

PUTTING: DOES YOUR PERCEPTION REFLECT THE REALITY?



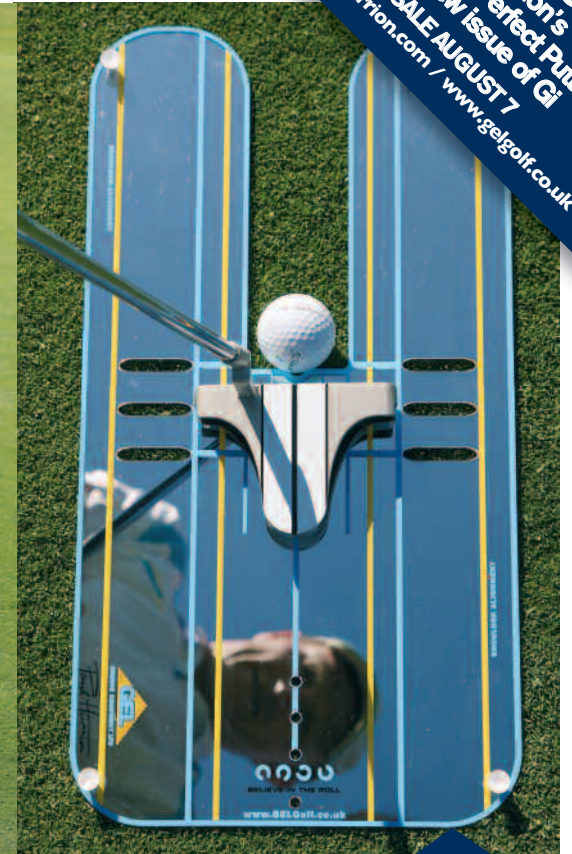
A SIMPLE ALIGNMENT
TEST WILL QUICKLY
GET YOUR AIM – AND
STROKE – BACK ON TRACK

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PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID CANNON/GETTYIMAGES.COM

Line 'em up: find a perfectly straight putt of around six feet and use a chalk line to help you place the balls in a straight line into the middle of the hole. Once you have done that, assume your set up position and take dead aim



Now here's the test: when you remove all but the middle ball and the one directly behind the hole, do you still see this as a straight putt? For the majority of golfers, some adjustment to the position of the eye-line is necessary to see a straight line



Before you can seriously set to work on the details of your set-up and stroke it's vital that you have the ability to 'see' and relate to a perfectly straight line to the hole from a short distance (and you'd be amazed at the variation in the perception of 'straight' that I find with leading tour players). So the first thing I do with a new student is challenge his/her perception of a straight line with this test from six or eight feet or so. [This is something you can do yourself on a putting green (or at home indoors) and it will very quickly reveal how closely your perception of a straight line matches up with reality.]

The first thing you have to do is find a straight putt of six feet or so and then create this dead-straight line of balls, placing one last ball directly behind the hole (as you see left). To do this it's a good idea to use a chalk line (indoors I use a builder's laser – you can pick up both of these products at a good hardware store).

Once the balls are in place, the next step is to set yourself up to the object ball (ideally within a putting mirror) and take dead aim at the second ball in the chain. The key is to focus on squaring the putter-face to that near ball and then, once you are satisfied with your aim, look up to view the line to the hole. What do you see? Does the line of balls still appear straight into the middle of the hole?

It's no exaggeration to say that nine times out of 10 the an-

swer is 'no' (and I'm including tour players in that analysis). The line of balls will either appear to curve either gently left to right or right to left into the hole – and if that's your experience then clearly your perception of what is 'straight' is at odds with the reality (because we know for a fact that the line of balls is dead straight). To correct this most fundamental of alignment issues, you will need to adjust your posture – and, most critically, your eye line – until you see that line of balls as running true into the middle of the hole. Using the putting mirror will help you to check this every time you practice.

As a result of running through this test with Rory McIlroy recently we found that he needed to add an inch to the length of his putter to accommodate for the fact that he needed to stand a little taller and bring his eye-line just inside the line to the hole for him to match perception with reality. That's where he saw the line of balls as being straight. Before, his eyes were too much over the ball, and he felt that he had to pull the ball back on line.

We are all different. Some of you, like Rory, will need to adjust your eye line inside the target line to see straight, others will need to move closer to it or even slightly outside. But one thing's for certain: matching perception with reality is the first step to better putting.

Secured in place with tee pegs, the putting mirror is a vital tool when it comes to grooving set-up habits. In this case, it will help you identify the correct alignment of the eyes in order to see the straight line to the hole

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