

GOLF AID

The choice of training aids which promise to cure all your golfing ills is bewildering. We put seven leading devices into the hands of real golfers to see if they really work

BY KIT ALEXANDER

PHOTOGRAPHY BOB ATKINS

All golfers love a gadget, especially if it promises to improve your game and take shots off your handicap. But there are so many theories and training aids out there that it's difficult to know where to start and which bits of kit to trust.

We've recruited seven club golfers to put a variety of training aids - from putting and chipping devices to cures for slicing and topping - through their paces.

We'll also be getting expert opinion on the theory behind them from Derek Simpson, senior teaching pro at The Belfry.

Do they deliver on manufacturers promises? Are they over-priced gimmicks? Or do the results offer great value for money? Our seven case studies reveal all...

INVESTIGATION
WHICH TRAINING AIDS ARE
WORTH SPENDING YOUR
HARD-EARNED CASH ON?



CASE STUDY NO.1

Yes! Trueplane trainer

This device claims to help train a smoother and more on-line swing with your putter. It is used by some Tour players and costs just under £40. But would it work for the TG tester?



YES! TRUEPLANE PUTTING TRAINER

£39.95 FROM WWW.PERFECTMYGOLF.CO.UK

Chris Bradshaw
Age: 20
Handicap: Scratch

What they say: The Trueplane Putting Trainer is a pioneering and innovative product that provides a great way to achieve better putting and lower scores. Trueplane is one of the most popular training devices on Tour, and has been used by more than 200 pros for over 150 wins, including six Majors. Perfect your aim, stroke path and putter alignment. Easy to use for all golfers from beginner to Tour.

Chris says:
"It looked very impressive when I first saw it and I was excited to use it because I wasn't putting very well. "It was very easy to set up and the instructions very clear. The device you put on the shaft is good as it helps to keep the putter face square to the board because the heel of my putter wasn't square to the board originally. "I've used it quite a bit on the putting green and in the house and I'm now shooting better scores. I was off 1.2 before I started using it and I'm now down to 0.3 as I'm holing more putts. "I'm feeling confident over five-footers and expect to hole them. I'm getting one or two 10-footers to drop. I know I'm not going to three-putt. "I started using it on a straight putt and then changed to putts with a bit of

break and that proved to me that I was reading the greens pretty well because you get a true stroke off the board. It helps you trust your reads if it's an area you're not happy with.

"Any golfer can benefit from this - we all want to hole more putts. I've had a couple of my friends on it and they're already looking to buy one. It's great value from the experience and the results that I've had from it."

The test
Before: Holed 6/10 putts from 6ft. Got 7/10 inside 2ft from 30ft downhill, none holed.
After: Holed 6/10 putts from 6ft. 4/10 holed and got 5/10 inside 2ft from 30ft downhill.

Belfry coach Derek says:
"I've coached Chris from the age of seven and he's always had a good short game so I was a little sceptical if this would work for him. But he needed to gain confidence in his stroke as he has a natural eye for distance control. "This aid allows you to get the blade back to the ball squarely more than most things on the market and the ball gives instant feedback on your stroke. "His stroke and confidence improved. I tried the aid and was amazed at the amount of putts I holed from 15 feet. I will be using this with my pupils, and for myself!"



CASE STUDY NO.2

ORANGE WHIP CORE MUSCLE TRAINER

£79.95 FROM WWW.PERFECTMYGOLF.CO.UK

Nathan Holt
Age: 27
Handicap: Five

What they say:
The Orange Whip is the ideal swing trainer and the perfect golf fitness tool. Simple and efficient, it is the most dynamic and practical swing aid on the market. It will improve your swing and provide a core-muscle workout focused on the golf-specific muscles. Each end has a weighting system that works together with the flexible shaft to improve swing and physical fitness.

Nathan says:
"It's very simple to use and has a good manual. It's got a couple of different functions, but the one I found it most useful for was warming up before play. "If you're at a decent level it'd be useful but if you're just starting it wouldn't be as helpful as you need to understand what you want out of it and have the basics already. "The Orange Whip sets a decent rhythm for your swing and replicating it while you're playing is quite easy. You get good feedback if you make a bad swing because the weight on the end makes it feel like a casting motion. "You can use it as a warm up before you play or have a swing with it in your garden. "I'm not sure I'm hitting the ball further but if you keep using it and using it then that six-pack and added distance might come. I will certainly consider using it in the future."

The test
Before: 6-iron spin rate of 5,303rpm which created a flight which was hard to stop quickly.
After: Upped rate to 5,576rpm (closer to the 6,000rpm optimum) for a rainbow flight.

Derek says:
"I've seen similar teaching aids before so had a few swings to gain an understanding of what this one feels like. I was impressed. "In the past I've used three clubs together to generate more feel of the downswing plane, but I believe if you're disciplined then you will see an improvement of your plane and clubhead speed with this aid." >

SLICE ELIMINATOR

£29.95 FROM WWW.PERFECTMYGOLF.CO.UK

CASE
STUDY
NO.3



Kevin Daly
Age: 60
Handicap: 16

What they say:

Swing underneath the Slice Eliminator and your 'over the top' downswing will be a thing of the past. The elevated guide bar encourages an inside-to-square-to-inside swing path and provides immediate feedback if the swing path is over the top.

Can be adjusted to demonstrate the correct swing plane and teach the proper lower body action.

Kevin says:

"My slice used to be really wicked. Sometimes I used to hit it so far right that I'd get the feeling it was going to come round and hit me in the back of the head so I really needed some help.

"The instructions were clear and it's so easy to set it up. I like the adjustability because as I feel I've been getting better I've been lowering the bar down closer to the ball.

"It's been a very good implement and I'm hitting it a lot straighter. I'm not hitting it that much further but at least my second shot is from the fairway as opposed to trying to get it back onto the fairway.



"The polystyrene cover means you can't damage your clubs which is good because when I was getting used to it at first I was hitting the bar.

"I also found it helpful as a guide for taking my club away on the right path."

The test

Before: 5/10 drives went 35 yards right and 5/10 faded.

After: 7/10 drives had slight fade and 3/10 were 15 yards right.

Derek says:

"Kevin really struggled with his out-to-in swing path. We've used headcovers and tee pegs to improve this path in the past. The sight of this teaching aid gives you the visualisation of the correct swing path and got Kevin swinging more in-to-out. I like the look of it and the flexibility allows for dual use for various teaching drills. I will be using this and would recommend it."

CASE
STUDY
NO.4

TOPPERSTOPPER

£16.95 FROM WWW.PERFECTMYGOLF.CO.UK



Judith Waterhouse
Age: 52
Handicap: 36 (beginner)

What they say:

The TopperStopper was created to promote a proper swing plane. It acts as a focus device establishing an accurate swing path to encourage the correct impact. It helps beginners address problems such as topping while advanced golfers can develop shots to use when faced with golf course obstacles.

Judith says:

"It's very simple to use. You literally just put it down and put the ball underneath it. It concentrates the mind downwards towards the bottom of the ball and

encourages you to keep the club stroking through, which is what it's supposed to do.

"The only improvement I would suggest is a mark to show where you're meant to position the ball underneath it. I seem to be getting a lot more height on my flight now."

The test

Before: 7/10 irons topped and 3/10 thinned. After: 5/10 good shots, 3/10 thinned, 2/10 fat.

Derek says:

"People are often afraid of hitting grass as they often practice from artificial tees in ranges. I was amazed at Judith's progress with it - however, if someone tops the ball you can just let them play from a tee then gradually lower it as they improve. But the TopperStopper did give Judith confidence." ▶





CHIPPING AND PUTTING BRACE

£39.95 FROM WWW.PERFECTMYGOLF.CO.UK



Richard Massey

Age: 63

Handicap: 24

What they say: Developed by top teacher Michael Breed, it keeps your forearms at a consistent distance from each other, producing 'quiet' hands in the putting and chipping strokes.

Richard says:

"When I read the theory I thought it ought to work and it does, but it's a little delicate. It's light and comfortable and you don't know it's on your arm but I don't think it's substantial enough to stand up to much wear and tear.

"Unfortunately the ball joint broke on my second use. But I did feel it was working

before this because it makes you keep your hands in the right place. My chipping was more consistent after I'd used it.

"If you paid for it and it broke after half-an-hour you wouldn't be very happy, but the idea of what it teaches you to do is good."

The test

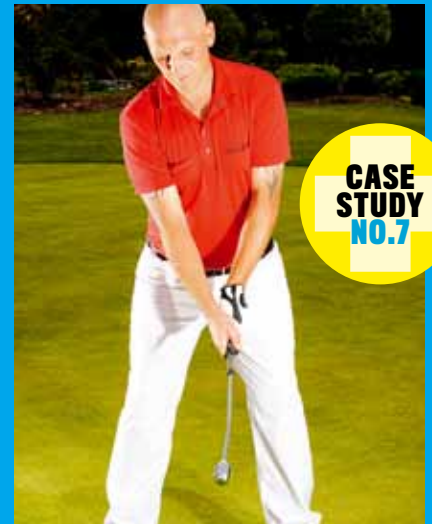
Before: 4/10 10-yard chips within 5ft and 2/10 thinned through green.

After: 5/10 within 5ft and all on green.

Derek says:

"This is a great teaching aid and is high on my list. It allows you to maintain a solid impact position and eliminates the over use of wrists and hands. It's a little complicated at first and Richard found it a little flimsy."

CASE
STUDY
NO.5



SWING AND GRIP TRAINER

£17.95 FROM WWW.PERFECTMYGOLF.CO.UK



Darren Snook

Age: 35

Handicap: Five

What they say: Perfects your grip position, swing tempo and timing. Helps groove a good swing and shows golfers how to grip correctly. Helps build golf muscles and improves a golfer's swing plane. For right-handed golfers only.

Darren says:

"From the immediate feedback I got from the first swing I knew it was going to help.

"My trouble is my hands are too 'quiet' and putting this into my hands immediately gave me the correct grip and the weight gets your hands moving to the right positions and gets you to release through the ball.

"I keep it in my bag and always have a few swings with it before I hit a ball to try and get the muscle memory working. I'm starting to get a much better launch now with my long irons. I'm hitting it further and getting more consistency.

"As long as you've got your basics correct you can just swing away with this and it gets you into the correct positions.

"I've already passed it onto a few friends and they've immediately agreed how good it is. I'd recommend it to any golfer."

The test

Before: Slightly weak grip, carrying 6-iron 163 yards.

After: Perfect grip, carrying 6-iron 169 yards.

Derek says:

"I've used this before and find it improves the motion in the swing, allows for the correct wrist cock and increases power in the downswing. Within 10 minutes of using this Darren got in a better position at the top of his swing, had improved his ball striking and played some fabulous golf.

"With the teaching grip attached it is also a great teaching aid for beginners."

■ Find out more about Advanced PGA coach Derek Simpson at www.dereksimpsongolfpro.co.uk

CASE
STUDY
NO.6



SPLASH BOARD

£15.95 FROM WWW.PERFECTMYGOLF.CO.UK



Matt Lilley

Age: 25

Handicap: Scratch

What they say: An indestructible board with graphics depicting bunker technique makes getting out of the sand and developing confidence easy. Teaches you how to use the bounce of a wedge in sand.

Matt says:

"Bunker play has always been the weakest area of my game. The lines for alignment are good for helping your swing path and followthrough and it gives a good sense of how a proper bunker shot should feel.

"You don't have to worry about the clubhead digging into the sand and hitting it fat so you can be confident and commit to a good swing. I'll definitely continue to use it."

The test

Before: 6/10 20-yard shots inside 5ft.

After: 8/10 inside 5ft.

Derek says:

"I like the idea of the line for the path and alignment. It will improve the strike, so you always get the ball out. This promotes greater confidence, which is essential."