

THE EQUIPMENT ISSUE

Golf Digest

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February 2006

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CLUBS

The Hot List

2006

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The Equipment Issue

The Hot List 2006

By **MIKE STACHURA**
SENIOR EDITOR, EQUIPMENT

ADDITIONAL CATEGORY PROFILES BY
E. MICHAEL JOHNSON • PETER FINCH • STINA STERNBERG • JOHN STREGE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JIM HERITY**

The Place to Start

Four hundred seventy-five.> It's not Tiger's average driving distance (316.1, precisely). It's not the length of the par 3 the U.S. Golf Association is extending for the 2007 U.S. Open (285, give or take). It's not even the number of drives of 375 or longer on the PGA Tour in 2005 (227, actually). No, that's how many models of new clubs and balls we at Golf Digest looked at in the past 12 months. In truth, when you factor in all the different irons, different driver lofts and shaft flexes, that number adds up to 1,299, or 1,339 if you count the 40 golf-ball models we also hit. It's all part of the preparation for Golf Digest's 2006 Hot List, our annual guide to the best stuff to put in your bag.

As bleary-eyed as all those mailbox-size drivers and kitchen-utensil-like putters might have made our equipment team, we never lost focus on the mission of the Hot List. The Hot List exists as a service for you, the overwhelmed shopper, to get the exploding equipment universe down to a manageable number. It's our way of cutting through the merely good stuff to get to the truly exceptional. It's a full-year occupation for our five editors responsible for equipment coverage (see page 124). What we're ultimately after is a way of answering the most common question we get: "What should I buy?"

On the following pages you'll find a start to that answer. There are 131 products listed here, the best of the best. If it's on any list in these pages, it's great. The products highlighted here are exceptional. They go beyond routine innovations. They show dramatic and unique ways to make this hard game easier through technology. Now, about those Editors' Choices. In every case, narrowing to one was difficult. And it was our choice, not necessarily yours. So above all use the charts to apply your own priorities. For example, in drivers there were four that were very close. The Editors' Choice has more loft options and

The Hot List is the result of a year's worth of research, deliberation and old-fashioned range time, culminating in the annual Hot List summit. This year it was at the Marco Beach Ocean Resort and The Golf Club at Fiddler's Creek in Florida. The summit included meetings and discussions with advisory panels comprising leading teachers, top retailers, expert scientists and avid players.



THE JUDGES



MIKE STACHURA ■ Senior Editor/Equipment, Golf Digest . . . member of staff since 1992 . . . 13-handicap.



E. MICHAEL JOHNSON ■ Equipment Editor, Golf World . . . golf writer for 20 years . . . 6-handicap.



STINA STERNBERG ■ Senior Editor, Golf For Women . . . past member of Swedish PGA . . . former golf retailer.



PETER FINCH ■ Senior Editor, Golf Digest . . . Editorial Director, Golf Shop magazine . . . 12-handicap.



JOHN STREGE ■ Senior Writer, Golf Digest . . . 20 years covering golf, based in California . . . 9-handicap.



FRANK THOMAS ■ Chief Technical Advisor, Golf Digest, non-voting member . . . former USGA Technical Director.

a low price—a real benefit to the amateur market. Of course, if those factors aren't vital to you, then you might make a different choice. Remember, the entire list is hot. Use the charts to find out what's hottest, based on the criteria that matter most to you. And however you come out after reading everything here, try several.

Some other key changes this year:

■ **New sub-categories in drivers**, the most technologically sophisticated component in the game. We know certain player types and swing types might require individual attention, and we know that club designers have earmarked some of their ideas to solve specific problems. The result is a page of player-specific designs spotlighted for their unique solutions.

■ **A third sub-category in irons.** It will be easier for you to place yourself in the proper neighborhood, whether it be Player's, Game-Improvement or the new category of Super Game-Improvement irons.

■ **A change in the percentage breakdowns** in our Hot List criteria. We now place slightly less emphasis on the marketplace and more emphasis on technology and innovation. Although strength in sales and tour use won't be ignored, strength in fresh thinking has been elevated. The latter

should spur the former, and it's our job to identify that kind of game-changing innovation as soon as possible. Therefore, Buzz Factor (formerly called Market Forces) has been reduced to 15 percent of the vote, and Technology/Innovation gets 30 percent.

■ **No separate designations** for "highly recommended" and "recommended." The message should be clear: Each product on these pages receives our highest endorsement.

■ **A new advisory panel** of average players in the 10- to 18-handicap range. Super Game-Improvement irons are best assessed by those who need more improvement, not less. Our new group complied on that front, and its input matched the quality contributions of our elite players, teachers, retailers and scientists. As in the past, each of these advisory panels provided thoughts, commentary and insight, but not a single vote. The judges/editors cast the only ballots.

Here, then, is the culmination of a year's effort, geared to taking that indecipherable equipment market and making it clear. We know you don't know which way to turn. Our advice is simple: Start here, and stay here. What follows are 131 guarantees that you'll get better this year. Not the manufacturers' guarantees. Ours.

THE PROCESS

A year-long search gets intense at the annual Hot List Summit

Thinking about the Hot List is a year-long process, but it heats up every fall. Preparations rev up in July with requests to manufacturers about their product lines. The next three months of intense study are highlighted by a 10-day Hot List summit. This year's event was in southwest Florida, at The Golf Club at Fiddler's Creek and the Marco Beach Ocean Resort.

Our team met with three separate advisory panels: leading retailers provided product-specific golf-market analysis; top academic minds in the fields of materials science and engineering discussed the state of golf technology and reviewed more than 1,500 pages of data supplied by manufacturers; and a group of 12 players and teachers, who spent three days on the range hitting 23,000 balls combined. The players were interviewed individually by

editors and provided comments immediately after they hit each product.

Upon returning, the editors met for seven additional days, debating criterion by criterion each individual club's score. More than 2,000 scores were tabulated to arrive at our selection of 131 Hot List honorees and the 11 Editors' Choice selections.

THE HOT LIST CRITERIA

The Hot List voting is based on a 100-point scale with the following percentages:

■ **Buzz Factor (15 percent):** A product must be in demand. We look at market share, tour use and customer satisfaction, as well as retailer reaction for new products.

■ **Performance/Playability (25 percent):** Based on interviews with our panelists and other sources, does the product work in a unique and significant way?

Golf Digest
HOT LIST

■ We reviewed 475 products, but only 131 received this seal.

Golf Digest
Editors' Choice
2006

■ The product with the highest point total in its category earns Editors' Choice.

■ **Technology/Innovation (30 percent):** Based on interviews with the company and study of its technical documents, as well as discussion with our academic panel, we look at these questions: Is the design innovation new or different? Is it meaningful? How well does the company explain its technology?

THE HOT LIST PANEL

We learn by asking, especially asking the right people. Our panelists are inquisitive (scientists), inspired (retailers and teachers), and enthusiastic (players). These 24 minds made our judges that much smarter.

THE TEACHERS

- MIKE DAVIS** ■ Dir. of instruction, Walters Golf. Ranked No. 3 Best Teacher in Nev.
- DON HURTER** ■ Golf professional, Castle Pines. Ranked No. 2 Best Teacher in Colo.
- TODD KERSTING** ■ Dir. of golf, Puerto del Sol G. Cse. Ranked Best Teacher in N.M.
- MICHAEL MARION** ■ Dir. of golf, Promontory G.C. Ranked Best Teacher in Utah.

THE PLAYERS

- JOHN-PAUL BOUFFARD** ■ 12-handicap. Neuropathologist, Baylor Univ., Dallas.
- RYAN BURKE** ■ Plus-1 handicap. Golf enthusiast for 30 years, from Westport, Conn.
- LEEANN FAIRLIE** ■ Plus-2 handicap. Three-time Okla. Women's Mid-Am Champion.
- JOHN GALLY** ■ 18-handicap, golfer for five years. Deutsche Bank associate, New York.
- BOB GREIG** ■ Plus-1 handicap. Nine-time club champion at Riviera (Calif.) C.C.
- JIM JONES** ■ 14-handicap. Retired airline pilot from Park City, Utah.
- DONNIE LUPER** ■ 1-handicap, has played for 37 years. DDS, Endodontist, New Bern, N.C.
- IAN SHEA** ■ 17-handicap. Dir. of planning and operations, Replay TV, San Francisco.

THE SCIENTISTS

- KIM BLAIR** ■ Ph.D. Founding director, Center for Sports Innovation, MIT.
- MARTIN BROUILLETTE** ■ Ph.D. Prof. of Mechanical Engineering, Univ. of Sherbrooke.
- JACK HU** ■ Ph.D. Professor of mechanical engineering, University of Michigan.
- DAVID LEE** ■ Assoc. Professor of Physics, Biola Univ. Former Liquidmetal R&D director.
- TOM MASE** ■ Ph.D. Visiting Assoc. Prof., Michigan State Univ. Owns five golf patents.
- GEORGE SPRINGER** ■ Ph.D. Paul Pigott Professor of Engineering, Stanford Univ.

THE RETAILERS

- LEIGH BADER** ■ Founder, 3balls.com, Joe & Leigh's at Pine Oaks, South Easton, Mass. 100 Best Shop.
- CASEY BAKER** ■ Owner/VP Operations, Miles of Golf, Ypsilanti, Mich. 100 Best Shop.
- CHRIS BARTLETT** ■ First assistant, Butler National G.C., Oak Brook, Ill. 100 Best Shop.
- BILL DIXON** ■ Retail manager, Haggin Oaks G.C., Sacramento, Calif. 100 Best Shop.
- DALE ROBBINS** ■ Owner, Dale's Winning Edge, Knoxville, Tenn. 100 Best Shop.
- SUSAN ROLL** ■ Owner, Carlsbad (Calif.) Golf Center. GFW Top 25 Pro Shop in USA.

Personal Preference (20 percent): In the individual judge's opinion, does the look, sound and overall presentation resonate with our individual interpretations of what this specific product should be? In short, does it move us?

Value (10 percent): What does the product deliver in relation to its price?

CHARTS AND MEASUREMENTS

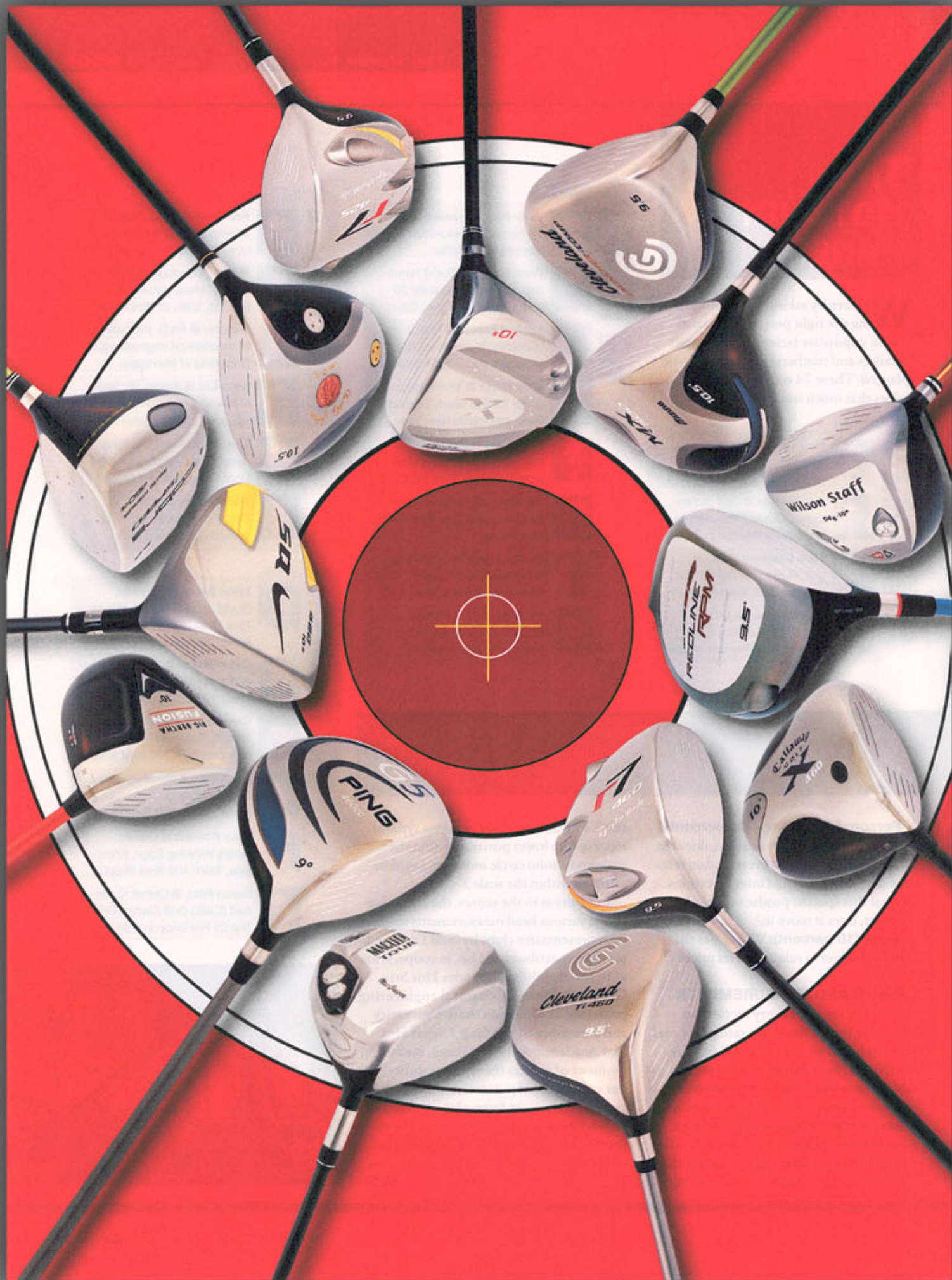
At the conclusion of every section is a chart that breaks down the ratings for each product based on our five Hot List criteria. (Note: The colored circles represent a range of scores within each criterion. For example, a score of 13.5 to 15 receives an "Outstanding" designation in the Buzz Factor criteria. That score is designated by a red circle in the chart. A plus sign in the center indicates a higher position within

the "Outstanding" scale, a minus symbol represents a lower position within the scale and a solid circle indicates a middle position within the scale.)

In addition to the scores, the chart also shows various head measurements made on representative clubs by Golf Digest editors and contributors. Also, in cooperation with retail clubfitting leader Hot Stix Golf, Tom Mase, mechanical engineering professor at Michigan State University and a member of the Golf Digest Hot List Academic Advisory Panel, measured moment of inertia (heel-toe stability) on our collection of putters. Although there can be differences from club to club and different ways to measure clubs, these listings are meant to illustrate the relative differences in shape and properties among products.

M.S.





The Driver

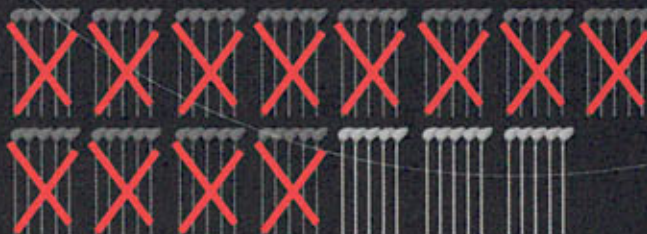
Power. >Intimidation. Exhilaration. Strip away all the titanium, graphite and robotic plasma-welded face inserts. These three ingredients must remain at the core of every great driving experience. You can build it any number of ways (at least 15, by our estimation), but the result will be a nice, big cup of "Eat my dust" to your playing partners. Today's best drivers are designed by engineers who struggle with more restraints on their craft than at any time in history. Yet despite the clamps of the game's rules-making bodies and the laws of physics, there are new drivers that will help you hit it farther. The first step is getting fit on a launch monitor. The next step will be cutting the corner of the dogleg on 13.

The Hot List

- Adams Redline RPM 460D
- Bobby Jones Players Series
- Callaway Big Bertha Fusion FT-3
- Callaway X460
- Cleveland Launcher Comp
- Cleveland Launcher Ti 460
- Cobra Speed
- MacGregor MacTec NVG2
- Mizuno MX-500
- Nike SasQuatch
- Ping G5
- TaylorMade r7 quad 425
- TaylorMade r7 460
- Tour Edge Exotics
- Wilson Staff Dd6

THE FIELD

Golf Digest considered 75 clubs in its preliminary evaluations in the driver category. The editors narrowed that field to 24 finalists. A select group of 15 drivers was named to the 2006 Hot List.



Clubs listed alphabetically



BOBBY JONES PLAYERS SERIES

HEAD SIZE: 440cc. **LOFTS:** 9.5, 10.5, O.L.A. (Optimum Launch Angle).

STREET PRICE: \$300. **WEB:** bobbyjonesgolf.net.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** A graphite crown and a triangular head shape reposition weight to the sole, with a 12-gram weight in the rear and a two-gram weight in the heel. The face is made of beta titanium.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Not a pop-fly driver, it almost automatically accelerates through the ball. It's what a club should be. . . . Hit it a mile. I just love the sound and feel, and it looks nice and traditional."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** It looks like a work of art, but don't be fooled: There's more than enough horsepower inside.

HOT LIST

HOT: Head shape encourages you to cover the ball.
NOT: Synthetic grip might be too spongy for heavy-handed hitters.

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CALLAWAY BIG BERTHA FUSION FT-3

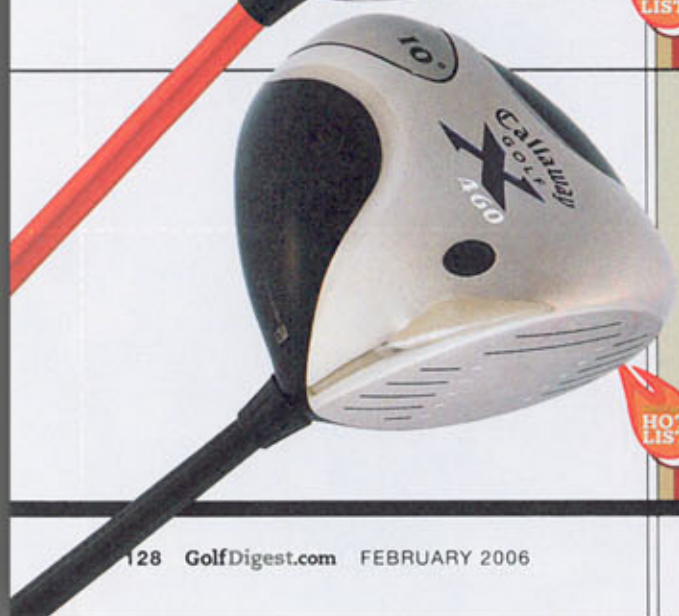
HEAD SIZE: 460cc. **LOFTS:** 8.5°, 9°, 9.5°, 10°, 11°, High Trajectory (*four versions, all in fade, neutral or draw setups; left-handed in 9.5, 10 and 11 degrees).

STREET PRICE: \$400. **WEB:** callawaygolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** The carbon-composite material in the crown, rear sole and walls allows 44 grams of weight to be redistributed. The cup or wraparound face is designed to strengthen the clubface.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Really jumped off the face and went very straight. I think they really improved the cosmetics, too."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** High marks for getting the maximum out of multiple materials without forgetting that size matters.

HOT LIST

HOT: A dramatic improvement and more forgiving than your mother.
NOT: Still can sound like you're hitting a tree trunk, not the best feeling.



CALLAWAY X460

HEAD SIZE: 460cc. **LOFTS:** 8.5°, 9°, 9.5°, 10°, 10.5°, 11°, HT (*face angle 1 degree open; others are slightly closed; left-handed in 8.5, 9, 9.5 and 10 degrees).

STREET PRICE: \$300. **WEB:** callawaygolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** The new face geometry is designed to push the springlike effect to the U.S. Golf Association limit. Its titanium face is robotically plasma-welded for precision. The face area is 10 percent larger than the Big Bertha 454. The sole is designed to rest squarely on the ground.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Nice, simple design. Penetrating flight with good distance."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** The best all-titanium driver Callaway has made, including the revered Great Big Bertha.

HOT LIST

HOT: Sole design promotes solid setup with a super-fast face.
NOT: Impact can sound like a brass band.



SLICERS

Technology has snuffed out the slice. Closed face angles, heel weighting and unique shapes have squashed the banana ball flat. Here are four that do it better than most:



TaylorMade r5 dual Type D: The D stands for draw, the "pulled-heel" head shape gets the job done (\$250).

Ping G5 DTL: Subtle quarter-inch offset helps its strong left tendency (\$300).

Cobra M/Speed: 1.5-degree tip shaft, 1.5-degree offset help, but 3.5-degree closed face helps more (\$300).

Bob Burns No Bananas: One-half inch offset, 5-degree closed face angle (\$300).



SLOW SWINGERS

The slower swinger needs lots of loft (to get the ball in the air) and a deep CG to keep it there. Here are some of our favorite drivers to give you more gitty up and go:



Callaway X460 HT: 15 degrees of loft, closed face angle, a perfect combo (\$300).

Bobby Jones Players Series OLA: "Optimum Launch Angle." Shape is a plus, too (\$300).

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LOW-HANDICAPPERS

Low-handicappers have to watch for subtle tweaks, like a less-closed (or even open) face angle, a neutral weight bias and a CG that's not too deep or too low. Consider these:



TaylorMade r7 quad 425 TP: Open face angle, cool Fujikura REAX shaft and the No. 1 driver on tour (\$800).



Titleist 905T: Classic shape with CG in a more centered position (\$400). Bigger 905R is coming.



KZG Gemini 460: Dual face design is aimed at improving stability; a favorite with clubmakers (\$375).



Nike SasQuatch Tour: Compact version has taller face, lower flight and Diamana shaft (\$530).



WOMEN'S DRIVERS

For too long women haven't had the benefits of the bigger heads to maximize distance. That's changing. Look for shorter shafts and plenty of loft, too. Some top examples:



Nike SasQuatch Sweet 16: Shorter shaft and 16 degrees of loft are perfect (\$300).



TaylorMade r5 dual Type W: Smaller size, special low-heel weight bias works well (\$250).



Cobra M/Speed: 13.5 degrees of loft, a 3.5-degree closed face and a 45-gram Mitsubishi Bassara shaft (\$300).



Callaway Big Bertha Fusion FT-3 HT: The draw configuration and the soft feel are a nice package (\$400).

BUYER'S BASICS

You're not a long-drive champ, so take that extra-stiff, low-lofted driver out of your bag

Buying a driver without a fitting session is like scuba diving without an oxygen tank—it's not getting the job done. Drivers are not one size fits all, but investing about \$100 in a fitting session ensures a return on a driver that's right for you.

Most golfers won't reach nirvana, but the following considerations will make your fitter's launch monitor data decipherable.

Players should choose a driver with enough loft (start at drivers marked 11.5, then go with more or less loft based on launch monitor data). The reason? The ball needs to leave the clubface at a high launch angle with low spin for maximum distance, says Mark Timms, owner of Hot Stix Golf. (Note: Loft is the angle of the face, launch angle is ball-flight trajectory.)

Players with slower swing speeds need more spin to keep the ball airborne, and those who swing faster than 95 miles per hour can rely on ball speed. So, swing speeds of 80 mph need about a 16-degree launch angle (and 3,500 revolutions per minute of spin). A 15-degree launch angle and 3,000 rpms of spin is a good benchmark for a 90 mph swing, and at 100 mph, a 14-degree launch angle with 2,500 rpms of spin is ideal.

Don't forget shaft length. Clubfitters use static measurements (above) and, more important, dynamic measurements to determine length. "A one-inch longer driver shaft equals eight yards. But, mis-hit it a half-inch off-center and you'll lose 20," Timms says. "Our final length determination is based on how consistently you

Wrist-to-floor measurement is a universal starting point for determining shaft length.



hit the sweet spot." If you buy a driver off the rack, it's more than likely 45 inches long. Yet the average shaft length on the PGA Tour is 44.5 inches. News flash: Shorter is better. **Caroline Stetler**

DRIVERS	Street price	Performance/playability (25%)					Length (inches)	Head size (manufacturer)	Crown to Sole (mm)	Heel to toe (mm)	Front to back (mm)
		Buzz factor (15%)	Technology/innovation (30%)	Personal preference (20%)	Value (10%)	Category leader					
Adams Redline RPM 460D	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.75	460cc	64	115	108	
Bobby Jones Players Series	\$300	+	+	+	+	44.75	440cc	60	126	108	
Callaway Big Bertha Fusion FT-3	\$400	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	62	115	107	
Callaway X460	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	65	120	105	
Cleveland Launcher Comp	\$380	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	62	118	103	
Cleveland Launcher Ti 460	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	63	121	103	
Cobra Speed	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	65	122	105	
MacGregor MacTec NVG2	\$300	+	+	+	+	44.75	445cc	63	122	105	
Mizuno MX-500	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	58	123	105	
Nike SasQuatch	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	59	122	119	
Ping G5	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.75	460cc	66	129	106	
TaylorMade r7 quad 425	\$400	+	+	+	+	45.0	425cc	62	127	103	
TaylorMade r7 460	\$400	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	65	125	111	
Tour Edge Exotics	\$400	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	63	121	101	
Wilson Staff Dd6	\$300	+	+	+	+	45.0	460cc	65	120	103	

For the complete list of products considered for the 2006 Hot List and more equipment information, visit golfdigest.com/hotlist.



MONEY FOR NOTHING

What that driver in your garage is worth

Below are some of the top drivers from two years ago and what they might get in trade, according to the PGA.com Value Guide.

TaylorMade R580: \$32 to \$48.

TaylorMade R580XD: \$46 to \$63.

Cleveland Launcher 460: \$66 to \$85.

Cobra SZ 440: \$55 to \$69.

Cobra SS 427: \$51 to \$67.

Callaway Great Big Bertha II: \$32 to \$47.

Titleist 983K: \$49 to \$67.

Adams RPM Low Profile
Bobby Jones Players Series
Callaway X
Cleveland Launcher Comp
Cleveland Launcher Steel
Cobra Speed
MacGregor MacTec NVG
Mizuno F-50
Nike SasQuatch
Ping G5
Sonartec SS-2.5/SS-3.5
TaylorMade r7 TP
Titleist 904F
Tour Edge Exotics
Wishon 515GRT

The Fairway WOOD

Satisfaction. > The well-played fairway wood is perhaps the most underrated shot in all of golf. The driver always will be the rock star of your bag, the putter its poet. And you might never hit a shot that stirs you quite like a crisp iron to a tucked pin. Yet when your match is on the

The Hot List line, how great is it to lace a 5-wood to the center of the green on a par 5, hardly disturbing a blade of grass at impact? And how excellent does it feel to stand on the tee with your trusty 3-wood, not hoping but *knowing* your next shot is headed down the middle (unlike what goes through your head with certain other sticks we won't mention)? Here are 15 such clubs that will make it happen. Go on, give them the credit they deserve. They won't let you down.

THE FIELD

Golf Digest considered 53 clubs in the fairway wood category. The editors narrowed that list to 23 finalists. A select list of 15 fairway woods made the 2006 Hot List.



Clubs listed alphabetically

BOBBY JONES PLAYERS SERIES

LOFTS: 13, 15, 17, 19. STREET PRICE: \$200. WEB: bobbyjonesgolf.net.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** A thin, forged maraging-steel crown weighs only 10 to 12 grams, about 30 grams less than stainless steel. The saved weight is placed low and back in the club. The clubface is shallow to improve its playability from the fairway, and it is extra wide from heel to toe to improve forgiveness.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Very pretty. . . . The Cadillac of this group. . . . Had a little different shape that caught my eye and made me feel like a good shot was coming every time. . . . Tons of height."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** A superb all-around club: great feel, accuracy, distance.

HOT: Designer Jesse Ortiz created hugely popular Orlimar TriMetal.
NOT: Gets the ball a little too high for some better players.



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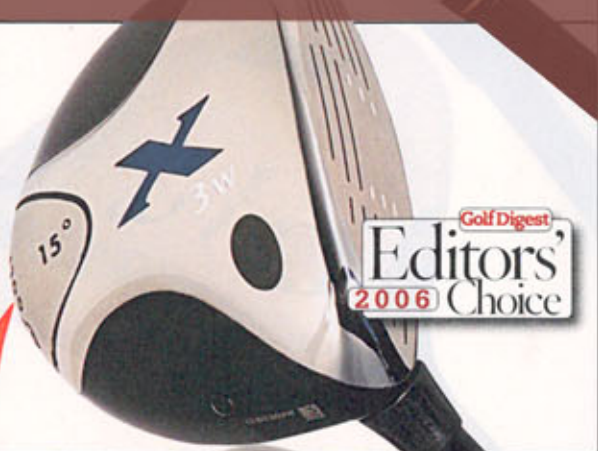


CALLAWAY X

LOFTS: 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23. STREET PRICE: \$200. WEB: callawaygolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** Variable face-thickness technology increases ball speed and the club's perimeter weighting. Weight has been added along the back edge to provide a high moment of inertia (less twisting). The three-piece stainless-steel clubhead has two sole rails designed to eliminate rocking at address.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "My goodness, that was hot. . . . Easy to get off the ground; consistent trajectory. . . . That's just high and hot. . . . Feels very solid. I can work the ball with this. Tour model for better players, obviously."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** A great field takes its cue from the leader, which upgrades to a sturdier sole, a confidence-inspiring look and ease of use with plenty of heat.

HOT: Best-looking (and playing) Callaway fairway since Steelhead.
NOT: No X Tour 5-wood loft.



CLEVELAND LAUNCHER COMP

LOFTS: 13, 15, 19, 22, 25. STREET PRICE: \$300. WEB: clevelandgolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** SP700 beta titanium is a unique face material for fairway woods. Its extremely lightweight triple-ply carbon-fiber-composite crown allows weight to be distributed low and back in the clubhead to produce a high launch angle with reduced spin.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Classic looking, if you can call a composite classic. . . . I like the sound; I'm getting used to it. . . . Feels really hot; the ball jumps off the face."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** Popular with better players and high-handicappers, it's a strong part of the Cleveland lineup. But don't buy it without testing the Launcher Steel as well.

HOT: Low-handicappers praise its flatter, boring trajectory.
NOT: Is it really worth \$100 more than the Launcher Steel?



BUYER'S BASICS

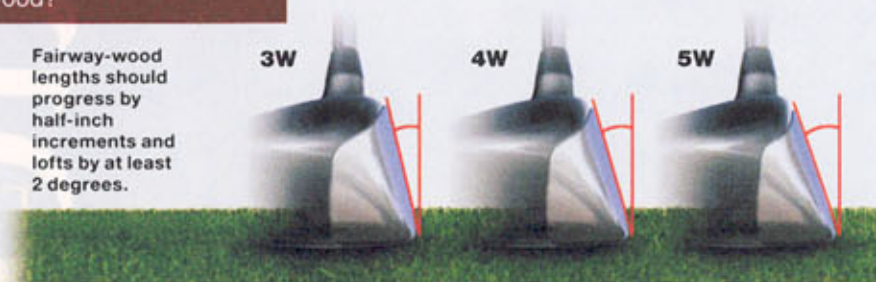
Trend: Should a 4-wood replace your 3-wood?

A driver needs a trusty sidekick just like Batman needed Robin. Fairway woods, often overshadowed by hybrids, can be a great relief because their longer shafts help increase clubhead speed.

First, consider the distance gaps in your set. Subtract your longest iron or hybrid distance from your driver distance, and divide that range by the number of fairway woods you plan to carry. For instance, if your driver goes 230 yards and your 20-degree hybrid goes 195, you can split the difference with a club that goes about 215, or put fairway woods in at 205 and 220. Shoot for 10- to 15-yard gaps.

Don't be afraid of less-traditional lofts. "People still buy fairway woods that are too low-lofted," says Susan Roll, 2005 LPGA Teaching and Club Professional of

Fairway-wood lengths should progress by half-inch increments and lofts by at least 2 degrees.



the Year and owner of the Carlsbad (Calif.) Golf Center. "They think 3- and 5-wood versus 4- and 7-wood. Just 2 degrees more can make a difference in trajectory."

Fairway-wood shafts can be shortened one-half inch, but make sure any adjustment doesn't upset the length tapering within the set (see illustration). You can consider different clubheads, but many players find a consistent shape and sole

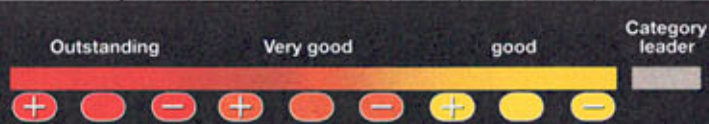
make setting up to the ball easier. In fact, some 3-woods are getting bigger to smooth the transition from driver to fairway wood.

Also, think about how you will use your least-lofted fairway wood. If it's strictly a second driver, a deeper face will be less of a concern than if it serves double duty. Ultimately, the right fairway wood or woods start with trust, or as Robin might say, "Holy reliability, Batman." **C.S.**

FAIRWAY WOODS

	Street price	Buzz factor (15%)	Performance/playability (25%)	Technology/innovation (30%)	Personal preference (20%)	Value (10%)	Head size (manufacturer)	Crown to sole (mm)	Face width
Adams RPM Low Profile	\$180	+	+	+	+	+	140cc	32	103
Bobby Jones Players Series	\$200	-	+	+	+	+	145cc	35	98
Callaway X	\$200	+	+	+	+	+	167cc	40	98
Cleveland Launcher Comp	\$300	+	+	+	+	+	160cc	38	99
Cleveland Launcher Steel	\$200	+	+	+	+	+	155cc	39	100
Cobra Speed	\$180	+	+	+	+	+	192cc	48	98
MacGregor MacTec NVG	\$200	+	+	+	+	+	163cc	37	103
Mizuno F-50	\$200	+	+	+	+	+	160cc	39	97
Nike SasQuatch	\$200	+	+	+	+	+	165cc	39	102
Ping G5	\$220	+	+	+	+	+	190cc	41	100
Sonartec SS-3.5/SS-2.5	\$230	+	+	+	+	+	160cc	39	101
TaylorMade r7 TP	\$400	+	+	+	+	+	169cc	41	100
Titleist 904F	\$250	+	+	+	+	+	155cc	37	95
Tour Edge Exotics	\$350	+	+	+	+	+	170cc	39	101
Wishon 515GRT	\$230	+	+	+	+	+	150cc	42	95

For a complete list of products considered for the 2006 Hot List, visit golfdigest.com/hotlist.



TOP TRADE-IN VALUES

Make a down payment on new woods

Below are top fairway woods from two years ago and what they might get in trade, according to the PGA.com Value Guide:

■ Callaway Steelhead III: \$28 to \$44.

■ Cobra SZ: \$32 to \$47.

■ TaylorMade V Steel: \$40 to \$42.

■ Callaway Great Big Bertha II: \$47 to \$66.

■ Cleveland Launcher: \$28 to \$40.

■ Cobra SS Hyper Steel: \$29 to \$33.

■ TaylorMade R580: \$47 to \$67.

■ Titleist 980F: \$29 to \$42.

■ TaylorMade 200 Steel: \$32 to \$41.



Hybrid

Adams Idea a2/a2 OS
Bobby Jones Players Series
Callaway Fusion FT-Hybrid
Callaway Big Bertha Heavenwood
Cleveland Halo
Cobra Baffler
Nickent 3DX DC
Nike CPR
Nike Slingshot
Ping G5
Srixon AD
TaylorMade Rescue Dual
Tour Edge Bazooka JMax

Forgiveness. > We can't get enough help when it comes to long irons. Hybrids are that help, a Mother Teresa in stainless steel. A year ago we asserted that the hybrid is the most important club in golf. We haven't changed our position. Hybrids have thankfully moved toward the mini-wood shape, providing a low and deep center of gravity. The sole is designed to promote all sorts of utility, too. The result is a club that works from long distance, the rough, even out of bunkers. Hybrids also can be a valid sub for a shaky chipping stroke. In short, the hybrid's many virtues make up for a whole lot of sins.

The Hot List

THE FIELD

Golf Digest considered 49 clubs in its preliminary evaluations in the hybrid category. The editors narrowed the list to 25 finalists. A select list of 13 hybrids was named to the 2006 Hot List.



BOBBY JONES PLAYERS SERIES

LOFTS: 19, 21, 25, 30.

STREET PRICE: \$180. WEB: bobbyjonesgolf.net.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** The triangular head is designed to improve stability at impact, and the super-thin maraging-steel crown saves weight that is redistributed to the sole. The wide-sole design improves playability from a variety of conditions.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "I'd put it in the bag right now. These help in just about any conditions. It gives you the feeling you have a lot more head to work with."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** A classy look with the punch of a street fighter.

HOT LIST

HOT: The retro cleek design works out of the rough.
NOT: Spongy grip might turn off some.



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CALLAWAY FUSION FT-HYBRID

LOFTS: 14, 17, 20, 23, 26.

STREET PRICE: \$225. WEB: callawaygolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** The steel face, sole and body combine with a graphite crown to save weight. Weight is internally redistributed for a neutral or draw setup.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "You can hit a variety of shots, and they all fly pretty well. The trajectory on every shot with this one was like a 5-iron. Very easy to hit for high-handicappers."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** Intriguing, especially given the two ball-flight options.

HOT LIST

HOT: The draw option is welcome.
NOT: The feel is a little too soft for some.

CALLAWAY BIG BERTHA HEAVENWOOD

LOFTS: 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32.

STREET PRICE: \$180. WEB: callawaygolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** A wide, low-profile head is designed to improve off-center hits. A center section in the sole is aimed at improving turf interaction.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "It looks a lot like a fairway wood. Actually was better than most out of the thicker rough. Very hot off the face. Has a 'ting' to it like the old Callaways."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** Surprisingly tech-lite for Callaway, but a very friendly feel.

HOT LIST

HOT: Low lofts let you ditch even your 3-wood.
NOT: But do you really need a 7-Hybrid?

CLEVELAND HALO

LOFTS: 16, 19, 22, 25.

STREET PRICE: \$150. WEB: clevelandgolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** A light, thin, Carpenter 455 steel plasma-welded face insert saves weight. The crown slopes down from front to back to push more weight to the back. The sole has a rocker-and-camber design to improve turf interaction.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Very good on mis-hits, but that little scoop is distracting. Good for the average player. Really straight without any effort."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** A reliable design whose rocker sole is under-appreciated.

HOT LIST

HOT: Super-confident setup at address.
NOT: Ho-hum stock graphite shaft.

COBRA BAFFLER

LOFTS: 16, 18, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35* (*women's only).

STREET PRICE: \$150. WEB: cobragolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** The face insert is made of thin maraging steel, and the rest of the clubhead is made of 17-4 stainless steel. The sole features a raised center contour that is designed to work in a variety of lies.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "The sound is good. It's good for the ego."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** Typical of Cobra, there's plenty of heat here, but be sure to factor in its extra shaft length when replacing a long iron.

HOT LIST

HOT: Nippon and Aldila NV shafts are standard.
NOT: Wide and deep face might not be ideal for some.



SRIXON AD

LOFTS: 18, 21, 24.

STREET PRICE: \$150. WEB: srixon.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** A thin, maraging-steel face is designed to improve ball velocity. Tungsten-nickel weighting in the rear sole helps lower the CG. The wide toe-and-heel sole radius is designed to cut through the grass easily.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "This hit it far and high. . . . good club for medium to high handicappers. . . . has really good sound and feel . . . nice simple look to it."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** If you can find one in a store, take it right out to the range.

HOT LIST

HOT: Light crown is just .6 mm thick.
NOT: The "3" is 40.5 inches long with 18 degrees loft.

TAYLORMADE RESCUE DUAL

LOFTS: 14, 16, 19, 22, 25 (TP version in 14, 16, 19, 22).

STREET PRICE: \$200 (\$300 for TP version). WEB: taylormadegolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** Widely spaced adjustable weights are designed to increase clubhead moment of inertia and allow the golfer to control the ball flight (neutral or draw configuration). A T-shaped contour in the sole reduces turf drag.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Mis-hits still ended up down the middle. It's got a little bit of a steely feel. Easy to hit, consistent trajectory."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** The leader's technology boost earns it our top overall score.

HOT LIST

HOT: TP version has legit Diamana shaft.
NOT: Heftier feel is an adjustment for some.

TOUR EDGE BAZOOKA JMAX

LOFTS: Two heads, 13 lofts (16 to 60 degrees).

STREET PRICE: \$80. WEB: touredgogolf.com.

- **KEY TECHNOLOGY:** The face and body are constructed of thin "hypersteel." Nearly half of the clubhead's total mass is concentrated in the sole. The regular version has an extra-wide sole.
- **PANELIST COMMENT:** "Baby got back, but get over it. Tour version's a little easier to take, but I like the flight on the regular model."
- **JUDGES' VERDICT:** It's as good a budget buy as there is in any category.

HOT LIST

HOT: Two shapes satisfy players and choppers.
NOT: A 60-degree hybrid is borderline silly.



HYBRIDS

	Street price	Buzz factor (15%)	Performance/playability (25%)	Technology/innovation (30%)	Personal preference (20%)	Value (10%)	Face height (mm)	Face width	Sole depth
Adams Idea a2/a2 OS	\$150	+	+	+	+	-	36	93	61
Bobby Jones Players Series	\$180	+	+	+	+	-	31	95	69
Callaway Fusion FT-Hybrid	\$225	+	+	+	+	-	36	95	62
Callaway Heavenwood	\$180	+	+	+	+	-	32	95	56
Cleveland Halo	\$150	+	+	+	+	-	36	93	56
Cobra Baffler	\$150	+	+	+	+	-	38	92	58
Nickent 3DX DC	\$150	+	+	+	+	-	35	91	54
Nike CPR	\$110	+	+	+	+	-	42	91	66
Nike Slingshot	\$170	+	+	+	+	-	34	93	67
Ping G5	\$190	+	+	+	+	-	36	90	51
Srixon AD	\$150	+	+	+	+	-	37	95	58
TaylorMade Rescue Dual	\$200	+	+	+	+	-	36	90	57
Tour Edge Bazooka JMax	\$80	+	+	+	+	-	44	86	47

For a complete list of products considered for the 2006 Hot List, visit golfdigest.com/hotlist.



BIG WINNERS

Players used 48 hybrids to win on all tours in 2005

■ **PGA TOUR** TaylorMade's Rescue Mid, Titleist's 503H and Sonartec's MD (Jim Furyk, below) were used twice by winners in 2005. Adams, Bridgestone, Callaway, Nickent, Nike, Ping and Tour Edge were used in one victory each.

■ **CHAMPIONS TOUR** TaylorMade hybrids were used six times in wins in 2005. Others with victories included Adams (6), Cobra (3), Ben Hogan (2) and Callaway (2).

■ **LPGA TOUR** Four brands were used in wins in 2005: TaylorMade (12) dominated; Ping (4), Sonartec (2) and Nickent (1) won, too.



MADE FOR WOMEN, TECHNICALLY

Women's sets get a real boost from research based on real players

Women are the fastest-growing adult segment of the golf population (up 26 percent to 6.9 million players in 2004, according to the National Golf Foundation), and the equipment industry is focusing more attention on this growing sector. These are not your grandmother's pink sticks. Plenty of research has gone into improving the club-head designs, the shafts and the set make-ups to better suit a woman's body and swing. Many of the women's offerings come in sets of 10 or 12 clubs that transition from woods to hybrids to short irons, with wider loft gaps between each club. Here are some of our favorites (with a couple of traditional sets, too):

ADAMS Women's Idea a2 OS is a progressive design that includes wood-like hybrids and iron-like hybrids (\$600, graphite shafts, adamsgolf.com).

PING's G5L features the option of replacing the 5- and 6-iron with either hybrids or high-lofted fairway woods (\$120 per iron, \$190 per hybrid, \$220 per wood, pinggolf.com).

TAYLORMADE's Miscela transitions seamlessly from driver to 3-wood to 4-, 5- and 6-hybrid middle woods to short irons with a low CG and perimeter weighting (\$1,000, taylormadegolf.com).

MIZUNO's Tava has wider loft gaps and bigger heads with a lower CG than its previous model. The set has a 14-degree driver and a utility 7- and 9-wood (\$960, mizunousa.com).

CALLAWAY's Big Bertha irons are available in the more traditional full-iron set, but can be pieced together with Big Bertha fairway woods or Heavenwood hybrids (\$800 for eight irons, \$180 per hybrid, \$200 per wood, callawaygolf.com).

COBRA's 3400 I X/H irons feature 50-gram Graphite Design YS 5.1 shafts to lighten the load. The clubheads evolve from hollow-back long and middle irons to cavity-back short irons for a low and deep CG (\$700, cobragolf.com).

Others to check out: **Bobby Jones'** low-profile designs, **Tour Edge's** 10-piece Moda set with 55-gram shafts, and the 11-piece **Nicklaus** Compri set.

Stina Sternberg



Adams a2 OS: Hybrids with extra offset, wood-like long irons and more compact hybrids in middle irons.



Cobra 3400 I X/H: Hollow-back and cavity-back irons; urethane inserts.



Ping G5L: Mix-and-match hybrids, irons and fairway woods within set.



TaylorMade Miscela: Improvements for '06 include larger loft gaps between clubs and slimmer grips.



Callaway Big Bertha: 360-degree undercut channel, notch weighting and a 67-gram graphite shaft.



Mizuno Tava: 6-iron through sand wedge and utility 7- and 9-wood.

Log on to Golfdigest.com/hotlist on Jan. 20 at 4 p.m. EST for a live chat with Stina Sternberg about women's clubs.