

# Austin American Statesman

Tuesday, September 21, 2004

GOLF

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## High-tech club takes shot at swing flaws Austin company marketing new training device

By Doug Smith

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Remember the putter Rodney Dangerfield used in "Caddyshack"? The one with the little radar screen. It might not be so far-fetched in today's golf market, where many players resort to the latest high-tech shaft, oversized driver or space age-looking putter in their bids to knock a couple of strokes off their scores.

SmartSwing Inc., an Austin golf technology company, recently unveiled a club that is certainly high-tech and sure to raise eyebrows. The LS100 driver is not your grandfather's golf club.

SmartSwing engineers have installed computer hardware into the shaft of each LS100 driver. Every swing is recorded, whether it's during a round or on the driving range. The player then downloads the data onto a PC application that comes with the club.

The computer displays a detailed breakdown of the player's swing that can be analyzed from every angle and compared side-by-side with the chosen model of an ideal swing.

Dick Eyestone, SmartSwing's chief executive officer, said he conceived the idea for the computerized club while taking a lesson.

"I asked the pro how many people learn to swing on plane and then stay on it for the rest of their lives," Eyestone said. "The answer was that it is a miniscule percentage of golfers. That inspired me to find a unique solution to the problem. Our system empowers golfers with the information they need to alter bad habits and perfect their swing."

SmartSwing plans to implant the computer hardware into a full set of irons. For now, it is only in the LS100 driver, which sells for \$649 to \$799, depending on the software system.

The folks at SmartSwing think teaching professionals will want to use the club as a training aid. Joe Beck, director of golf at Austin Golf Club, is ready to jump on board.



Alex Gabbi, SmartSwing's chief operating officer, takes club measurements for Dallas Gremillion.



The shaft of each LS100 driver is equipped with computer hardware, which records downloadable information about each swing.

"I think this is going to start a revolution in the way people learn the game and the way they improve their game," Beck said. "Most of us are visual learners. This is just another tool the teaching pro can use, and it provides immediate, visual feedback.

"This is not a gimmick. This is a way of getting accurate facts about your swing."

Another Austin teaching pro, Barbara Puett, was a longtime student of Harvey Penick. She considers herself a traditionalist but said the SmartSwing driver "sounds like

a very interesting idea, and I would just like to see exactly how it works and see some experiments with it.

"I have always said that one of the biggest detriments to learning this game is the misconception golfers have of their swing," Puett added, "and this sounds like something that would help. However, a big thing I hear from all golfers is how little time they have to play and practice. I'm just not sure how many people have the time or commitment to do this."

Alex Gabbi, SmartSwing's chief operating officer, said the company's target customer is the beginning golfer or the mid-to-high handicapper. But he said the company also is trying to make inroads on the professional tours.

"We have some tour players interested in it as a tool to avoid getting into the little swing shifts that occur," Gabbi said.

Austin touring pro Bob Estes, known to constantly review every aspect of his game, said he had not heard of SmartSwing but was intrigued by its product.

"It sounds like something that could be an effective training tool if you can compare your swing with an earlier one," Estes said last week from San Antonio, where he was playing in the Valero Texas Open.

SmartSwing, founded in March 2003, launched the LS100 driver just a month ago, so feedback in the industry has been scarce.

For the time being, SmartSwing is demonstrating and selling the LS100 at pro tour stops and on its Web site, [smartswinggolf.com](http://smartswinggolf.com).

The Austin-based retailer Golfsmith would appear to be a natural to carry the LS100, but the club won't be in store showrooms in the near future.

"We are really not aware of this product," Golfsmith spokesman Andy Craig said, "but we carry a lot of teaching aids, and we take a look at everything that comes on the market. It's just too early to tell if we would or would not carry it. We just have to learn more about it."

### How SmartSwing works?

The SmartSwing system is designed to give beginner- to intermediate-level golfers the ability to improve their swing through high-tech feedback.

- 1 High-tech circuitry, gyroscopes and an accelerometer enable the LS100 driver to track and record up to 100 swings.
- 2 The recorded data are wirelessly downloaded to a PC through a USB device.
- 3 The 'SmartSwing Visualizer' application takes the downloaded data and provides an interface to analyze:
  - **Tempo:** Is the golfer hitting the ball at a consistent pace?
  - **Speed:** The clubhead's speed and whether the ball is being struck at the clubhead's maximum speed.
  - **Swing quality:** Compares actual swings with the golfer's ideal swing.

**Price:** \$649 to \$799, depending on the software system.

Source: SmartSwing

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