

Veneer vs Callaway – blind test (6/28/00)

Complete Game Feel and Performance

Purpose

Setup

Method

Background

Results

Miscellaneous

Purpose: To compare the overall playability, particularly into the green, of the V-1 Prototype versus Callaway Red and Callaway Blue golf balls.

Set-up:

Ball type	V-1 Prototype, Callaway Red, Callaway Blue
Player pool	Phil Mickelson
Golf Clubs	Wedges, 8-iron, 7-iron, 5-iron, driver
Test location	Acushnet Test Facility, Oceanside

DX-1008

Method:

All of the balls were unmarked, painted white and encoded with a single letter (A, B, or C). Testing began with greenside play, from as close as 30 yards to the pin. Each shot type was hit a number of times with each ball type. Observations and discussion of feel and performance, including trajectory, spin, stopping power, were noted. In addition to wedge play, short iron and mid iron shots were played into the green and tee shots were hit both with a headwind and tailwind.

Background:

When discussing play into the green, "stopping the ball close to the hole," Phil stated that the more important part of that is stopping the ball. To him, if he cannot stop the ball, worrying about getting it close is pointless. He told me that his bread and butter, his money shot, hinges on the fact that the cover of the ball must grip the clubface. The ball has to get into the grooves so he can have total control on the spin and direction of the shot.

Results:

20-40 yards, LW:

The performance and feel of both the Blue and Veneer was what Phil was looking for. It was neck and neck until he hit from the deep rough when he declared that the Veneer prototype felt like ~~the Blue~~ and the Blue ball felt like a ball that was trying to ~~be the Veneer~~. They both felt very good, it was a draw. The Red ball simply did not make the grade for greenside play - "it is not what I want." When chipping from a perfect lie it was fine, but any variable lie it was difficult to control spin or trajectory.

Initially, the Blue had the optimal launch and spin combination that Phil desires for this shot (30 - 40 yards to the pin, in the fairway). The Red ball was good from a perfect lie and when well struck, but from a fluffy lie (or any imperfect lie or contact) the ball jumped off the face - it launch too high and did not have enough spin, Phil lost control of these shots. The Veneer ball

spun the same as the Blue, it too felt soft, but it felt as if it was a solid ball with a soft cover and the Blue ball felt like [REDACTED]

He then hit additional shots, from the fairway, first cut and second cut of rough: The Blue ball still feels and performs similar to [REDACTED]. It has the ideal spin and trajectory. The Veneer prototype performed as well as the Blue, and did not necessarily feel worse, but Phil felt as if he was hitting a "bigger ball." As he hit from the deeper rough he took a strong liking to the Veneer prototype. Still couldn't tell much difference in feel, but the Blue ball launched a little too high out of the deep rough. The Veneer ball was more "efficient," meaning it stayed lower and bit well even out of an against-the-grain-deep-rough shot. The Red was not too bad, but was not what Phil wanted.

100 yards, LW and 55° Vokey:

Fairway: The Red ball felt better with a full shot; based on his feel greenside, he expected a harder feel. Veneer and Blue were definitely hard to tell apart. The Red ball still launches higher and it feels like it scoots left. On solid shots the Red is OK, but his mishits slide short left. Phil said, "The performance of the [Red] is suspect to the lie. I'll be tentative with that ball on a sketchy lie out of the rough or even in the fairway. With the [Veneer] and [Blue] I feel like I can be aggressive - I can go in after it and it will come off the face with the right amount of spin."
Greenside: Veneer and Blue had similar ball flight into the green. These balls would come in fairly steep, hit and 1-hop, and spin back 4-7 feet. The Red balls came in notably steeper, and with less spin. These balls dropped in and stopped where they hit. (This was the case for both clubs.)

150 yards, normal 8-iron:

Fairway: Phil stated that it appeared as if the Veneer ball stayed in the air longer, that it was coming down at a slower rate - as if it is hanging a little bit longer. This was neither desirable nor objectionable, just different. (I think that this distance is where the solid vs wound flight characteristics begin to appear.) The Red ball flew well from here, even on the mishits; it is starting to feel more "normal," and doesn't feel as comparably hard as it did around the green. The magnitude of difference between the Red balls and either the Veneer or Blue has gotten smaller, the "kick" in launch is not as dramatic and the feel is getting closer to the softer balls.
Greenside: The Blue balls hit and rolled about 4-6 feet. The Veneer balls hit and sat. The Red balls fell in shorter than the other two, hit and sat. (There was a considerably wider dispersion in the land area for the Red balls because Phil was intentionally striking them poorly to examine feel and launch variability from this distance.)

150 yards, easy 7-iron:

Fairway: The Blue ball has a "looseness" in the flight the Veneer ball is less likely to exhibit. It is as if it oscillates during ascent, looks like it's a cut then it'll draw. The Veneer ball holds the line tighter and has a more penetrating flight. Phil had more confidence in the performance of the Veneer ball than the Blue ball due to the odd flight. Also, he had all but written off the Red ball, but did hit several shots with it if asked. It was starting to feel more like the other test balls, it still felt harder when he mis-struck a ball, but he seemed to be suspicious of it on account of the earlier shots. Veneer and Blue once again had very similar feel, but the more reliable flight of Veneer gave it an edge in performance.

Greenside: The flight into the green with Veneer and Blue looked very similar - they came in shallower than with the 8-iron, and released a couple of yards toward the pin.

180 yards, knock-down 4-iron:

Fairway: Only a few shots with each ball type were hit from here. (This was more of a disaster check for feel off the longer irons, as it is an odd yardage to hit into a green.) Phil hit these shots a variety of ways, mostly knocked-down and releasing to the pin - much like the type of shot he is expecting to play in the British Open. The "looseness" in the flight of the Blue that Phil started to

see with shorter shots was magnified with this shot. He was uneasy about the flight of that ball. He said that the feel was fine, as good as would expect from his ball.

Greenside: The balls all came in low and released several yards. There was nothing really distinctive about angle of descent, and the shot dispersion was high (due to the variety of shots Phil chose to hit) - however the Reds seemed to be a little longer.

Driver, headwind:

Phil is looking for maximum allowable distance, without selling-out the ability to cut or turn-over shots of the tee.

The Veneer ball was straighter, with less dispersion than the other balls. It took Phil about three drives with each ball type to completely dismiss the Red, and the performance with the Blue was undesirable due to the increased penalty on mishits. The Blue ball also seemed to have more than the ideal amount of spin. The Veneer prototype was consistently longer into the wind - about 10 yards or so longer than anything else was.

Once the identity of the balls was revealed, I had Phil hit the Veneer prototype against new Reds (off the shelf) [redacted]. The [redacted] had lower launch and higher spin - expect when he turned it over, then the spin is down. The Veneer was consistently longer into the headwind (which was steady and moderate). The straighter flight and tighter dispersion of the Veneer noted during the blind test held up against both the [redacted] and Red.

Driver, tailwind:

Phil only hit Veneer prototypes and Red balls (out of the package). He teed the ball higher, and sat back and went after these balls (the wind was steady and moderate). All of the balls were within 5 yards of one another. There was no advantage to either downwind.

Miscellaneous:

Phil's wedges have milled grooves, and are extremely aggressive (see: Phil's bread and butter shot). They're definitely toeing the 'legal' line.

After hitting the drivers into the wind, we discussed the nature of the prototypes. It took Phil about two minutes to realize that there were competitive products in the test. Eventually I told him what was what, and to confirm what we saw on the blind test, he should hit regular (off the shelf) competitive product. He had said that he had played Callaway Red recently and they weren't as good off his irons. At the time he had chalked it up to lack of play/practice. His responses during the blind test confirmed what he had noticed earlier. He did choose to hit drives head to head with the Veneer prototype and the Callaway Red balls (both with and into the wind).

Phil's more memorable quotes at the end of the blind test:

"C [Red] is the epitome of a shitty ball," said Phil after two drives. "It spins like crap around the greens. It goes short and flutters with the irons. You can have that one."

"The A [Veneer] is a frickin' awesome ball. It has a tight ball flight. Into the wind it is holding a tight flight, there's no flutter. The sauce is tremendous around the green. It flew by those other two that I hit well."

"The B [Blue] ball isn't that different, and granted that I'm not swinging the best, but the misses are just so magnified with the B ball. It flutters up and to the left. I'm not all that high on that one."

Discussion that I think needs to be addressed while actually playing golf:

"The ideal ball would be a ball that went further than the Prestige does off the driver, and reacts the same around the green. But here's the catch though.... here's the sacrifice that I'm not sure

how you would fix it and if its fixable: the driver you want to go far, but you don't want your 7-iron to stay in the air. Like the driver you can hit it and have it stay in the air and have it go as far as it can, and every now and then with the solid balls you'll find that they'll just GO, they won't come down out of the air, but you don't want that with the 7 iron - you want it to go a certain yardage."

What we were talking about is when does spin and shot shape kick in more than initial velocity? He doesn't care if the difference between a strong and easy 2-iron is 20 yards or so, but that can't happen with a the mid irons. He will lose faith in what club will get him to the pin, and that out of control feeling is, simply put, bad.