

HOLE in ONE

CLASSIC DESIGN AND CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY MAKE TOP-END GOLF CLUBS MODERN MARVELS OF PRECISION. **MERAJ SHAH** LISTS THE TOP NOTCHERS.

One of the earliest advice I ever got from my dad on the golf course was never to fret about my old clubs while other kids played with fancy shiny irons. "Clubs are only as good as your swing, and you can hit these better than anything your friends are playing with," he said. The dull grey, hand-me-down Robert Forgan clubs were narrow blades and were nothing much to look at. But that was back in the days when you couldn't judge a book by its cover. My clubs were tough to hit but offered superb ball control. And, when I did manage to get my timing right, the ball took off flush and stayed hit. With wound leather grips they looked classic all right but only to the purist. A fading etching on the back of the clubface was possibly the only proof that they had been hand forged in Japan.

One of the most enduring traditions in golf has been the unrivalled skill of Japanese club makers at hand-forging clubs. Himeji, a small town in Japan, finds more mention in history books than it does in current affairs. It was here that craftsmen in the last century pounded steel into samurai swords, producing some of the finest blades ever known. It is a different kind of blade that is made here by Katsuhiko Miura and his family-owned Miura Golf for the last fifty years. Miura forges golf clubs from steel that is heated and pounded into shape, and smoothed



HOTLIST

Driving distances are going up like never before, as is the quality of play—among professionals and amateurs alike—and the reason is largely because of innovations and strides in equipment manufacturing technology. Here's our hotlist of clubs that rocked the shelves in 2009.

DRIVERS

PING—Rapture V2 (Rs 26,900)

TITLEIST—909D2/909D3

(Rs 23,500)

TAYLORMADE—R9 (Rs 20,000)

FAIRWAY WOODS

TITLEIST—909D2/909F2/F3

(Rs 11,500)

CLEVELAND—Launcher (Rs 9500)

PING—G10 (Rs 13,900)

HYBRIDS

PING—G10 (Rs 10,900)

TAYLORMADE—Burner Rescue

(Rs 8,500)

ADAMS—Idea Tech A4/A40S

(Rs 8,500)

IRONS

Player's Irons: TITLEIST—AP 2 (Rs 59000-69000)

Game Improvement Irons: CALL-

AWAY—X 22 Tour (Rs 75000)

Super Game Improvement Irons:

PING—Rapture V2 (Rs 74,500-

85,500)

WEDGES

TITLEIST—Vokey Design Spin

Milled (Rs 6500)

CLEVELAND—CG14 (Rs 6,000)

BOBBY JONES—Pelz Wedge

(Rs 7,500)

PUTERS

TITLEIST—Cameron Studio

Select (Rs 16,800)

PING—IWI Anser

(Rs 10,900)

ODYSSEY—Black Series 1

#6 (Rs 13,500)

and finished on grinding wheels. While many golf equipment manufacturers create oversized, mass-produced clubheads by pouring metal into casts, Miura's 14-step forging process does not lend itself to mass production and remains an anomaly.

Interestingly, a number of top professional golfers around the world actually insist on their clubs being forged in Japan by companies such as Miura and then rebranded with their equipment sponsor company logos. PGA & European Tour stars Retief Goosen and José María Olazábal have used Miura clubs while winning major championships. Honma, another iconic Japanese clubmaker, is well known for its exquisite craftsmanship and the melding of precious metals in golf clubs which make each set exclusive and unique. The Honma Beres 5- and 7- series clubs have 24-karat gold and platinum embellishments which, not surprisingly, make them the world's most expensive golf clubs in production. A 14 clubs (irons, woods and putter) set costs between \$32,000 (Rs 15.6 lakh) and \$52,000 (Rs 25.4 lakh) depending on how much gold and platinum detailing you want on each club. If you are lucky, and rich enough, to get your own set of Honmas, you join an exclusive club that includes the King of Brunei, the Prince of Monaco, Jack Nicholson, Danny DeVito and, closer home, Pawan Munjal.

High-end golf clubs today are products of an astonishing mix of tradition and technology mirroring the evolutionary, yet old-school, character of the game itself. Their design is as much about form as it is about utility. In the final analysis, they should inspire you to become an even better golfer. After all, if you can afford to buy a Stradivarius, you might as well be a violinist of some note. Invest in good swing instruction and put in a few hours of practice every week. The clubs are, after all, only as good as your last shot. 🍀

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Miura's forged irons are hand-crafted masterpieces and retail for about \$2000 for a set of nine clubs





Ball markers

It's true that a ball marker may not figure as a significant piece of golf equipment. At the same time, it's perhaps the one thing that lends itself completely to personalisation and a player's creativity. Most golf professionals carry distinct markers that pronounce individual style. Shano Golf's markers are creations in their own right, crafted from semi-precious metals and stones.

Green Clover Ball Mark-\$130 (Rs 6,370), Blue Sapphire Celtic Triple Ball Mark-\$110 (Rs 5,390); Rope Edge Mother of Pearl Ball Mark-\$90 (Rs 4,410).

Classic Vogel Golf Shoes

The classic leather golf shoe can't be found on the shelves anymore simply because it's too expensive to make and sell. But if you still have a yen for the real thing and happen to be in New York, then pay a visit to E. Vogel's shop on Howard Street. Go through great rolls of hides imported from Europe that vary from calfskin to more exotic (and much more expensive) ostrich, alligator and lizard to select the leather for your custom made shoe. The shoes are crafted by hand and take three months to produce. The cost for the initial pair is \$1,300 (Rs 63,000) but the shop will store a model of your feet so that subsequent pairs cost \$450 (Rs 22,000). Your initials are hand-etched on the inside of the tongue.



Louis Vuitton Damier Geant Golf Bag

LV screams high-fashion, if you ignore the monogram overload. And the Damier Geant Golf Bag is no exception to this rule. The bag, which can hold a full set of clubs, is a virtual holdall. It has tons of pockets for gear and features a cowhide base and handle, a padded canvas-and-cowhide shoulder strap, a travel cover and six compartments for all your other trinkets. Pulling along a bag like this also makes you look super-rich, considering that at \$ 9750 (Rs 5.25 lakh) it's in a league of its own.



Hummer H2 Golf Cart

Okay, so Hummers are out. Even those who didn't give two hoots about the SUV's fuel costs have been forced to hide their Humvee behind its gigantic carbon footprint. But there is a place where you can indulge your love for the guzzler with no guilt—the golf course, and on the Hummer H2 golf cart. Based on the original Humvee, the electric cart is built over a 3.75 hp aluminium club car chassis. Capable of speeds up to 20 mph, it includes headlights, turn signals and brake lights. The cart also includes a cooler under the hood, storage under the seat, a tinted windshield, fog lights, glove boxes, a fold-down tailgate and, of course, drink holders. It's stamped with H2 logos on the sides and rear bumper and has another pair of logos embroidered into the seats. It even has the option of a carbon fibre or wood grain dashboard. At \$38,000 (Rs 18.5 lakh), it is the most expensive golf cart in the world. The fact that you don't need gas can help salve the conscience.

