Fairway fashion



Zero Restriction Rain suit.

There appears to be no let up in the development of more golf courses across the United States. In 1999 a record 509 courses were opened. Admittedly this figure included 13 reconstructed courses. It is now five consecutive years of phenomenal growth - since 1995 more than 400 new courses have been added every year to cope with the demand for more facilities. As the millennium was ushered in, there were another 936 courses in various stages of development, the second highest number under construction in any given year. Looking even further ahead, there are another 903 golf course projects 'in planning'.

According to the US National Golf Federation, the year 2000 arrived with America's 25 million golfers able to play on 16,747 courses. Is it any wonder that golf is such an attractive sport for so many manufacturers?

The lure of the giant US golf market remains as strong as ever. The number of companies targeting the game continues to grow and every fashion name of consequence seems to be producing golf collections which, style-wise, will be at home both for leisure and on the course. The cross-over between fashion, leisure and sport is typical now of the game. The styling and colours get stronger while function is built-in through fabric selection. The palette of properties seems to be near complete in terms of waterproofing, breathability, wickability, wind-proofing, easy-care, easy-clean, stain and dirt resistance. So now it becomes a matter of style and fashion. The giant PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, with more than 1,450 exhibitors under one roof, reflects this too: its first fashion show starts at 7.30 am, with six presentations a day. One in every four exhibitors is devoted to golf apparel.

Style starts young.

The children's market is now very much in focus. If there is a whole generation of baby boomers still being targeted, then their grandchildren are now considered fair game and the segment is simply called the pre-schoolers, aged anywhere between three years old to six. It's a good thing that the baby boomers can afford to indulge their grandchildren and birthday present buying could be very easy if the child shows any aptitude for the game. A glance through the Louisville, Kentucky, CPP (Club Pro Products) catalogue is quite revealing: there's My First Bag designed 'for infants to six years old'. The bag comes in at 23" high or just over 58cm. Then there are high quality, real golf clubs (which should retail at $59.95), My First golf glove ($9.95), My First head cover (the perfect way to complement a child's golf bag), My First pull cart ($39.95), My First travel cover - personalised embroidery available ($56.95) - and fortunately My First golf lesson video ($16.95).

Wee Golf and WeGolf.2 in Lewiston, NY, is another company focusing on the children's market, from as young as 2-3 years old. It does a stunning line in linen shorts, window pane polos and microfibre windshirts. Its argyll sweaters are a treat too. U.S. Kids Golf, based in Duluth, GA, has as its mission to help kids have fun learning the life-long game of golf. Its clubs start for children just three feet tall (approximately three years old) and it runs a Red Tee personal learning golf programme. There is a U.S Kids Golf World Championship too. One feels that Tiger Woods certainly has a lot to answer for.

Even Callaway Golf is offering its Little Bertha golf clubs which are not cut down versions of its adult range. These clubs are designed specifically for the unique size, strength and abilities of young golfers starting at about seven years old.





Far Left: CPP's children's collection including My First Bag.

No niche untapped



Left: On the catwalk at the PGA Golf Merchandise show.

A stroll round the PGA Golf Merchandise show reveals how every niche market is catered for, just as long as a link can be established to the game and its exponents. The legendary Sam Snead has spawned a host of companies promoting hats in the expectation that sufficient golfers will wish to emulate his look even if they do not have the sporting ability. There is an acute awareness of the history and heritage of the game which is always there to be turned to commercial advantage. The late Payne Stewart had established himself in the eyes of the golf world not only as an outstanding player but also as a very smart, sharp dresser on the fairway with his Plus Twos and Plus Fours and sweaters in a rainbow of colours. It took someone of his stature to breathe life into that particular fashion, first popularised to the masses by the South African golfer Bobby Locke over forty years ago, who one remembers as only ever playing in Plus Fours, muted sweater and white flat cap. Of course, older generations had played in such trousers (and even tweed jackets) but in terms of the modern post-World War II game, few have done more to maintain the style than Mr Locke and Mr Stewart. It is not that surprising, therefore, to find The T. Barry Knicker Co, based in Palm Desert, California, celebrating its 19th anniversary, having built the company on the resurrected Plus Four. According to this company, it was in 1923 that the Plus Four style of knicker or knickerbocker was introduced to the fashion world with the knicker being bloused to four inches below the regular knicker-bocker. (The Plus Two didn't have the fullness and only fell two inches over the knee.) Today the company offers the style for men, women and junior golfers (waist 22") in a range of classic tartans and traditional plaids. It also offers the trousers in plains and to enliven the look it presents a range of Intarsia Argyll socks (33 patterns for men, a subdued 12 patterns for women). To complete the look, it has its range of caps, hats and sweaters, all designed to go with Plus Fours and to team with the plaids and checks.



In contrast to classic styles, Frogg Toggs outerwear based in Alabama produces a waterproof suit which weighs just 11.5 ounces. It is not designed for fashion buffs but is made from a patented three layer fabric of 100% polypropylene, with the centre layer made on a microporous film. Made in the US, it is fairly described as an advance in utility outerwear.



Frogg Toggs on the fairway.



What the smart golfer used to wear before technology interfered.

Back to the Pacific Northwest

Cutter and Buck is yet another of those sports activewear companies which is based on America's West Coast - in Seattle, Washington State, this time which makes a change from choosing Portland in Oregon. Founded as recently as 1990, its focus is on the man or woman who believes that clothing is a reflection of personal style but its 'design philosophy combines the inspiration of the golf lifestyle with our Pacific Northwest roots'. Its identity has been forged on the golf course and it is an on-site merchandiser for the US Open, the PGA Championship, The Open, the Ryder Cup and the President's Cup. "Our customers may not play golf at all, but they appreciate the environment and tradition of golf," claims its director of retail development, a strong recognition of just how much the clothing worn on the course is seen as highly desirable leisure and casual wear.

The formula obviously works for this company as its net sales increased by over 50% to $66.1 million during the first half of fiscal 2000. For the past three years it has achieved gross margins exceeding 40% and in 1999 was ranked 54th by Fortune magazine in its top 100 listing of the

fastest growing companies in the United States. Even though it is only 10-years old, Cutter and Buck is already regarded as a major player with an established brand to defend.

It is a fact, however, that there always appears to be room for upstarts and what makes the fashion on the fairway story more interesting to the observer is the way smaller companies, and very new ones, can find their place in the sun. They seem more than willing to take on the more established, more global, sports activewear manufacturers. The fact that there are so many pro shops, specialist shops and more conventional retailers must help, along with the advent of e-tailing. Scott & Sterling could be considered one such newcomer. Based in Bannockburn, Illinois, it was started by husband and wife team Mark and Susan Scott, with Susan Scott doing the designing. Like so many entrepreneurs, they have looked for and apparently found a new niche to nurture: The Secret. In this instance, the secret is not in how to swing a golf club but lies in an all-in-one body slimming solution, a 'unique and full fashion women's microfibre golf short. "We developed a fit that drapes beautifully and softens a woman's contours without restricting movement," says Susan Scott (the company has a patent pending on the new design) while Mark Scott sees the company as "ideally positioned for rapid growth in the green grass [on course pro shop] and off course specialty store channel". There is little doubt that both hope that the women who wear their designs on course will be more than happy to transfer them into their casual wardrobe off course too. In fact, part of the collection's appeal is that they do not necessarily look like a golf uniform.

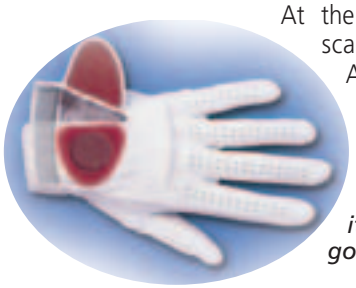




Mrs. Scott's ideas are based on the premise that the golf consumer wants something different from the fashion basics available in any department store. "To make the golf shop competitive, you have to give them something unique," she says and to that end she has introduced 100% silk pique polo shirts.

The womens market sees fierce competition and the top selling brands to this sector of the business are E.P. Pro, Nike, Tail, Bette & Court and Marcia Originals.

At the other end of the scale, companies like Ashworth still appear to dominate the market overall, seeing itself as the original global golf brand but acknowledging that its products are suitable for golf, work or play and golf as being one of the great unifying sports in the new century. It continues to combine fashion and function, including its Moisture Control System, a best-selling category for the company. This year there is a noticeable increase in the use of moisture wicking fabrics. In fact the Ashworth weather systems collection utilises just about every fabric technology available to the manufacturer and it has designed its concept round three separate garments performing as one system, providing moisture wicking, fast drying, breathable, stain repellent, antibacterial, UVA/UV blocking, insulating, durable water repellence, waterproof and windproof properties. The outer protective garment is either a windshirt, rainsuit or jacket, the insulator garment utilises micro fleece while the primary garment next to the skin may incorporate Intera, Comfortrel or Coolmax.



Florsheim puts biomagnetic technology into its cabretta leather golf glove.



Scott & Sterling Secret, shorts designed to flatter on the fairway.

Left: Page from the current Jamie Sadock collection, a company based in New York with designs on getting more fashion on to the fairways of the United States and, below, golf style from Marcia, a brand based in Chatsworth, CA.

Because of the nature of the game, many of the companies targeting golf are also equally at home chasing the tennis fraternity. For all that, there are still those companies which are totally committed to the game, companies such as Zero Restriction with its strong use of Gore-Tex and its Windstopper fabrics. So successful is the company that its research indicates that 41% of players on the US PGA Tour wear its jacket (none of the players is paid to wear the jacket which is covered by two mechanical patents), with its nearest rival trailing at 14.5%. On the Senior PGA Tour, 49% wear Zero while on the LPGA Tour a staggering 54% of the women professionals choose to wear Zero. It now offers its Perfect Warm Weather Rainwear Collection, which includes Gore-Tex lined rain shorts, a rain vest and a short sleeve pullover rain shirt designed to be worn in hot, humid rainy conditions. It is also introducing a collection of sun-protection garments for women. Zero only started up in 1992: it has managed to nearly double sales every year since Gary Tolton started the company with a bank loan and his farm as collateral. New in the collection this year is the Zero Restriction Cash-mere Vest, a pure 12 oz. cash-



Forrester's Polartec MicroFleece reversible wind vest.





Left: Cotton Traders target golf with chenilles and bouclé in wool, alpaca, acrylic and nylon mix and Cross Creek Apparel, based in Mount Airy, NC, presents Oxford pique stripe tops for men in 100% Peruvian Pima cotton. Cross Creek is a subsidiary of Russell Corporation. "We realise that more and more people are going directly from the office to those activities taking place in their personal lives," claims Cross Creek. And that includes golf.

mere trimmed with Cabretta leather, lined with soft butterskin microfibre. Meanwhile, Tolton has plans to expand his design technology into other sports such as fishing, sailing and skiing. His overall goal is to target 12 new markets within the next decade.

Forrester's is another player in the golf performance outerwear sector; it too majors on Gore-Tex as well as its own RainShedder fabric and Malden Mill's Polartec microfibre fleece. The company's product range is spattered with the words waterproof, windproof, breathable, lightweight, quiet, and soft. Unlike many of the companies seeking the golfer's dollars, its catalogue highlights its 'made in the USA' credentials, claiming to be the country's leading manufacturer of maximum performance Gore-Tex rainwear for the golf market. Once again, this is a company headquartered in Portland, Oregon. It too has seen the growth of the youth market as important and includes in its range a new collection of windshirts and wind vests for boys and girls, starting at age six. UK company Sunderland on the other hand has for the first time moved away from Gore-Tex as its primary waterproofing liner with a new version of its hydrophilics, a naturally water repellent material that the company guarantees for three years. Sunderland has also introduced its Dolphin SSP Weatherbeater, a full protection pullover.

Hats and caps are also making a strong play for attention and the companies aiming at this segment use embroidery as one of the ways of ensuring that golfers will need many more than just one item of headgear, a forte of Ahead, based in New Bedford, MA, while others such as Outback Shade, made in Australia and available from Outback Originals in Florida, has seen to fit to promote the hat style which harks back to the open spaces of Australia (without the cork fringe) as the headgear of choice for the discerning golfer. It talks of its excellent sun and UV protection, its all-weather crushable and washable materials - and the availability of customised embroidery. It has a wire framed brim which allows easy shaping for extra individuality.

While there seems to be a trend to more fashionable fabrics and colours, there are still companies which can produce a range of golf wear spicy and colourful enough to get any traditionalist blowing steam. Chiliwear LLC with its Tabasco Sports-wear range is one such company. Its designs are based on the logo and graphics of the original Tabasco Pepper Sauce and its clothing is hot.





Above: The Outback gets into golf and, right, Chiliwear Tabasco golf shirt.

Even head-covers for clubs continue to see new thinking being applied. Neoprene, so long associated with wet suits and not rain suits, is being used for fitted headcovers. After six years of research and development, Coverupz, a company based in Valley Village, Los Angeles, California, is making them in durable, lightweight neoprene in a range of sizes and colours, claiming that they are both user-friendly and durable. The covers come with an easy hook-'n-loop closure and because of the length, the covers will also protect the upper shaft of the club. By creating fitted covers, designer Lisa Bernath feels she has overcome the problem of covers which fall off or get ruined in bad weather.



Sun Mountain's Nimbus jacket, part of a rain suit, using Gore-Tex. The jacket features a polyester water repellent cuff, and a two layer microfibre cuff. Below, fitted head-covers by Coverupz .

A new rule

The rules of golf have been refined over the centuries and until this year there were just 34 rules, admittedly with many subsections, clauses and a few appendices. Callaway noticed an unused marketing ploy and has now introduced Rule 35, its own golf ball which the Carlsbad-based company says has been engineered to deliver Complete Performance 'to most any golfer'. It combines distance, spin, durability and consistency and has taken three years to develop at a cost of some $170 million. The Callaway Golf Ball Company evaluated more than 300 dimple patterns and 1,000 variations of golf ball constructions before coming up with its own.

With a fine sense of style, Callaway proposed an unofficial Rule 35, designed from the golfer's point of view, and one forgotten by the game's administrators on both sides of the Atlantic: "Enjoy the Game."



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