

3M Enters Graphite Market with Carbonite

For more than a couple of years, graphite has been looked on as golf's fiscal fancy. Many in the game have viewed it as an expensive aid to a few more yards on their drives or the answer to the spray hitter.

Like many things, graphite has never been totally accepted for one reason or another, the another being the price. Golfers have waited for the prohibitive cost of the shaft to decline, but graphite still retains an elite price and is a major expense item for the average golfer.

Recently, 3M Company in St. Paul, Minn., came into the graphite shaft business and the result has given added credibility to the industry.

Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing thus has entered into graphite with the acquisition of Carbonite Corporation.

Through action of its board of directors, 3M has made a decisive move into the leisure time field. They named a special division, 'Leisure Time Products', and Carbonite is included. Under the guidance of division head, Lew Jewett, the new section has also ventured into the fishing rod field.

Laboratory supervisor for the division's projects is Cecil Jacobs and after a service career, which included experience in graphite related materials for aerospace, the Iowa native is the LTD's top tester.

With several companies already in the graphite field, 3M seems aware of a competitive market and with its access to the raw material for the shafts, Pre Preg, plus its marketing abilities, the three billion dollar firm is ready for its new venture.

"We feel that our arrival into the industry will strengthen the market," Jacobs told GOLFDOM in an exclusive interview in his office in the 3M complex in suburban St. Paul.

Although it is difficult to ignore 3M's success in other business endeavors, Jacobs observed that his firm is not out to necessarily reduce the profits of competitive manufacturers.

According to 3M, high quality will be the rule for its Carbonite line, as in all the company's endeavors.

"Marketing a 'Cadillac' shaft is our goal here. We will keep the same price as always. We feel that Carbonite has established itself as a top shaft and the fact that 3M owns the company is incidental. We expect these shafts to sell themselves," Jacobs noted.

Keeping a low profile in the future advertising of the shaft, 3M is playing down a massive corporate image, but realizes that profit won't materialize overnight.

Jacobs is convinced that graphite is here to stay and the shaft won't disappear from pro shop shelves.

In essence, 3M will gear its advertising toward the club member and continue to merchandise its shafts through pro shops as Carbonite did.

3M thinking is that graphite shafts are for the persons who need to add distance to their swing.

With this in mind, the fact that many pros do not utilize graphite because they can do equally well without, will influence Carbonite advertising.

For this reason, Carbonite will not solicit testimonials from PGA players, but will gear the 3M line through club pros.

Getting the pro to stock the expensive Carbonite shaft constitutes the marketing program for 3M.

Jacobs is convinced that his firm's complete \$1,400 set of shafts will sell, but recognizes that club pros are the key to marketing.

"Certainly, many pros resist graphite because it does little for their game and some aren't sure what it is. Trevino and Nicklaus both have sets, but do not play with them on the tour.

"Looking at the club, we feel graphite is for the average male or female player. This shaft is designed to assist the high handicapper," stated Jacobs.

Even though, Carbonite will not solicit male pros for endorsements,

the company has several LPGA standouts that back the shaft, including Sandra Haynie.

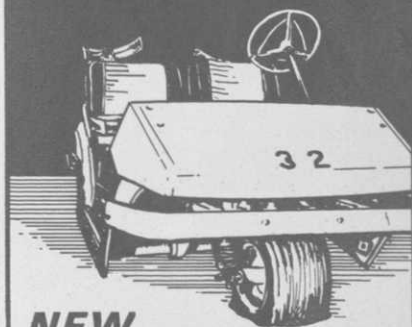
Carbonite has also put together a modest display unit that club pros can utilize to aid prospective buyers. The stand includes 10 shafts and a pair of woods.

In Jacobs' specialty, he demonstrates the technical aspect explaining that graphite gives the best control of any shaft because it's lighter and when the ball is hit the club will not open up.

Not anxious to overwhelm its competitors, 3M looks to the shaft business as a new field, even though they have dealt with the shaft's raw material for several years. Determined to stay out of the discount houses, 3M looks at Carbonite as a pro line that will offer players quality that they cannot get with other shafts.

Stature has always been a 3M watchword, which the Minnesota firm expects to extend to their endeavor in the golf industry. □

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