

Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

MP3s



Turntables gave room to reel-to-reels, which gave way to eight-tracks. Eight-tracks gave way to cassettes, cassettes

gave way to CDs, and CDs have given way to MP3s. To adapt the words of a band famous for encouraging fans to record its shows, "What a long, strange technological trip it's been."

The explosion of digital music, the increasing cheapness of CD burning and the advent of a smaller, more compressed audio file type called MP3 (the extension that stands for MPEG, audio layer three) have created a nation full of newfound music listeners, not to mention more than a few musical pirates. And in just a few short years a new breed of portable audio players have taken the country by storm, bringing with them not only lower costs but surprisingly more storage space.

So how does it work? Think of a portable MP3 player as a humongous jukebox. You download your music files from your computer and into these gizmos and — voila! — you have a history of music in your hand. You can make your own playlists — "Songs for Mowing" or "Workout" or "TGIF" — to suit your mood, and easily add or subtract songs from the player. In essence, the players are glorified portable hard drives, allowing storage of any type of file. For exam-

DO YOU LOVE ROCK & ROLL (OR ANY OTHER TYPE OF MUSIC)? WELL, PUT A FEW DIMES INTO THIS JUKEBOX, BABY **BY MARK LUCE**

ple, a 40 GB iPod (\$399), from Apple, can hold nearly 20 times the information of the trusty Macintosh laptop on which I type this column.

As the holidays approach, MP3 players would make a great gift — super for getting back to your musical roots, broadening your enjoyment of mowing or simply to escape for a couple hours. As with all purchases of electronics, we here at *Golfdom* encourage you not only to do your research but head to an electronics store and fiddle around with the players. Things to keep in mind are quite simple: storage, battery life, accessories (many allow you to hook the thing up to your car stereo) and price. To help make things easier, here are a few that we have found to be quite good.

■ Apple, always on the cutting edge, offers the most elegant of the MP3 players and one of the easiest to use. Its colorful new iPod Mini (\$249) is a 4-gigabyte machine that holds nearly 1,000 songs and plays for eight hours on a rechargeable battery. The slightly larger models hold 20 GB (\$299) or 40 GB (\$399) and play for 12 hours on rechargeable batteries.

■ Sony, the inventor of the Walkman, has raised the stakes on portable

players, adding a small color screen to its 40-GB VAIO Pocket (\$499).

Whether viewing album art or scoping your own digital picture slideshow, the VAIO Pocket adds sight to sound.

■ Philips, which pioneered compact disc technology, offers one the smallest and sleekest players, the Micro Audio Jukebox. This 2-GB machine (\$179) holds nearly 500 songs and has a built-in FM radio. It's also about the size of a credit card, only thicker.

In addition, the just-on-the-market Zen Micro 5-GB (\$249) comes in a rainbow of colors and features easy-to-manage controls, a personal organizer and an FM radio (with a record feature), all in a player that easily fits into your back pocket.

When I hear about these machines and then play with them, it's all I can do but shake my head like an old-timer and wonder aloud how 1,000 45s could not only be accessible in nanoseconds, but also how all that vinyl could fit in your shirt pocket.

Happy listening and, more importantly, happy holidays.

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