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HOT LIST 2009 | GOLF BALLS



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CompuGolf and SwingModel conducted research and provided data and analysis for this article...

 Just like a properly fit set of woods and irons, a ball that matches your needs and skill level can help you get the most out of your game. We've done the research (including player, robot and air-cannon testing) and determined the best balls available. Now it's your turn to find the one on our list that works for you.

The simplicity of a golf ball's outward appearance belies the subtlety and variety of its performance characteristics. It might be the least thoughtfully considered purchase, but it's probably the smartest -- and thriftiest -- way to improve your game.

That's what they're seeing at places like **CompuGolf, a Dallas-based club fitting center** that is using air-cannon tests to create profiles of all golf balls to match the right ball to the right swing. "We've seen improvement of as much as 10 yards because of proper ball selection in our fitting sessions," says leading golf-biomechanics **expert Ralph Mann, developer of SwingModel**, the component-based fitting system used at CompuGolf. "It's a simple process of knowing what you have and what you need."

We were no less precise in our selection of the 28 balls on this year's Hot List. They comprise less than a third of the golf-ball market, and we believe the balls profiled on the following pages represent a group that will help the greatest number of golfers of all ability levels and budgetary needs.

We sought the input of golf retailers, scientists and especially our panel of 22 players during testing at Ginn Reunion Resort in Reunion, Fla. To prevent any bias, we blacked out the logos of every ball and numbered them so players wouldn't know which models they were hitting. (*Pictured above are some of the balls we tested.*)

We know that golf-ball fitting is an individualized process. That's why our Hot List isn't a simple ranking of how far each ball goes when hit by a robot. We believe each of these 28 balls is a superior product. But we don't think any one player could use any of these balls and play his or her best. That's why a serious equipment fitting always should include the ball. So read over these pages and get to work on improving your game in the least expensive way possible -- sound advice in any economy.



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Finding The Right Ball For You

Playing the right golf ball is just as important as – and possibly even more than – being fit for any club in your bag.

Deciding on which ball, however, isn't easy. The research company Golf Datatech tracks no fewer than 83 models of golf balls. **And according to testing done by CompuGolf**, a custom-fitting center in Dallas, you can routinely have 2 degrees of launch-angle difference between two balls in the same company's line at high speeds.

For those looking for a starting point, try to identify the problem you want solved (higher launch off the tee, for example), the type of "feel" you desire and your ideal trajectory. The answer is different for everyone, but by focusing on one or two characteristics, you can narrow your choices