

Whoops! Someone finally does a (semi)-honest report of golf technology on Youtube

by Miles Mathis

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Yes, this is a bit of a break from the serious and anxiety-inducing subjects of the summer. You may think that if you don't play golf, this isn't for you, but as with my last one on golf, this one plays out into a larger arena. Golf stands for society as a whole in this critique, showing technology is often just a scam. In this way it plays into my critique of AI.

[Gary Martin Golf in the UK](#) did a test last year to compare irons and balls from 1988 to irons now, unintentionally proving what I have been saying for years. They pitted the Titleist ProV1 and PXG 7-iron against the Maxfli and Ryder cavity-back 7-iron from 36 years earlier. Although the Titleist spun faster and stopped quicker, the **Maxfli was actually the same distance carry (150) and two yards longer total.** That despite sitting in a box for 36 years. Even worse, the PXG was only 18 yards longer. You may think that sounds like a lot, but they forgot to factor in club length and loft. They admit early on in the video that they thought of testing the Ryder 7-iron against the PXG 8-iron, which they should have, but they didn't. The PXG is five degrees less loft and half an inch longer, so it is more than one club stronger. So they were actually testing an old 7-iron against a new strong 6-iron. Doing the math, that means the PXG is only about 3 yards longer, which is negligible. It could be due to the shaft alone, and probably is. Iron shafts were stiffer in the past, and a stiffer shaft will cut your distance by a couple of yards. So the test was a complete and utter wash. So much for technology. And so much for the 5X prices you are now paying for irons. Despite that, Gary and his pal sum up by telling you the opposite: the old clubs and balls are ten shots worse per round, they assure you. Based on what Gary? Based on bribes from PXG?

They didn't test drivers, though the subtext to that video says they are going to look at the Qi10. I guess this test on irons soured them on that, since they either decided not to do that test or let the dog eat it. It isn't to be found on their channel a year later. Why? You can ask old Gare, but my guess is because they found the same thing there. Sure, there have been distance gains since 1988, but most of that is in shaft length, weight, and flex. If you reshafted an old persimmon driver like the Powerbilt I played with in the 80s with a 46" light graphite shaft instead of a 43.5" heavy stiff steel shaft, you would gain about 20 yards, about the increase in tour average since 1980. Meaning most of the driver head technology is meaningless as far as distance goes. Yes, the replaceable heads are nice, as are the customizable weights, I guess, but I don't even use the latter since I don't want a hook or slice face. I want a club that fits a perfect swing off the shelf, as in the old days. The golfer then is expected to fit himself to a lovely club, rather than fit the club to his ugly swing. Instead of spending \$600 on a new driver, how about take an effing lesson and square up your stance and swing?

As confirmation of that, [we have this test](#) on a Trackman monitor of a Toney Penna persimmon from the 1960s against a Titleist 913 from about 50 years later. Both have stiff graphite shafts, but the Penna is 10.5 degrees and 43.5", while the 913 is 9.5 degrees and 45". With that huge advantage, you would expect the Titleist to be much longer, but the difference in total distance was only. . . **10 yards!** We can

assign *all* of that to the shaft and loft, meaning the head technology is a myth. In fact, it looks to me like the Penna head is probably longer than the Titleist head, and we have to wonder why the guy didn't test equal shaft lengths and equal lofts. I suspect it is because it would prove the new heads are actually *shorter* than the old persimmons, by themselves. Going into this test, you would expect the persimmon to be at least 30 yards shorter, based on what all the salesmen have been saying for the past 30 years. They have told us technology has given us about a yard more per year since the 1990s. But the Trackman (technology) says otherwise. Again, whoops!

The problem of course is that, at 45", the persimmon would then be about 9 swing weights too heavy, or something like D10, which is why the Powerbilt persimmon was filled with cork in the 1990s. That extra length also makes the persimmon head feel even smaller, making it harder to hit. So we have to wonder why they never made bigger, lighter persimmon heads to solve that problem. Probably because they didn't feel they could demand \$500 for them after charging just \$100 before. So they had to make up the myth of new technology, which they are still doing with "AI-produced designs".

As you may know, I have started playing about once a week after years of not playing at all, and from my experience most people on the course now don't even know what a proper grip or proper stance looks like. They have 2-4 thousand dollars worth of equipment, including the hottest new drivers—even on this cheap public course I have been playing—but not the foggiest clue how to set up for a swing.

I don't know anyone who golfs in this area, so I just show up as a singleton and they put me with a pair or threesome. After watching me swing, many of them ask me for pointers, but when I tell them we have to start with their grip and stance, they beg off. I don't know what they thought when they asked: I was just going to move them an inch farther away from the ball and all their problems would be solved? I would wave a magic wand and they would be Scottie Scheffler? I also tell them to buy some golf shoes with cleats, and that goes over about as well. They tell me Fred Couples has been playing in tennis shoes for years. I say, "Yes, but you aren't Fred Couples." I would still be playing in steel spikes if they allowed it. Most amateur golfers are slipping all over the place, but they apparently have never considered the possibility that might be a problem. It is. If your feet aren't set and don't stay set, there is no way you can develop a repeatable swing of any kind.

I think people want free advice, so that when they inevitably ignore it they aren't out anything. Most people are desperate for help but incapable of accepting it. I got the same thing when I taught painting, though those people were actually paying. I had thought they were there to learn my secrets, but when I gave away my secrets for far less than they were worth, they ignored me and went on as before with their crappy paints and brushes and canvases—though they could afford anything they wanted. I finally decided most of them were just there to get out of the house. It is probably the same with the people on the golf course. Many talk about how they want to get better, and if they could improve just by showing up they probably would. But as far as putting any real effort into it, not so much.

And here's another thing. Gary and his pal try to sell the extra spin of new clubs and balls as a plus, but I have always seen it as a negative. I don't want my balls backing up twenty feet under any circumstances, or even ten, since I don't want to have to fly past the hole. What is the point of that? It's just silly. And yet "sauce" is all the rage on Youtube now, and I guess it has been for at least three decades. Titleist has been selling big spin in its commercials for years and people have been eating it up like cake. But by watching the Tour or Youtube golf videos, you quickly see that spin more often costs those guys strokes than saves them strokes. For every one ball that flies past the hole and backs up to pin high, you see ten that fly pin high and back up twenty feet, leaving a twenty foot putt. Or you

see balls backing up into the rough, into sand traps, off the front of the green, or into the water. But these geniuses never seem to get the message. They keep trying to get more spin on their wedges, so they can back up into the water more often, I guess. For myself, I still play with an old Hagen wedge from the 1960s, to avoid the new grooves and milling on purpose. I hit my wedges very high, but they generally just stop in their own divot, or move a foot one way or the other. Far more predictable and playable than huge spin.

Speaking of wedges: on Youtube, you see those guys hitting lob wedges from the fairways now all the time. They generally take all the loft they can all the time, to further maximize spin. But because they have too much loft, they have to flight it down. They hit their lob wedges amazingly low, which is a form of insanity. How about just skip a step, and hit a non-flighted sand or gap wedge? Then you don't even need a lob wedge, and you will have more room for other clubs to fill gaps above the 4-iron. That's another thing I tell amateurs who want advice: get rid of the lob wedge. You don't need any loft above 56, *ever*. And it's the last thing you want to be chipping with.

Another thing I notice on Youtube: those guys never hit enough club, especially with long irons. Grant Horvat, the Bryan Bros, and the rest of those guys are always trying to force a 4-iron 230 or something, and end up hitting a low hook to do so. So they rarely hit a green on a long par three, being one or two clubs short. Same thing on approach to par fives. No wonder they are such great chippers. If they do hit a green they can't understand why it doesn't stop. Maybe because they hit a low hook? You want to hit a high fade with a long iron, not a low hook, and that is why. So they should be taking an extra club, or two, and sweeping it instead of flighting it down. But for some reason they think everything should be flighted down, even wedges. Why? The only time you should flight down a club is into the wind. Any other time it just looks stupid. It drives me crazy watching them misclub 90% of the time, over and over and over, without ever figuring it out. One guy misclubs badly, and the next guy does exactly the same thing, learning nothing. All so that if they magically catch a super-flyer, I guess, they can claim to hit their 4-iron (which is really a 2-iron) 240.

Almost none of them have a club for those distances, although the need for it comes up all the time. Garrett Clark may be the worst in that regard. They constantly play with a huge gap from 3-wood to 4-iron, though some may have a hybrid that goes 5 yards further than their 4-iron. Seems to me they need a 4-wood or 1-iron, but the manufacturers have convinced them otherwise. They think they need that flighted-down lob wedge, so they don't have room for a 4 or 5-wood.

I watched "the longest driver in college", today, Chase somebody, and he has no club between driver and 3-iron. He said it is easier to lay off a driver than hit a 3-wood. What? Since when? Apparently nobody likes 3-woods anymore, I guess because they don't know how to sweep a club off the ground. They are always super-compressing, to catch those flyers off all lies, and you can't do that with a 3-wood. So rather than learn that shot, they just don't have clubs that go from 230 to 280. Makes sense bro.

The thing is, the 46" driver is so much longer than the modern 3-wood, players now need a gap wood between the two, for a 270-280 shot on par fives. Enter the mini-driver. But again, the manufacturers want to be sure you are paying at least \$500 for that, instead of making your own for under \$100. You just need a head at 11 degrees and a 44" shaft, right? And a bit of epoxy. Best would be a smaller head and a shallower face, like they were making thirty years ago. An old Taylormade Burner or Callaway Big Bertha, for instance, which you can get for almost nothing on Ebay, since nobody wants them. Or, here's an idea: how about put that old persimmon driver in the bag for that 270 shot? At 11 degrees, it is fairly easy to hit off the ground, and you could treat it as a strong 3-wood. You could also do that

with an old persimmon 2-wood, with 12 degrees. Nah, that wouldn't be cool. To impress your pals you need a \$300 Ventus shaft in a \$400 Callaway triple-diamond head. You can't hit it, but you can't hit any of your clubs, so what's the diff? It's the expensive bag that counts, dude!

Again, I saw the same thing in art, where nobody cared what you were painting—almost everyone was painting crap anyway—it was how cool your studio was: how high your ceilings were, how north your light, how much square footage you had, how many huge expensive easels and taborets you had. Nobody knew a good work of art from a bad, but they knew to the penny how much your easel cost. The Modern world in a nutshell.