

Golfweek®

FOR YOUR GAME

Club fitting becomes a Cool process

By James Achenbach

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

Mark Timms is into names. In 2000, he founded Hot Stix, the custom fitting and clubmaking shop that had a huge impact on the golf industry. Now he has launched Cool Clubs.

Just like that, he went from Hot to Cool.

In early 2006, Timms left Scottsdale-based Hot Stix after a series of business disagreements with some of his partners. After establishing Cool Clubs in fall 2007, he is again propelling Scottsdale into the epicenter of the fitting revolution.

Some have described Cool Clubs as Hot Stix on steroids. In truth, though, both have a similar mission: Take the latest golf club technologies and apply them during highly detailed and intense fitting sessions. The goal, of course, is to find precisely the right clubs for everyone. Customers range from touring pros to avid amateurs of various skill levels.

Thanks to Hot Stix, Timms, an opinionated man who has ruffled a few golf feathers with his version of the plain truth, has emerged as a leading figure in the fitting movement.

Thus it was fairly easy for him and partner Mark Cowell, former president of Williams-Sonoma, to round up a group of investors that included the likes of financial baron Charles Schwab, Wells Fargo chairman Dick Kovacevich, Siebel Systems founder Tom Siebel, former Ryder Cup captain Lanny Wadkins, former San Francisco Giants owner Bob Lurie and current Cincinnati Reds CEO Robert Castellini.

Golf's version of the home run, perhaps.

"I met Mark when I went down to Scottsdale with George Roberts (another Cool Clubs investor and the R in the Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. financial juggernaut)," Cowell said. "We were amazed at all the technology and the high end approach to fitting."

"(PGA Tour commissioner) Tim Finchem and (president of CBS News and Sports) Sean McManus will be in the shop (during the FBR



PHOTOS COURTESY COOL CLUBS

Cool Clubs offers fitting sessions for any club – the putting analysis system (below) features eight cameras for a video motion breakdown.



Open) to get fit."

Cool Clubs is a futuristic shop with chrome and metal everywhere. Even the workbenches are metal. There is no wood here – unless you count the modern metalwood, which, as golfers know, is mostly titanium.

Fitting is the keyword here. Choices among the one-hour fitting sessions include the driver (\$100); fairway woods and hybrids, called the long game (\$100); putter (\$100); gap fitting (\$100); and irons (\$150).

The irons session includes an adjustment of the loft and lie of each customer's irons. The gap fitting session, which measures the gaps between clubs in a player's set, requires a golfer to hit 100 or so balls.

It is the putting, however, that really caught my attention. Most players go their entire golf lives without a putter fitting or, for that matter, without much putting instruction. Timms believes fervently the two go hand-in-hand.

"My goal, really, is to help golfers putt better, not necessarily to sell putters," Timms said. "Over half the people we see have the right type of putter. We just need to modify the length, loft or lie, or maybe we need to change their stance or setup."

Timms has a putting analysis system that includes eight cameras. "They have to be lined up perfectly," he said. "What we provide is a

combination of motion analysis and video.

"When golfers see how the ball comes off the putter, it's an eye-opener for most of them. In fact, most have never even seen their setup or their stroke. A guy might hit his putts on the toe every time and not even know it. He might not have any idea where his (putter head) path goes."

Clubs for most major manufacturers can be found at Cool Clubs. Timms doesn't hide any secrets when it comes to golf clubs.

>> For example, he looks at the new interchangeable heads and shafts and marvels at the array of products from Callaway. "I think this is a great thing,"

he said. "Why? Because it's the ultimate demo club situation.

You mess around with a bunch of different combinations. When you find the right one, you take it home. This takes demo clubs to the next level."

>> Timms looks at what he calls "specialty items" and smiles. "I can't even tell you from one year


Mark Timms

to the next exactly what clubs will be in here, but right now these Tour Edge Exotics fairway woods are unbelievable. They are fabulous."

>> Among drivers, he said the TaylorMade Burner has scorched the competition: "We have sold more of those than all our other drivers combined."

>> Longer drivers, Timms maintains, are not for everyone. "The trend in drivers is to go longer with lighter shafts," he said, "but a lot of times we will go shorter. An (extra) inch equates to probably 6 yards, but you hit it off-center and lose maybe 25 yards. Playing golf is not a long-drive contest; you have to hit 14 tee shots."

Timms, 43, got his start in the golf business in 1990 when he co-founded Custom Clubs of Connecticut in Stamford, Conn. Ten years later, he moved to Scottsdale. In the handful of months that Cool Clubs has been open, Timms intentionally has "done no marketing at all, just relying on word of mouth."

The word is getting around, and the early reviews have been positive.

"One thing hasn't changed," Timms said.

"I love listening to the golfers who come back here with stories about how they shot their lowest score or did something they had never done before."

So the official motto of his new business is simply, "Play Better Golf."

That's Cool.

COOL CLUBS