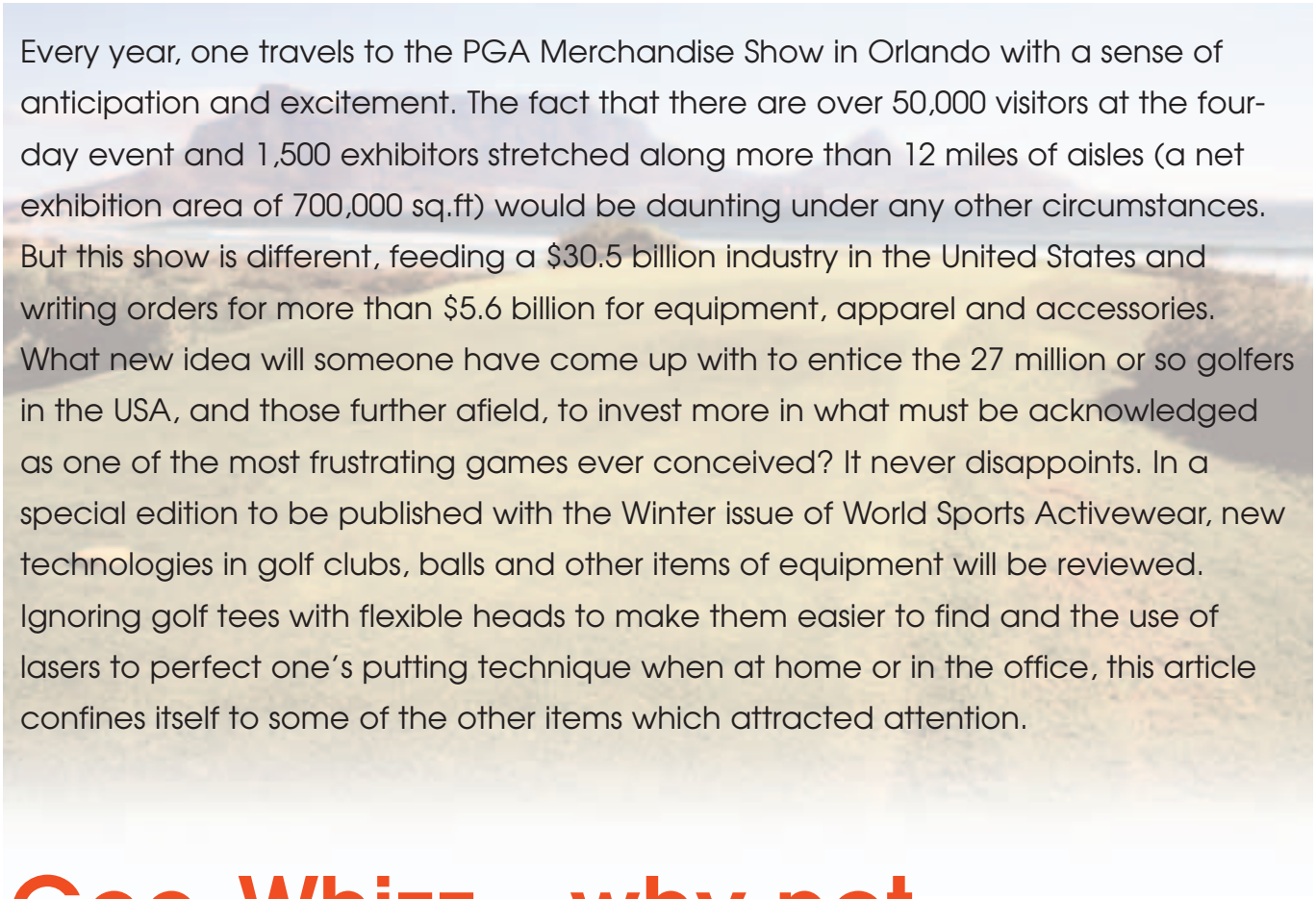


Golf is played in stunning locations worldwide; the view from the third tee Milnerton Golf Club, Cape Town.

Every year, one travels to the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando with a sense of anticipation and excitement. The fact that there are over 50,000 visitors at the four-day event and 1,500 exhibitors stretched along more than 12 miles of aisles (a net exhibition area of 700,000 sq.ft) would be daunting under any other circumstances. But this show is different, feeding a $30.5 billion industry in the United States and writing orders for more than $5.6 billion for equipment, apparel and accessories. What new idea will someone have come up with to entice the 27 million or so golfers in the USA, and those further afield, to invest more in what must be acknowledged as one of the most frustrating games ever conceived? It never disappoints. In a special edition to be published with the Winter issue of World Sports Activewear, new technologies in golf clubs, balls and other items of equipment will be reviewed. Ignoring golf tees with flexible heads to make them easier to find and the use of lasers to perfect one's putting technique when at home or in the office, this article confines itself to some of the other items which attracted attention.

Gee-Whizz - why not whack a duck!



In the drive for innovation, the golf industry is increasingly turning to high tech solutions. For the ordinary club golfer, for years the usual question has been "Where did it go?", followed by muttered explanations such as "I couldn't see the ball, the sun was in my eyes" when, if truth were told, the long-handicap player knew darn well that the ball had whizzed off line into the bushes or into the lake.

Now, the industry appears to be devoting more research into getting the hacker to ask, with a degree of one-upmanship probably, "Now, where are we?" while consulting his personal global satellite positioning system, and "How far is it to the pin?"

Nevertheless, all this is unlikely to stop his ball whizzing off into the rough.

But it looks good, something that the clothing industry serving the golf world knows a lot about and continues to cater for. Much of its energy is directed at keeping golfers warm and dry. Considering the feel good factor of playing golf in pleasant sunshine, it is quite astonishing just how many rounds of golf appear to be played in rain - as if the game wasn't difficult enough. Sun Mountain, based in Missoula, Montana, has developed a new microfibre rain jacket which is claimed to provide the most protective two-layer system of water-repellency in the golf business. Called the Torrent it has a soft, quiet brushed microfibre shell treated with DuPont Teflon DWR. The second layer is its Gore-Tex suspended lining. By suspending the lining, the company has constructed a waterproof garment while ensuring complete freedom of movement for the player. But the real interest could lie in the jacket's cuff which utilises Sun Mountain's new pulse-point comfort technology. Using US Army research, it is suggested that superior athletic performance is possible if key pulse-points (such as in the wrist) are kept warm and dry. The jacket's polyester cuff is a two-layer microfibre keeping wrists and forearms dry in all conditions.



Sun Mountain's Torrent



Water repellent, windproof knit from Serious Golf

Serious Golf Inc., of Sparta, NJ, is offering the SportSweater, a lined waterproof sweater range for both men and women, designed for the company in Ireland. The special water-repellent yarn used, 50% wool-50% acrylic, together with the lining creates a showerproof, windproof, breathable garment which may be seen by many golfers as an easier alternative to waterproof jackets. Zero Restriction golf outerwear still retains its No.1 status in the USA, has produced its Microlite short sleeve pullover which has expansion back pleats to ensure a non-restricted golf swing, a high storm collar and zippered front hand pockets. It also includes hidden tee loops on the chest. The pullover has a Gore-Tex liner, while the outer shell is made of a quiet, butterskin microfibre. Rivers West, a company based in Seattle, has introduced its Hydro2PowerLock system which is said to represent a brand new, lightweight waterproof fabric, utilising Schoeller's Dryskin, a breathable, abrasion resistant, stretch nylon/Lycra. Shown at the PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando earlier this year, the fabric is a sandwich, the centre of which is a thin layer of impermeable micro-film fused between an outer shell and inner lining. The film is said to build a thermal wall between the body and the elements, keeping the golfer warm and insulated regardless of the outside conditions. There are two versions, H2P Fleece and H2P Supplex. In the first the film lies between two fleece layers, in the second, one layer is Supplex and the other fleece.

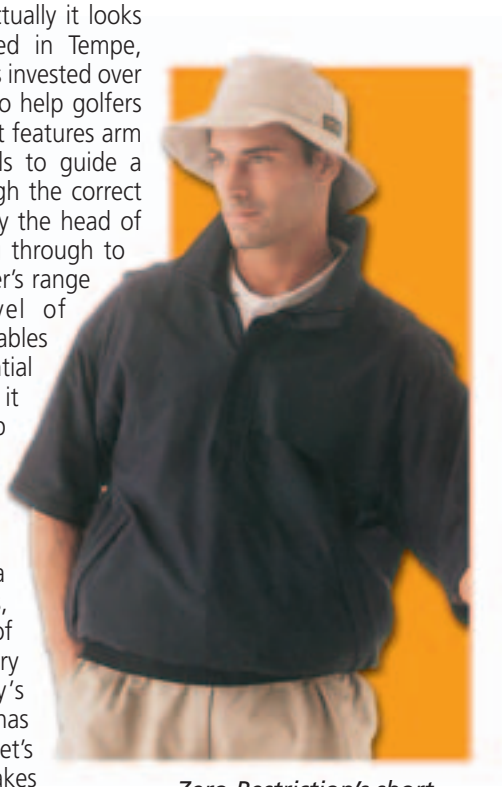
The Swing Jacket

But there is another discernible trend: the development of equipment and clothing designed to help golfers improve their swing, stance and scoring. But, with every development, it means that the golfer will need to devote more time to practising his or her passion. With each round of golf already dragging into many hours of play, is it reasonable to expect that extra practice time will be found or will many of the 'must have' developments be relegated to the attic of tried theories.



The Swing Jacket: is it the answer to better golf?

The swing's the thing still remains true and now there is the Swing Jacket. Actually it looks more like a restrictive vest. Based in Tempe, Arizona, the company behind it has invested over two years and $1 million in R&D to help golfers play that little bit better. This jacket features arm cuffs and precisely positioned rails to guide a golfer's arms and shoulders through the correct path or 'plane' - from taking away the head of the club at the start of the swing through to follow-through. By limiting the user's range of motion, it enforces a level of consistency in each swing that enables the golfer to rapidly build essential 'muscle memory'. As a result, it should programme strong set up and posture when addressing the ball, one-piece take-away, correct arm motion, full shoulder turn, proper hip rotation, ideal weight transfer and swing tempo. That's a lot of muscle memory but if it helps, why not. According to Dr. Nigg of the Human Performance Laboratory at the University of Calgary's department of Kinesiology, who has been involved in validating the jacket's benefits, "it's not practice that makes perfect, but perfect practice that makes perfect. The more consistently an athlete repeats a specific move, the stronger the auto-nervous response, maximising the athlete's ability to



Zero Restriction's short sleeve sweater, waterproof just in case summer sun turns to shower

Hydropedes is a glycerin filled insole with DuPont's Cambrelle, designed to cushion, massage and relieve pain in feet, legs and lower back. The worse one's golf is, the more likely is the player to become aware of discomfort, usually starting from the feet. Fatigue reduction is said to be generated by a combination of cushioning, massaging and shock reduction. Hydropedes are said to offer constant massage to the bottom of the feet. With each step, the glycerin gel is moved forward, and as the ball of the foot descends, the gel moves back to the heel. The link is made to the nerve endings located at the bottom of the feet which in turn, according to the Reflexology chart, lead to various parts of the body. The gel used is of a dense consistency, which makes it slower in movement than many other liquids. The slower movement is claimed to create a deeper massage action and is 'therefore very therapeutic'. The same gel is meant to reduce shock as it 'floats the foot' and the impact is absorbed by the insole and not the ankles, knees or lower back. Anything which reduces the pain of watching a ball whizz off into the rough must be worth considering.

...across the pond

The European equivalent of the PGA's Orlando presentation is small - held in Munich, Germany, in September, the Golf Europe show attracts less than 20% of the exhibitor numbers seen in US. Last September, this business-to-business meeting hosted 266 exhibitors and some 3,500 professional buyers and golf shop merchandisers from 47 countries.

Size in this instance is relative but the key factor is that the game is spreading strongly across more and more countries. One of the central themes noticed at Golf Europe was the importance of ladies golf. The potential for sales to women in both sports shops and pro shops in golf clubs is enormous. British golf professional, Beverly Lewis, during her lecture on how to entice women to play golf and how to teach them, expressed a self-evident truism that "it should be realised that if the shop does not stock golf gloves or other equipment for women, they cannot sell them," adding that women love to shop and one of their first ports of call on a golfing day out is the golf shop. Her tips on how to help women to enjoy golf caused some merriment among listeners, as did her comment that many, possibly most, British men golfers would be horrified at the thought of the 50/50 ratio men to women in golf clubs in Germany. There is no doubt that golf still carries a full bag of historical and, dare it be said, outdated attitudes.

But change is on the way and manufacturers see the Britain and the rest of Europe as major markets. The number of players may be minuscule by comparison with the USA but the attitude to players' spending power is much the same.

According to the German PGA, the standard of teaching in Germany is on a par with that of Britain and USA, and it is reported that there are some 25 British trainee professionals enrolled in the German system. Of the 1,300 club professionals in the German PGA, around 450 are non-Germans - again, mainly British.

In fashion terms, ladies golf wear in 2001 is both functional and attractive styles. Pastel colours are more important than the classics here, although there appears to be a tendency for stronger colours from Northern European manufacturers. Rukka of Finland, for example, favours strong red, navy and bright yellow as well as nutria and eggplant while Italian manufacturer Belfe promotes shiny ceramic polyester weatherproof fabrics in mint, silver, sky blue and pale pink and lilac. Not surprisingly Rukka's collection is designed with wet and windy European autumns and winters in mind, to ensure the right fabric selection matched with the right construction.

Fabrics for women's wear are generally soft and shiny, with those that rustle or squeak being definitely out. Functional wear is now possible in a wide range of mercerised cotton mixtures, viscose and fine wool and linen, alongside microfibres and elastic mixtures. Trousers in chino and gabardine and cotton/microfibre mixtures and '60s retro and Burberry style checks are making a comeback here. Zipper and hook-'n-loop style fastenings for simple use areas are important in wet-weather wear as are the breathing qualities of the fabric. Here again quiet fabrics are favoured and the extremely lightweight and high-tech materials, innovative laminates and breathable coatings all have their followers.

Adidas is promoting its Clima concept for golfwear with ClimaShell Wind and ClimaShell Rain fabrics, for windshirts and rain suits. Classic colours and designs are the favourites here, but with a more definite sporty touch.

After eight years, Golf Europe is firmly established as the golf fair in Europe and, as it has already taken up the full capacity of the MOC halls in Munich, it has been decided to transfer the fair to the larger premises of the Messe Munich as from 2002. However, Golf Europe 2001 stays in MOC, and takes place October 7-9.

There is no doubt that what happens in the USA strongly influences the spending attitudes of European golfers. The companies serving the game naturally view the market as a global challenge but make allowances for national preferences and - of course - the weather.



Styled by Rukka



Styled by Adidas



perform in pressure situations." The jacket is said to be as comfortable as it is effective. There are versions for men, women and children as well as a jacket for left-handed golfers.

Seamless

While the trends for material design in gloves is discussed elsewhere in this issue, glove designers are themselves trying to provide better golfing solutions. International Gluv, a sports glove development company based in Chattanooga, TN, has recently introduced a new design based on some ten year's of R&D. The problems seemingly inherent in conventional gloves include the twisting of the glove's thumb and index finger during motion, excessive wear in the thumb and lower palm area, moisture build-up in the palm during play, 'bunching' of leather at the base of the fingers when the hand closes to grip the club - and even a lack of a uniform sizing system. To address these problems, Gluv developed a seamless palm design and the absence of seams in the thumb and index finger which eliminates the twisting effect common in many gloves. Its patented design draws moisture away from the palm towards the back of the hand and the palm is claimed to stay dry and soft throughout play. The only seam close to the palm is at the base of the middle two fingers. This small seam is designed to recede into the fold of the hand when closed, while the single-piece palm construction and gripping surface of the fingers eliminates the build-up or bunching effect of excessive leather at the base of the fingers. Carl Espinosa, the company's president, claims that the leather used provides premium feel and durability.

Fit has not been ignored either and, with the aid of 7,500 avid golfers using its product, the company has developed a sizing system which appears to cope with the curvature of the hand as well as finger length within its size range. But will it stop the ball whizzing off the expected line of flight?

"I hate this game," J.B. Hawkins shouted as his ball dribbled slowly and pitifully off the front of the tee. He kicked at his tee and swung his golf club at the air in disgust. Actually he loved the game. He just couldn't play it very well.*

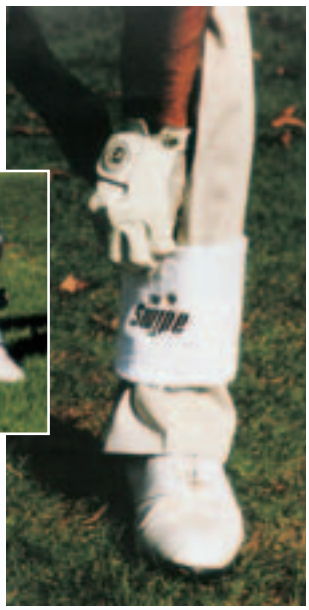
However, having found the ball, and given the weather patterns of the last six months or so, it is fair bet that there will be mud or grass on the ball, no matter what the brand is. The usual way of cleaning the ball or the club face has been to wipe it on a towel or on your glove or (if no one is looking) on your trouser leg. GolfOutingNetwork.com has produced an extraordinary answer to this mundane problem, called The Swipe. Made in white or beige coloured 100% cotton terry, this novelty (which can be custom embroidered or printed) is worn round the leg of the trouser, or in its smaller version, over a sock or bare leg. Now the keen enthusiast simply drags the face of the club across The Swipe to get rid of unwanted dirt or grass before hitting the ball and, of course, it can be used to clean the ball while lining up the putt. And all in the name of shaving strokes off your game.

Gee whizz

On the other hand, you could take all your frustrations out on the WhackDuck, promoted for on-bag, on-course stress relief. The brain child of The Product Factory based in both Sault Ste Marie in Michigan and Sault Ste Marie in Ontario, it's designed to put your game into perspective and, when you strike it (lightly) with your club or hand, it will deliver any one of eighteen (entertaining) messages, delivered with all the wit and wisdom of a Scottish caddy. These include "neygonnalikethat" - probably true by the time you get to the 18th - and "You still the man" - yet to be heard spoken by a Scottish caddy. At least there is no foul language coming from this fowl - one of its truer statements is "You're not good enough to get angry." Now that's the truth.

David Buirski
Research: Harry Lifsec

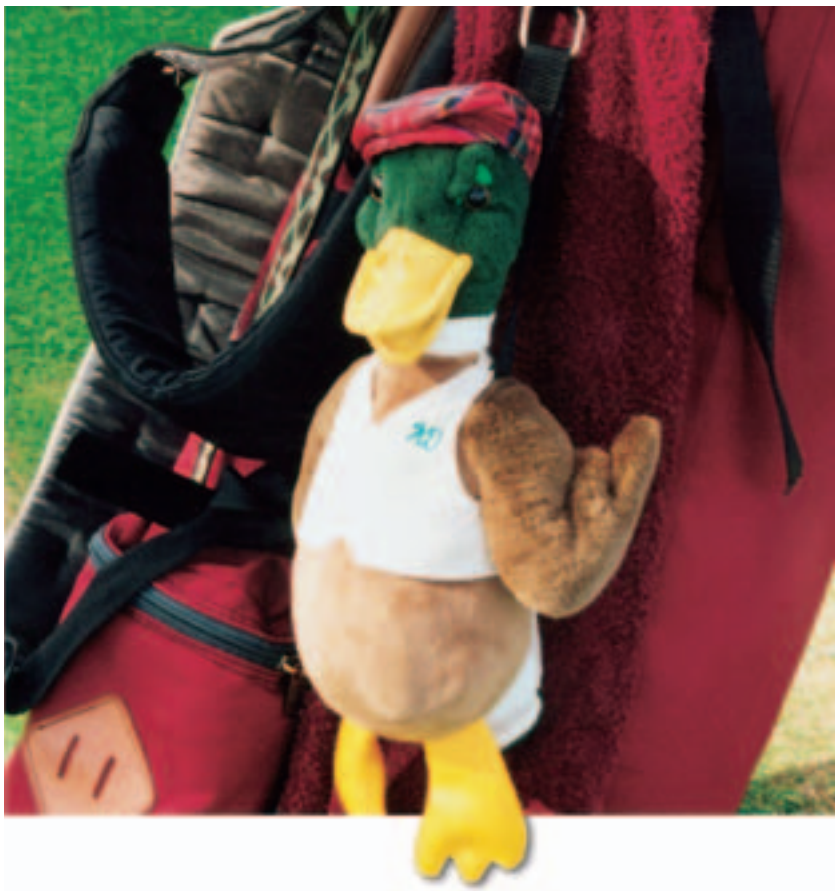
*From the golf instructional book 'You're NOT lifting your head' by Charlie King, published by UnCommon Golf, Casselberry, FL 32707, USA



It may look odd but The Swipe could set a new fairway fashion trend



Getting rid of the seams surprisingly improves grip - the Gluv



The WhackDuck, an end to frustrations and a choice of eighteen comments