one. A day after the jokes wear off, you are left with some ordinary, run-of-the-mill golf balls. I suppose someone needed a tax loss on this project because the golf ball market hardly needs another me-too entry.

Best General Areas of New Products. Technology is bound to help us improve with the advances in teaching devices, swing and shot monitors, golf simulators, and practice/training devices. That means that some golf professionals and club fitters are better than ever prepared to help you improve yourself. It makes it more essential than ever to consult a qualified golf professional who can effectively deploy this new technology.

While technology continues to improve equipment, the advancements/benefits are decreasing in magnitude. The limits on clubs and balls imposed by the United States Golf Association may have us within a few years of reaching the technological benefit limits. When you think of it, for the period between the forties through the late seventies, little really changed in club and ball performance. Then we got caught in a wave of technology where all of a sudden it appeared that you could buy a better golf game and entrepreneurs were quick to accommodate our demand for game-improvements. I wonder if that was our golfing forefathers' intent?

With regard to golf clubs, now it appears that the equipment manufacturers are moving weight around to provide better launch angle for the ball. If you are good enough to put your clubhead on the ball, you will benefit. If you hit your shots fat or thin, or come from the wrong path, all these game improvement clubs will mean little for you. What that equates to is the widening the gap of the capabilities between the professional tour players and the good amateurs, and most of all, the vast majority of us golfers. For most of us that means there is no substitute for improving your mind, body, and technique in order to play your best golf.