

What can a golfer wear that's six panel, vat dyed, low profile, structured, adjustable slide back-closure made from waterproofed microfibre and 2% spandex with soft buckram front and CoolMax liner, assembled by skilled hands during a rigorous 30-step construction process? A golf cap. Yes, there's more to golfing headwear than shades the eye, writes Mel Cheskin. At the world's largest golf exhibition, the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando in early 2002, there were enough headwear companies - 159 to be exact - offering Capbandoos, buckets, Gatsby's, straws, peaks and visors - to say nothing of hats and caps, to coif Arnie's army.

Once it was keep your head down – now it's keep your head covered



More golfers prefer to wear some form of headgear than do not. The percentage is approximately 80-20%. Of the 80% of hooded golfers, 75% wear baseball style caps, 10% wear visors and the rest of the market is shared by straw hats, floppy hats and other assorted styles. Obviously, caps are big. Let's first take a look at constructions, materials and the latest innovations in golf's #1 head covering.

Everything to do with styling

The typical golf cap is not a complicated garment. Cut from a pattern and sewn, a cap consists of fabric, buckram, button, lining, a visor or bill, a strap closure (various), and thread to hold it all together. A structured cap, one with more shape, form and features has up to a 30-step construction manufacturing process. An unstructured or 'fitted' cap requires less shaping and has a mid or low profile. A feature cap has five or six reinforced seamed panels that form the crown and a button that tops the convergence of panels and rivets the structure together. The seams are reinforced with tape and the bottom or sweatband gives the cap its basic fit to hold it on the brow but off the crown of the head for better ventilation. Buckram is simply the stiffener behind the front panels that gives a structured cap a higher profile. Bills, peaks or visors can be preformed into that "cool" contoured shape that has everything to do with styling so as to fit down the nape of the neck when reversed.

Caps are made from a variety of materials, from traditional cotton canvas to exotic fabrics

Above: Six panel pro-style cap by Yupoong

such as cashmere and camel hair or the latest moisture control synthetics such as Tactel microfibre. Almost every blend and weave of cotton is available in a cap including 100% cotton canvas, twill, brushed, enzyme washed, stonewashed, and stretched. The most popular cotton blends are 98% cotton/2% spandex, 95% cotton/ 5% spandex and 60% cotton/40% polyester. Synthetic/natural blends include 83% acrylic/15% 12.5oz. wool/2% spandex, 30% melton or flannel wool/70% acrylic and 63% polyester/34% cotton/2% spandex. Exclusive synthetic blends include 75% rayon/25% polyester, 65% polyester/35% viscose and 100% nylon Supplex, 100% polyester, 100% polynosic twill and 100% acrylic.

There are many special treatments incorporated into materials used to manufacture today's caps. Whether it's as simple as reinforced sewn eyelets for ventilation or as sophisticated as ceramic coating on nylon designed to reflect UV rays, every cap manufacturer has its own material selling feature. Imperial, based in Denver, Colorado, offers a cap made from high performance, water-resistant Tactel microfibre with integrated CoolMax sweatband to wick away moisture for all-day comfort. Imperial also offers a series of caps they call "The Performance SPF 30" with CoolMax (previously called the Up-Downer) made from water-repellent oil-cloth and 100% Supplex fabric with green undervisor and adjustable tab under the sweatband for added protection for the outdoorsman. Richardson from Eugene uses a wide variety of unique materials to promote its cap line including water repellent sanded microfibre, two layer mesh fabric and its KoolFit sweatband incorporating ComforTemp DCC that pulls heat and moisture away from the brow.

Drive Headwear LLC based in Cornelius, North Carolina has designed unique elasticised seams into its Par and Birdie caps for a flexible fit. The difference from intrinsic flexible materials is in the actual seams that open and close for an adjustable fit. Yupoong offers an extensive choice of caps made from an equally impressive range of materials including stretchable wool, polynosic fibre and pique mesh. It also offers an exclusive spandex woven through sweatband and crown for a perfectly comfortable fit. Adams of Florida utilises some of the more exotic materials used in caps such as camel hair, cashmere and distressed leather. Adams has also introduced a unique (patent pending) button feature it calls the Ballmark hat which incorporates a replaceable snap-out dime-sized ballmarker into the top button, so golfers will no longer have to fumble around in their pocket or golf bag to find a ballmark. Merkley, originating in Ontario, Canada, offers rip stop nylon and port hole mesh as well as printed taping. Merkley, amongst the true innovators in the headwear industry, offers the widest array of embellishments on caps including direct embroidery, rubber, leather and felt patches, sonic welds and metal embossing. When it



The Up-Downer from Imperial offers maximum sun protection

Flexfit brand by Yupoong. Spandex woven through the sweatband and the crown ensures a good fit

Merkley Ball Marker cap with magnetic ball marker on peak

Merkley's Control Fit Stabiliser stops the cap from sliding back

comes to custom made caps, no one offers a larger selection of styles and custom treatments than American Dry Goods out of Bourbon, Missouri. Be it screened appliques, felt patches, 3-D name drops, golf side designs, woven taping or sweatband, ADG caters to the huge golf market and beyond for a minimum 500 piece order requirement.

Sized caps are still available from many makers. Traditional hat sizes are a bit of mystery to the uninitiated. If you know whether you are a 7 1/8 or 7 5/8 hat size, my hat's off to you. Most manufacturers stick to the simpler S/M/L/XL method. Just for the record 6-7 1/8 is small, 7-7 3/8 is medium, 7 1/8-7 5/8 is large and 7 1/2-8+ is XL. Makers such as Merkley and Drive using stretchable, Flexfit materials are able to offer a smaller range to fit all sizes. Adjustable one-size-fits-all caps, first introduced by Imperial, have been around since the early 50s. Adjustable closure systems include Velcro (or the more generic hook and loop), self-fabric elasticised, strap and slide buckle, plastic hole and press tab, Nexus strap closure (bag buckle style) and drawstring closures.

Peaks, visors or bills, whichever nomenclature you prefer, have added several improved features recently. The latest innovation is the elongated 'Sandwich Bill' look that requires the addition of a slightly thicker stiffener to form the peak allowing an additional braided colour material to be added to the edge. This is an improvement over the previous visor edge binding to add subtle additional colour. Another major improvement to peak performance is the addition of several rows of self or contrasting colour stitching on the visor to give a 'welted' effect. Following the earlier 'Tri-Split" peak we have evolved into premoulded 'power' bills that are permanently precurved to save you the habit of constantly squashing the peak inward in an attempt to custom conform the bill to the natural shape of the brow, which adds better shading for the eyes. It fits down the back of the neck better, too, which is the way caps are worn by many people today.

Decline of the original

Lack of shading for the eyes is probably the reason for the decline of the original golf style cap known affectionately as the Gatsby, Cheesecutter or Andy Cap. These are caps with peaks hidden under an elongated flattened crown. The Gatsby style is primarily made from cotton/synthetic blends or soft polyester knits. The styling requires a snap closure on the top of the peak to secure it to the elongated front of the crown and an adjustable back closure. Gatsbys, if waterproofed, offer excellent protection in wet golfing conditions. Cold weather golfers have a hat style of their own. Several companies including Yupoong, Imperial and Merkley produce a knitted acrylic or Polar Fleece 4-dart seam hat as part of a 'Frostbite' collection. Similar to a traditional ski hat that may be pulled down over the ears, it is



Men's 3 piece sport visor from American Dry Goods

Adams Extreme Outdoor Performance cap deflects UV rays with ceramic coated nylon

Adams Extreme Performance hat incorporates mesh side panels for extra breathability

Biltmore Raffia Newports are now offered with UV and anti-mildew treatments

probably the best method of keeping the head 'toasty' during a round on a cold, lonely links morning.

Visors with slide-on or adjustable headbands are still very popular with the modern golfer, particularly with the ladies. Visors, which are basically peaks without crowns, are made from the same materials as caps with the exception of the all-plastic visor with padded sweatband added for comfort. The bucket or floppy hat, as it is sometimes called, comes in S/M/L/XL. Buckets are also made in a variety of materials, including 100% cotton, poly/cotton, 100% nylon, cotton terry and polyester/rayon or viscose. The Bucket, with its floppy brim, offers excellent head protection from the elements especially if waterproofed or treated with UV or Imperial's MCS (Moisture Control System) which has a 30 SPF (Sun Protection Factor) blocker. The other main category of golfing headwear is the woven raffia or twisted seagrass straws. (Just think of golfing legend Sam Snead.) Made in classical Panama and Western styles, straws, such as the wide variety of styles offered by Biltmore, can also be updated with UV protective and anti mildew treatments.

To top it off there are still more features that can be added to the not-so-simple cap such as a specific pony tail opening at the back for longer hair and the Blubandoo. Blubandoo is the brand name for non-toxic polymer crystals that evolve into a gel when immersed in water. Blubandoos can be inserted into specially made caps and hats and stay hydrated and cool the wearer, due to evaporation, for several days before they dry and slowly return to their original state. No refrigeration is necessary. Other extreme hats include Adams Extreme Outdoor Performance range using Italon UV treated lightweight nylon neck cape with patented zipper pocket, Cool Crown comfort mesh lining and plastic clip and cord system to attach to the collar. This hat also has a functional cord barrel lock closure. Yes, when it comes to specialisation or colour treatments such as camouflage for hunting, contrasting white piping on black for referees, or fluorescent logos, multi-colours with contrasting bindings and buttons, today's caps have it all and they plan to stay ahead of the game.

