



by Brian Wilkes
Brian's Custom Clubs

FROM THE Club FITTING BENCH

New Research Shows Shorter Driver Is Best

Pro Shops and golf equipment stores are full of drivers that range in length from 45.5 to 46 inches. Even ladies drivers are this long. One of the enduring myths in the golf club industry is that a driver with a longer shaft will hit the ball farther. It's true that *some* golfers will hit farther with a longer club *some* of the time, all other things being equal. But it is also true that many golfers do not benefit at all from the longer driver.

New evidence of this was recently published in *Flagstick Magazine*, an Ottawa-based publication concerning golf in Ontario and adjacent Quebec (*Flagstick.com*, July, 2013 issue). The research was conducted by club fitter Don Irving, owner of Artisan Golf in Ottawa, using a Trackman launch monitor in an indoor setting.

Irving's research was focused on addressing the effect of club length on club head speed, distance, power transfer and dispersion or accuracy. He grouped players into handicap categories. One group had a handicap range of 0-8, another 9-16, a third 16-23, and a fourth group 24-32. Just to be clear, a 16 handicap would, on average, play a round in 88 strokes. Most occasional golfers, and some serious golfers, score well above this number. Also note that the 0-8 handicappers are therefore very good golfers, generally with consistent swings, but

not necessarily with great distance.

Each group hit shots with drivers that measured 43, 44, 45 and 46 inches. The results are instructive. Key observations include:

a. Club head speed increased by an average of 3.5 miles per hour (mph) for the 46 inch driver more than the 43 inch driver.

b. Distance gained could be offset with reduced accuracy; some low handicappers gained distance with longer drivers, while others lost distance.

c. The shorter drivers (43 & 44 inches) showed 80-93% of players across all handicap groups had the best power transfer from the club head to the ball. There was no doubt that the shorter drivers enabled better contact with the ball.

d. From the data collected, although longer drivers tend to produce more club head speed, on average they do not produce significantly longer drives. Of course, there were individual exceptions.

e. Across the four handicap groups, the shorter drivers showed the best dispersion patterns.

Overall, Irving came to the following conclusions:

1. In the 0-8 handicap group, 60% did best with the 43/44 inch drivers, 40% with the 45 inch driver, while 0% with the 46 inch driver.

2. In the 9-15 handicap group, 76.5% did best with the 43/44 inch drivers, 17.6% with the 45 inch driver, and 5.8% with the 46 inch driver.

3. In the 16-23 handicap group, 55.6% did best with the 43/44 inch drivers, 22.2% with the 45 inch driver, and 22.2% with the 46 inch driver.

4. In the 24-32 handicap group, 60% did best with the 43/44 inch drivers, 26.7% with the 45 inch driver, and 13.3% with the 46 inch driver.

What are the take-away messages from all this? We are left wondering why the shelves are full of drivers with lengths that are proven to give the user the least chance of success. To us, this is just bizarre. From Don Irving's results, it is also clear that a lot depends on individual golfers, their skill levels and ball striking tendencies. As we have said in the past, the key is to find the playing length that gives each player the best chance of making an on-centre hit. The data generated by Irving's research shows that this chance improves quite a lot with a shorter driver, not a longer one.

If you are experiencing frustration with your driver, come see us to analyze the problem. Making it shorter is only one option, but it may be a fairly quick fix for you. Caution is required however, since making the driver shorter also lightens its swingweight, so this needs to be adjusted close to the original. Taming the recalcitrant driver is what we do. Give us a call.

For custom repairs or custom fitting, Brian Wilkes can be reached at brian@briansclubs.com, by telephone at 250-516-3392, or you can visit his website at www.briansclubs.com.