

Golf products continue to develop

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SPECIAL WRITER

As winter's gray gives way to the sunshine of spring, it's time to equip yourself for action. The color of spring is green, as in grass, and the best use of grass yet invented is hitting golf balls off of it.

The golf industry continues to develop new products and equipment to help you enjoy the game and make your scorecard a little bit easier to total. The new high-tech toys, bells and whistles included are on display at your nearest golf shop.

Herb Vader, 51, of Troy has owned the Pro Golf Shop on Woodward Avenue just north of 11 Mile Rd. in Royal Oak for the last four years. The Pro Golf chain of golf shops, headquartered in Farmington Hills, now boasts 170 stores worldwide. With 4,600 square-feet of retail space, Vader has plenty to talk about, including the latest and hottest new equipment.

There is no feeling quite like gripping a new club in one's hands and Vader says there are some very attractive options.

"Taylor Made is offering a product called 'Super Steel' irons and woods. They're made from a stronger and lighter steel," says Vader.

"The outer wall of the club is thinner, giving the manufacturer an opportunity to make the inner portion of the club thicker, which is supposed to create a 'spring effect,'" he says.

The heads of the Super Steel woods are a deeper, richer copper color than previous Taylor Made woods, and the ultra light bubble shafts are black cherry in color.

Vader says that Ping has released new 1-3 irons, and Spalding has taken a more traditional approach to its new Hogan Apex blades. You cannot talk about modern golf equipment without making mention of Callaway, which is offering new Steelhead X-14 irons, which feature a redesigned weight distribution to help ball flight.

"Callaway's Steelhead Plus driver and fairway woods have a very different look than previous stainless steel Callaway woods," says Vader. "The new Steelhead Plus driver has a very attractive and striking dark blue head."

Vader also beams about the new dark green Tour Edge BetaTi driver, which he says is a very moderately priced, user-friendly option for entry level golfers. The new Tour Edge Liftoff Driving Iron is also new to Vader's shelves, and all of the clubs in the shop may be tested out in Pro Golf's hitting nets. A comput-

erized swing analyzer can also help sales associates fit golfers with the right type of equipment.

Whatever equipment you choose, you've got to get the ball in the hole, and using the right ball can help you do that.

"Callaway has formed a golf ball division and now offers two types of product," Vader explains. "They wanted to keep it simple so they've named the ball 'Rule 35,' and it comes simply in a soft of firm variety. There are 35 official rules in golf, you see, and according to Callaway, 'Rule 35' should be to have fun! If you want the softer ball, you buy the blue version. If you like a firmer ball, you buy the red version. It's that simple."

The Callaway balls, which will be difficult to get for some time due to demand and production, are sold in sleeves of five and paired in 10-packs instead of the traditional dozen.

Vader says that while Titleist is still Pro Golf's best-selling ball, Taylor Made's "Inner-Gel" balls are selling quite well.

"It's a good ball with great spin," he insists, explaining the Taylor Made is also now offering a golf glove with flexible material in the knuckle area that allows for comfort and stretch. Advances have also been made in ladies' gloves, which feature cut out finger holes to allow fingernails to pass through and cut out ring slots for women who wear jewelry while they play.

"Datrek is really an up and coming company," Vader says of the high-tech golf manufacturer. "They're producing some very high-quality, attractive bags including something called a 'cart bag,' which has all of the pockets in the back so that they are easily accessible when the bag sits on a cart."

Vader says that Datrek bags are his biggest sellers, and moderately priced.

FootJoy has developed the new "Dry Ice" golf shoes, which is designed to better disperse the heat coming from a player's foot and therefore reduces sweating. The latest in soft spike technology, according to Vader, is a quick-lock system that locks spikes in place with one simple turn instead of the previously cumbersome threading system.

Gadgets are always aplenty in golf shops, and some of them really do work.

"SKB, a maker of hard travel bags, is offering a collapsible locker that fits in the trunk of a car," says Vader. "It has neat little pockets for shoes, hats, and balls, so that everything doesn't scatter all over in the trunk."

Vader says that new spring-action ball retrievers are available, and that the head cover business is booming.

"Head covers shaped like dogs, cats, tigers, whatever you want," he grins. "There are hundreds and hundreds of individualized head covers available, including one's that bear the logos of colleges and sports teams."



Nice options: Pro Golf owner Herb Vader of Troy says there are some nice equipment options on the market.

Along with your fashionable swing should come a current wardrobe, and Vader says this year's "in" golf fashion look is very different from the understated taupe and beige colors that have been popular for the last few years.

"Bright colored, flowered, Hawaiian-style shirts are now the rage," he insists, saying that the Tabasco sauce company is making some of the most sight after styles. You be the judge.

Summer hours at Pro Golf are 10 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. on Saturdays, with Sunday hours from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. Call Vader at (248)-542-3416 for more information on what is hot!

On stock: Whether you're a weekend golfer or a more serious golfer, bags of all styles and models are available.



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CARNEGIE

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