

# THE HACKER

## # 4 (March 2010) Stop flapping....

I don't know what it is about us golfers, but despite being an eclectic bunch of intellectuals - from plumbers to brain surgeons; chippies to princes - it seems the average golfer has a uniform disregard for engineers & designers. Now you may never have thought about it, but when you have been persuaded by the shop pro to chip and pin away the best part of £500 on a new set of clubs, you are leaving the shop with some very advanced pieces of designer engineering. Nowadays these aren't just whittled rods of hickory with a paddle stuck on the end. Oh no, these little beauties have had every atom of every millimetre tweaked, pushed, teased, calibrated and tested. Every curve, cavity and groove has been put through computer analysis to ensure ultimate aerodynamic performance. On top of that, as every couple across the world searches blindly for the G spot, the designers have given us a sweet spot that we surely couldn't miss after ten pints and a whiskey chaser. Even the shafts have put been through their paces, perfected for weight, length, torque, flex and kick not to mention a mind numbing array of materials such as carbon stickwood, graphite, grafalloy and tempered iron to name but a few. These materials come with engineering promises right up their with the best - "stores more energy during the downswing and releases the energy just before impact while maintaining stability..."

Even the ball has been aerodynamically advanced with a precise pattern of dimples that act as turbulators to induce turbulence in the layer of air next to the ball thus reducing long term drag. So let us look at the big picture. In our hands we hold a perfectly weighted instrument which comes into contact with the ball for an incredibly miniscule 450 millionths of a second. The engineered shape of the club then allows the ball to roll up its face, its grooves helping the ball to spin as well as ensuring the moisture in the grass is taken away from the face (in the same way that car tyres channel off the rain) so that the ball doesn't 'skid'. If you have just swung a pitching wedge then the ball will be exploding off the face revolving at 6000 RPM. All this, because of the amazing advances in science, engineering and manufacturing. And yet, despite all the help that the hard earned money has provided at our fingertips we still obviously don't believe the makers have a clue. For instead of letting the instrument purr through the air and launch our handicaps safely into the far distance - we try to smack the living daylights out of the ball and rip the balata cover from its core. Primeval instinct kicks in - the 5 iron is swung like a caveman's club and it is all we can do to refrain from screaming at the same time.

And yet do you think that people held the same disdain for the designers of say, the Concorde? Can you imagine all the suited, booted and fine frocked passengers of the inaugural flight sitting tentatively in their seats as the engines started to build power? Then as the aircraft launched down the runway, did they all crane their necks forward, just as they felt the iconic pointed nose struggle to lift hesitantly from the tarmac before deciding the engineers were a bunch of charlatans and in unison all thrust out their arms and start flapping wildly to get that bird off the ground?

Or what of the purchasers of the first motor cars to roll off the assembly lines staring in disbelief as they climbed in for the first time to find there was no hole cut in the floor so that they could stick out their legs and get that baby up to 20 miles an hour!

Now having made this hardly earth shattering realisation of the untrusting golfer and his cynicism toward our techie brethren I was surprised when I had a real eureka moment. I have for many years stood in disbelief and irritation on trains and buses within earshot of someone yelling down their mobile phone to someone in New Delhi, Guang Zhou or other such far flung clime. Why I wondered had man bothered to push human endeavour to the limit and create a network of satellites 36,000 kilometres up in the celestial heavens to provide a microwave radio relay? The man on the street doesn't believe a word of it and instead they'll just shout their instructions into the small device in the palm of their hand. They are of course utterly convinced that this is the only reason the person on the other end of the call can hear them; never the science, never the clever engineer. But of course it's more selective than the 'man on the street', I can whittle it down much better than that - in fact the next time I hear someone shouting into their handset, instead of getting irate I'll just smile and wonder what their swing is like....