



PGA

Golf clubs, bags and balls are departing from the "rut" of the past few years, and if golf professionals have done their homework on their members' buying trends and preferences, they may miss out on what may shape up to be brisk and profitable sales for 1973 and 1974.

Golf club manufacturers are taking separate stands and are divided into two camps—investment cast stainless steel head irons versus conventional forged steel irons. Last year at show time, one could count on one hand the number of manufacturers of stainless steel clubs. In 1973, however, this ratio has been reversed. Currently, only five of the top 24 manufacturers of golf clubs are sticking to forged steel clubheads. The other 19 manufacturers have added a stainless steel club to their forged steel line. Several have more than one stainless steel club. So the debate will range into 1973 and 1974 over which process, investment casting or forging, is best.

Proponents of investment casting say they can make a perfect model with only a plus or minus margin of error of two grams for each clubhead. They say forging introduces the human element causing a greater risk of imperfections. Manufacturers sticking to forged steel irons are not yet convinced that stainless steel produces the "feel" a clubhead should have. Its properties make it brittle. Also, the cost of converting from a forged steel operation is costly. New dies must be made. Because of this and the cost of stainless, the cost of stainless steel clubheads, in many cases, is much greater than forged clubheads.

The enormous success of the pioneer manufacturers, small companies such as Lynx and Karsten's Ping, has prompted the "big" manufacturers to get into the race. It remains to be seen if all can prosper in this high end, select market. Undoubtedly there will be some casualties. Whether it is the large manufacturers, which cannot get their production geared to the demand, and lose out, or the small manufacturers, which are engulfed by their large competitors, only time will tell—and the consumer.

continued

One bright note for the golf professional: The last several years have been extremely poor ones for club sales. Aluminum shafted clubs burned the professional and many consumers. But this year manufacturers are in an innovative mood, and members are likely to be in a buying mood.

Incorporated with both investment cast and forged clubheads has been the principle of weight redistribution between the heel and the toe. Weight is being shifted from the center of gravity to the extremities "enlarging" the sweet spot. Some manufacturers have added weights to the heel, or the heel and toe to increase this sweet spot. Other manufacturers have taken the weight out of the hosel, shortened the hosel, and added the weight to the clubhead.

Woods remain static. Only a few manufacturers are inserting weights in either the front or back of the club.

An interesting shift is taking place in the golf shaft market. More manufacturers are returning to the dynamic steel shaft. They indicate its strength is probably the best for the new clubheads being manufactured. A majority of manufacturers, however, still are using lightweight steel, but a trend is definitely developing back toward dynamic. Stainless steel and aluminum shafts have died a quiet death and now are on a special order basis from only a few manufacturers.

The golf ball market is equally as exciting, and unpredictable, as the golf club market will be in 1973. Only one thing is certain. Golf ball sales will undoubtedly be the greatest of all time. All indications—amount of promotion and consumer demand—point toward significantly increased sales. The balata cover versus the Surlyn

cover, and wound versus solid centers are areas where manufacturers either disagree, or have available several balls. One surprise move was made by Acushnet, long the number one manufacturer of top grade golf balls. The Titleist golf ball has been changed and now contains fewer dimples (324 as opposed to 336). The dimples are also shallower. Royal made the dimple change last year by putting in 252 hexagonal-shaped dimples. Acushnet executives said that they have never rested on their laurels of being number one and will continue to improve the Titleist as new materials or data become available. The Titleist has a balata cover. Many other manufacturers, however, are phasing out balata

and going to the Surlyn cover. The durability and good feel of a Surlyn-covered ball are cited by its advocates. Solid balls are moderately popular in pro shops. And the two-piece Spalding Top-Flite is having a great sales success. Several manufacturers are introducing additional top grade golf balls to their existing lines.

Golf bags have exploded into a myriad of colors for 1973. Patchworks, as well as new colors in women's bags should prove popular. Most manufacturers are touting expanded vinyl with leather trim. Leather bags are extremely costly, as everyone knows, so the professional should order cautiously on leather.

It should be a good year for golf professionals. Sales should increase in every category of hardgoods. But one note of caution. Remember that the normal turnover of golf clubs is every three to four years. GOLFDOM's surveys indicate that 1973 should be a buying year. People have been hearing about stainless steel clubheads for five years and have been waiting to buy. Because the investment casting process is so costly, closeouts should be non-existent next year because manufacturers will be less likely to change for the sake of change over the next few years.

On the following pages GOLFDOM has listed the merchandise that manufacturers, distributors and representatives will be exhibiting at the PGA show. The listing is not official; only the companies, not the association, have indicated to GOLFDOM that they will be at the show.

An asterisk preceding a company's entry indicates that details on its line were unavailable at press time.

PRODUCT GUIDE

GOLF CARS. EQUIPMENT. CARTS _____	31
GOLF EQUIPMENT _____	32
GOLFWEAR _____	37
GOLFING ACCESSORIES _____	46
PRO SHOP. RANGE SUPPLIES _____	46
OTHER _____	48