

Nick Bayly pays a visit to Horne Park Golf Club in Surrey, as it prepares to unveil a new **state-of-the-art putting studio**, which is being backed by Dr Paul Hurrion, one of the foremost putting experts in the game today

Golf magazines – including this one – have been banging on for years about the need for club golfers to get themselves custom-fitted whenever they are looking to buy a new set of irons or a driver, but how often has this been mentioned when it comes to putters? The piece of equipment that is responsible for the most number of shots in any round is the forgotten piece in the custom-fitting jigsaw, with most golfers happily picking one off the shelf, giving it a couple of waggles on the carpet and marching to the till.

This is perhaps not that surprising, given that most putter manufacturers only offer lip service to the concept of a true putter fitting. They might offer different head styles, shaft lengths and grips, but these adjustments bear no relation to a proper custom-fitting. A putter must match your putting style and posture – an analysis that can only be carried out with a dynamic fitting from a qualified putter fitter and instructor.

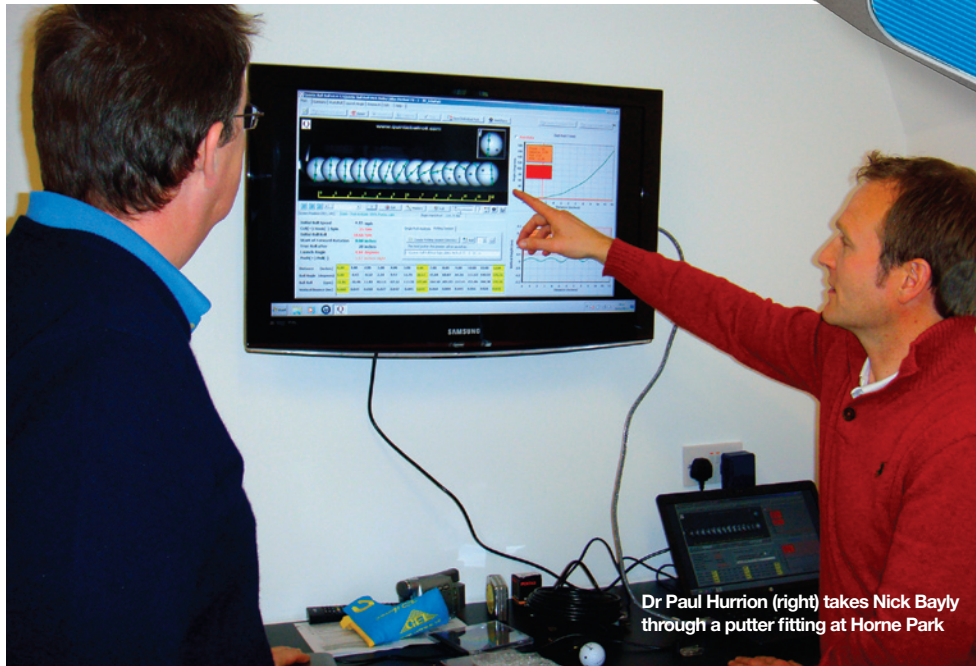
The other reason that so few people play with custom-fit putters is that putter fitting centres are few and far between. Thankfully that is beginning to change, and the new Gel Putter Fitting Centre at Horne Park Golf Club near South Godstone is one of growing number of venues that are focusing their attentions on this vital area of the game.

The putting studio officially opens its doors to all golfers on March 1, but I went along for a sneak preview last month to receive an assessment – which subsequently turned into a golf lesson – from Dr Paul Hurrion, one of the foremost experts in the dark art of putting, who has teamed up with influential putter brand GEL Golf to roll out a number of GEL Fitting Centres across the UK which use his specially-designed Quintic putting analysis system to ensure a custom-fit like no other.

The studio is being operated by the Mike Yorke Golf Academy and is staffed by experienced PGA professionals Mike Yorke and Paul Williams, both of whom have been personally trained by Dr Hurrion to offer an outstanding custom fit service and coaching experience. When booking a session, golfers can choose to custom fit an existing putter or one of the Gel putters, or any other brand, as well as receive expert putting tuition. MYGA is a dedicated coaching company that delivers quality instruction across Surrey and Sussex. It has recently launched 'Short Game Secrets', an instruction programme, lead by Paul Williams, that provides dedicated short game coaching to pupils across the region.

The studio at Horne Park is housed in a brand new purpose-built building adjacent to the clubhouse, which comprises an eight-foot golf hole located on a perfectly flat artificial surface. The Quintic Hi-Tech Putting analysis system uses high-speed cameras and a computer with biomechanical analysis software that provides the data from which a proper fitting can be achieved. While some manufacturers offer static putter fittings, measuring hand size and length of arms, the Quintic fitting is all about movement and dynamics and finding out what feels comfortable to the eye, the hand and the body as a whole – as well as what produces the best results, which after all, is the bit that matters.

The camera located at ground level



Dr Paul Hurrion (right) takes Nick Bayly through a putter fitting at Horne Park

Putting

FOR DOUGH



Having your eyes over the ball will help you to read putts more effectively

opposite the ball captures data from just the first 12-inches of the ball's journey to the hole, but this snapshot provides enough information to extrapolate results for the entire length of the putt, recording the angle of the clubface at impact (open or closed), launch angle (loft), spin, ball speed. All of which combine to tell you how far the ball missed the hole – if you needed reminding!

As well as developing the fitting centres, Dr Hurrion has also designed a range of putters that combines with Gel's unique horizontal groove technology with its own biomechanical research. The result is the Gel Paul Hurrion Signature Range, a collection of eight putters that are designed to impart

immediate topspin onto the ball, as well being perfectly weighted to match the golfer's putting stroke.

Dr Hurrion, who has a cast list of Tour pros who regularly call upon his services, including Pádraig Harrington, Rory McIlroy and Lee Westwood, explains the science behind the design of the Gel putters.

"When the golf ball is at rest on the green, it's sitting in a depression in the grass. The putter's loft is what helps lift the ball out of the depression, but the problem is that traditional steel-faced putters lift the ball too much and impart backspin, which causes the ball to initially bounce slightly higher and go offline. The groove technology is designed to help lift the ball out of the depression without imparting backspin, but forward spin to minimize bounce and keep your putts on line.

"At the GEL Fitting Centres, pros use the specially-designed tools to analyse a player's putting stroke and allow him to accurately fit each and every golfer with the most suitable putter for the individual," says Dr Hurrion. "Not only can they ascertain suitable length, loft and lie, but also blade against mallet, centre versus heel shaft and face-balanced against toe heavy."

After I had hit a series of ten eight-foot putts on the indoor carpet, Paul's instant assessment of my putting stroke was that I was standing too far away from the ball, and that the ball was so far forward in my stance that the putter face was on its way to the follow through at the point of impact – resulting in a closed face and pulls to the left. The data backed up this assertion, with marked hooked spin and a consistently high launch angle, which resulted in the ball 'bouncing' for the first 20 inches of its path, rather than rolling smoothly off the face.

Using a mirror to frame the ball, he made me take up my address position to work out where my eyes were in relation to the ball. It turned out that my eyes were focusing at least

two inches behind the ball, as well as several inches short of the ball, giving me a false impression of my true alignment – thus making even straight putts almost impossible to judge correctly.

Standing closer to the ball not only allowed the putter head to rest flatter on the ground – rather than having the toe in the air – but it also resulted in my eyes being directly over the ball, and for me at least, provided a true visual line to the hole. Not everyone sees straight from this position, which is why everyone needs to do the mirror test to record their own visual perception. Also, moving the ball more centrally in my stance meant that the putter face was now square to the target – which is essential if you want to hit the ball straight.

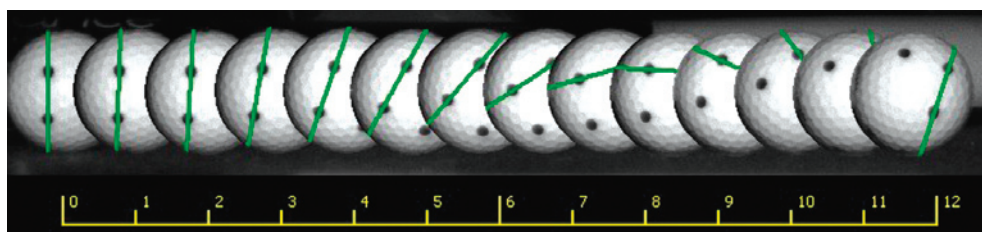
By using an inflatable ProStance balance board beneath my feet, Paul also noted that I was resting the majority of my weight on my heels rather than on the balls of my feet, and that I was placing more weight on my back foot – another factor in my poor posture that was affecting my balance through the stroke.

Lesson almost over, Paul thrust a Gel putter into my hands which could be adjusted to change shaft lengths with the simple twist of a screw, while a separate loft and lie machine meant that those elements could also be changed in an instant. Paul was able to tweak the specifications to a point where I felt comfortable at address – a 36-inch shaft no less – so that the putter head was lying flat to the ground and pointing directly to the target line and my eyes were directly over the ball. He also de-lofted the putter by 1.5 degrees from the standard three degrees in an attempt to bring down my launch angle, which would reduce the 'skid and bump' start that was characteristic of my putts.

I then hit a dozen putts using Gel's face-balanced Pondera putter, which he said would much better suit my stroke than the Anser-style model I was currently using. The results were impressive and instant. While my change of ball position had largely corrected the problem I had with squaring the putter head up, the de-lofting of the face had eradicated the bounce, while the groove design of the Gel putter created an instant forward roll, as opposed to the slight skid I had with my old putter. All of which helped to provide more consistent distance control and helped the ball to hold its line – the result being that I held more putts, sinking six out of the 10, as opposed to the two I managed with my 'old' putter. (Apparently even tour pros miss 40% of all eight-foot putts, so I didn't feel too bad).

Horne Park's pros are happy to simply adjust your own putter, or you can, of course, buy another brand – but I defy most golfers not to get better results using a Gel one designed from virtual scratch with your game in mind. Although my putting stroke had been somewhat deconstructed (i.e. torn to shreds), I came away with a renewed sense of confidence, a few key things to work on, and the knowledge that Paul had found a putter that would help me hole more putts.

An hour-long putter fitting session with one of Horne Park's qualified fitters costs £45, while a 30-minute assessment costs £25. Book by calling 01342 844443, emailing Paul at info@mikeyorkegolfacademy.co.uk or visit www.homepark.co.uk for more details. Horne Park is easily accessible by road from the M25 jtn 6 or M23 Jtn 9 or 10.



A properly fitted putter will help to generate instant roll, for straighter putts and more consistent length