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Maxfli's new tour ball: excellence on the cheap

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AboutGolf CEO Bill Bales. His company makes golf simulators.

If you're like us, you want a good value for your dollar when it comes to golf balls. Sure, those hot new Callaway HX-Tour and Bridgestone B-330s and Titleist Pro-V1s will get the job done for a wide variety of golfers, but if you send one in the woods, it can kind of make you angry since you basically donated your at-the-turn tip money.

Maxfli's new Tour Fire ball is \$10 to \$15 cheaper, at \$30, than its more expensive cousins, but is said to be a tour ball, not Maxfli's answer to, say, a Titleist NXT or Callaway HX Hot, midlevel balls that don't offer true tour performance.

We gave a dozen Tour Fires to one of chief testers, Bruce Bellamy, who played several rounds with the ball, which features three-piece construction techniques and orbicular dimples that make it, according to the company, "knife through the wind."

Bellamy rates the ball a four out of five stars, saying the only reason he didn't give it a perfect rating was because of an issue with the **John Daly** "777" numbering scheme (Daly likes to get lucky in slots in Las Vegas).

"This ball is really, really soft, and I liked that," Bellamy said. "It feels softer off the irons, woods and putter than a lot of more expensive balls. It has all the performance characteristics you'd find in a more expensive ball."

"It checks up and spins. It's a tour level ball for 10 dollars less. The only thing I don't like is the logo rubs off so easily and it gives you the appearance of playing a cheap ball. You hit it a couple times and the logo rubs off completely. You don't find that in other balls."

Golf Simulators help you enjoy and improve your game

True story. I was in Golf Galaxy on Providence Road two weeks ago and saw two older gentlemen arguing over which driver one of them should buy.

They debated stiff or regular flex, open or closed face, 10 or 11 degrees of loft. The man buying walked to the cash register with his guess of a purchase and the salesperson asked if he'd hit it in the simulator.

The man hadn't and was walked back to the rear of the store where he discovered after a few swings that he needed a senior flex and 13.5 degrees of loft.

He left a happy customer and somewhere in Toledo, Ohio, AboutGolf CEO Bill Bales had to be happy.

Bales company makes the simulators, which are basically a screen that you hit into (that shows golf images) while a computer reads your swing data based on ball speed and spin.

Bales company has supplied Golf Galaxy with these simulators for four years and also sells them in homes for about \$40,000, with plans to offer more expensive and more economical models (about half the current cost).

"Golf retail has shifted from the majority of equipment being sold in pro shops at golf facilities to being sold at big box retailers," Bales said. "Our original idea was to have a place to hit balls and something to lure people to stores. It's a lot more compelling to try out drivers in a simulator than go to X, Y or Z store and hit them into a net."

The simulators show you simulated ball flight and display distance, launch angle, spin and much more. You can quickly find out which clubs you hit best.

The simulators have come under criticism for displaying inaccurate information compared to launch monitors, but Bales believes his technology is best.

"This is really the ultimate launch monitor," he said. "Our simulators are not only powered by a launch monitor but they have software that enables you to visualize ball flight with a high degree of accuracy."

A new add-on called Kudu makes the simulators even more accurate. Kudu is radar-based instead of camera based like most Vector launch monitors.

"I will not argue that photography is the best approach," Bales said, "but Vector is 2D photography. Higher end 3D (photography) systems are expensive and only available at (manufacturers like Callaway and TaylorMade). I'm told Callaway's 3D system is close to \$200,000. Our stores can add Kudu for \$3,500."

Bales said many Golf Galaxy stores, including the Charlotte locales, should be adding Kudu soon, and it will only enhance ball fitting, club fitting and lessons given on the simulators.

BLACK GOLD CAPTURES CROWNE PLAZA INVITATIONAL AT COLONIAL

Rory Sabbatini won the Crowne Plaza Invitational last week with Black Gold golf shafts featuring proprietary "Frequency Tuned technology," that incorporates True Temper's {quot}Gold Standard{quot} manufacturing process. Each critical shaft parameter is held to exacting tolerances resulting in the first shaft ever to combine pinpoint frequency specification with precise weight tolerances and balance for superior repeatability and consistency.

"This is a great win with a premium iron shaft that really showcases the depth of the True Temper brand on the pro tours," says **Bob Montgomery**, Tour Manager for True Temper Sports. "The shaft continues to gain momentum each and every week."

- Sabbatini used a Nike SasQuatch Sumo driver, 15-degree SasQuatch fairway wood, Nike irons, wedges, balls and apparel.
- Nike Golf's **Jeff Coston**, Director of Instruction at Semiahmoo Resort in Blaine, Wash., took low PGA Professional honors at the 68th Senior PGA Championship after his 2-under-par 70 gave him a 292 4-over-par total and a tie for 19th finish.
- **Jim Furyk** and **Bernard Langer**, who finished runner-up to Sabbatini on the PGA Tour, both used Graphite Designs Purple Ice model shafts. This week's Nationwide Tour and Japan Tour winners also played Graphite Design shafts, according to the Darrell Survey.

Odyssey Success in 2007

Odyssey putters have had a terrific start to the year. The new Black Series already ranks number No. 6 in the putter category in terms of sales, even though it's at a higher price point (\$249 street) than any of the company's previous offerings.

The White Hot XG putters introduced last year have continued to be top sellers. According to the company, it's the best selling product line in the category and is currently at its all-time high in market share (over 11%).

PGATOUR.com's LIVE the Memorial

Golf fans will be able to view live online coverage of Muirfield Village Golf Club's scenic par-3 12th hole during the Memorial Tournament May 31 -- June 3. During the 26 hours of coverage, viewers can choose between watching every shot of the competition from the 12th hole and watching a video of golf instruction from PGA of America professionals.

LIVE@ the Memorial coverage will be broadcast online from 10:30 a.m. -- 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday, and 10 a.m. -- 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Adams In Play At Colonial

Adams Golf was the common brand of equipment between the top three finishers at last week's Crowne Plaza Invitational at Colonial. Not only was second-place finisher and Adams Golf Tour Staff Professional **Bernhard Langer** carrying a staff bag full of Adams equipment, so too were his fellow playoff contenders.

Sabbatini, the tournament champion and fifth-ranked player on the PGA Tour Money List, played an Idea a2 hybrid (18°). He's played Adams Golf hybrids, including the Idea Pro, since the beginning of the 2006 season, in which time he has climbed to No. 16 in the World Golf Rankings.

Langer used Idea Pro irons, the new Insight driver (9.5°) and the Insight 4-wood and 5-wood.

Jim Furyk, the third playoff participant, also played the Insight fairway wood and Idea Pro hybrid.

TaylorMade dominates Colonial Driver count

TaylorMade had 40 drivers in play on the PGA Tour last week, well ahead of No. 2 Titleist (25). There were 72 TaylorMade fairways in play, well ahead of No. 2 Adams (30). TaylorMade also led in irons (21 to 20 for No. 2 Titleist, which led in wedges and putters used).

Play Golf America in Charlotte

Play Golf America Day will be

held at the Charles T. Myers Golf Course on Saturday, June 2nd. The Play Golf America Day will be held from 10 am - 4 pm and is free to the general public.

Highlighting the day will be free instruction and golf clinics conducted by more than 20 Carolinas PGA teaching professionals from throughout the Carolinas, for beginners, intermediate, and advanced level players alike.

These golf professionals will also provide 10 minute tune-ups and conduct demonstrations on all facets of the game. All attendees will receive a complimentary golf goody bag. Additionally, registered participants will have the chance to win door prizes every thirty minutes, including the Grand Prize of a three day, two night golf trip to Pinehurst.

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