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BRIDGESTONE E6 BALLS

Since the days of balata and Surlyn back in the 1980s, golf balls have become more and more alike across the board, no matter the price point or manufacturer. Right? Well, yeah, especially when you view the ball market through the lens of a mid-handicapper. How much difference can this construction or that cover or whatever dimple pattern make to the average player?

Uh, lots, it appears, and it'll only take one round with the brand new Bridgestone e6 Speed or Soft balls to convince you. While the B330 and B330S are picking up a lot of tour pro play (including Tiger Woods), the new e6 is a different animal — indeed “longer and straighter,” as their marketing motto purports. Compared to what, you ask? How about the flagship, high-end ball from the bestselling brand in the world, the one that starts with a “T”? Yep, at least according to *Golf Tips*' testing over a couple rounds. Both versions of the new e6 took us at least eight to 10 yards

further down the fairway. What were 5-iron approaches turned into 7-irons; where we may have pulled a 3-metal on a par-5 in the past was now hybrid territory. And the Speed ball didn't disappoint around the greens, either, offering impressive feel and spin from 100 yards in. Then, when we switched to the yellow version of the e6 Soft, we noticed a bump in touch on the short ones, and, surprisingly, no loss of carry on the full shots, including drives. And there's no way we could put too much bend in the ball with either the Speed or the Soft, which tells us that Bridgestone's claim that they are “31 percent” more accurate than the competition isn't far off the mark. Same with their “nine yards longer” assertion. So, how did Bridgestone come up with this new pair of e6s, which feature new “Delta Dimple” technology to cut



down air resistance?

According to a press release they were “Developed using data gathered from more than two million in-person and online ball fitting sessions” — an outgrowth of their industry-leading “proprietary Ball Fitting system” introduced back in 2007. Count us among the early converts.

\$28.99 per dozen | www.bridgestonegolf.com

SHOE TIPS

Here's another simple and unique item that we can't believe hasn't hit the market before. You know your friendly neighborhood pro is always harping on the “no more than two swing thoughts at a time” mantra? Well, not only is it good advice, you can now drill it into your skull simply by looking at the tips

of your shoes as you move through your pre-shot routine on the course or practice range. Shoe Tips is a decidedly low-tech swing aid that involves no mechanics at all beyond tying two of 18 small, oblong plastic tags — each displaying one or two swing-thought or trigger words — into your shoelaces

using the small, provided holder. Our favorite right now is the head-clearing combination of “Turn” and “Breathe/Focus,” but you'll find your own apt combo, from “Back and True” to “Soft Hands” to “Alignment,” “Balance,” “Tempo,” “Commit/Trust” ... you get the (mental) picture. It's like a visual voice to back up your inner one. Who cares if your buddies give you a ration for putting Shoe Tips into action — you'll pay them back by taking their money at the end of the round, and writing down some of your lowest scores yet. The USGA has ruled that they're fine for casual play, but if you're posting a score for handicap purposes or in hardcore competition, you can still have them with you and visible by attaching them to your bag instead (a stretchable loop is provided for that purpose).

\$21.95 | www.shoetipsgolf.com



POWERPLANE

That big ol' thing at the top of it all — your head — is perhaps the most overlooked part of the human body when it comes to learning the golf swing. We all want to mimic the moves of top pros from Jason Day to Lydia Ko, paying a lot of attention to body turn, swing plane, etc., but often we ignore the one trait all the greats share: A head that stays relatively stable from address to follow-through, especially back-and-forth and side-to-side (everybody's head moves slightly up and down; just watch classic Tiger for proof). Tour Pro Tech's PowerPlane is a compact, easy-to-use training aid that uses high-precision ultrasonics technology (designed by an M.I.T. engineer with input from PGA pros) to help golfers correct the majority of common swing flaws simply by getting the feel of what a stable head really means. It automatically positions a “PowerPlane Zone,” two invisible vertical planes, around a golfer's head. If it moves out of the zone anytime during their swing until impact, the device alerts them with a beep at that

moment — instant feedback, instant learning. After a few trial run swings, the *Golf Tips* tester was able to adjust his takeaway, turn, transition and weight shift to keep the beep at bay, which resulted in much better ball contact on full swings. Even better, PowerPlane has settings for chip/pitch shots and putting, and the concept is the same: less head movement on those vertical planes leads to a solid, repeating swing and stroke. So how does it work? First you pull apart the main part of the PowerPlane, which is placed on the ground or practice mat, parallel with your target line and about a foot or so from the ball — after you've pulled the small “Sonic Sensor” from a compartment on the bottom of the unit, turned it on and clipped it to the target side of your hat, just above the ear. Then you're



ready to go: Set up over the ball, look at the target, look back at the ball, and swing. If you've selected the proper setting and the unit's lighted panel displays the proper cues — a green arrow pointing to your target and a series of four LEDs signaling when it's time to pull the trigger — you'll get used to the training sequence quickly and get the hang of both swinging within yourself (go too hard and the hat-mounted sensor is likely to move out of position or even fall off) and keeping your head “still” in the right way. PowerPlane is lightweight yet sturdy and slides right into your golf bag so it's right there any time you get the urge to practice ... and get your head straight.

\$189.00 | www.powerplanegolf.net

RETEE

This cool little product comes straight from the “why didn't I think of that?” category: A sturdy, two-pronged ballmark repair tool that not only includes a magnetic ballmarker, but a pencil sharpener. Talk about simple genius: Instead of filling your bag with busted scoring pencils, just run the latest, tipless graphite tool through the sharpener and it's ready to mark down those birdies again (that's the only score you need to remember,

right?). But wait, there's more ... it'll also sharpen those classic wood tees, too, a big plus especially if you're still old school and want to do keep those trusty spikes in shape, save a tree or two by not having to reload your supply as soon, and turn the long ones into usable short ones when you need to put a 3-metal, hybrid or iron into tee box service. The included ball marker comes in a variety of themes from “No. 1 Dad” to “I Love Golf.” What a fun way to sharpen your game.

\$13.99 | www.reteegolf.com

