

Davis has business down to a tee

SANTA BARBARA, CALIF.

You should know this about Paul Davis: He is obsessed with golf tees.

If Davis is eating in a restaurant, he is likely to approach a table of strangers and ask them, "Do you play golf?" If the answer is yes, Davis will hand out golf tees – his tees, naturally.

In 1997, Davis invented something called the Perfect-Tee. By 1999, he was selling it. He says his tee, made of a composite material from the aerospace industry, is indestructible. If you break one, Davis will send you two to replace it.

Davis is a one-man publicity machine. He is charming, persuasive, persistent and stunningly candid. If given the opportunity, he will address parties, groups or conventions. If the Republican national platform doesn't include an endorsement of the Perfect-Tee, it's probably not Davis's fault. I'm sure he tried. The Herrington Catalog has logged more than \$1 million in Perfect-Tee sales. A package of six 3-inch tees will cost you \$19.95. Restoration Hardware also is knocking on the \$1 million door, and the Perfect-Tee is available in many golf shops and stores.

The point is, somebody is buying these distinctive two-legged tees with black O-rings on top (the tees are available in three colors: yellow, white and lavender).

I asked Davis how many different non-wood tees he had seen. The list of competitors came right off the top of his head: Velocitee, VS Tee, Correct Tee, Launch Tee, Solplax Biodegradable

Tee, Eco Tee, Flex Tee, Forever Tee, AeroTee, Hex Tee, Rip Tips, T-Set, BackTee, Wedge Tee, Flexible-Head Tee, AimRite, Cloud T, Blast Off Tee, Anti-Slice Tee, Dynamic Tee, Direct-A-Tee, Jellyhead Tee, Consistent Tee, Evolve Tee, Trig, Golden Tee and Brush-T.

OK, tee me up, I get the message. It seems half the golfers in North America have concocted some kind of tee.

Successful in several other businesses, Davis jumped headlong into golf. Hooked by the romance and mystery of the game, he says he hasn't made a penny in profit.

I wonder who is using all these alternative tees. I play golf all over the United States, yet seldom do I see anything but wooden tees.

Davis maintains this is changing. He hints I am playing with the wrong crowd. I respond that maybe my friends can't afford \$3 golf tees.

"The Perfect-Tee lasts forever," he says emotionally. "And you always tee the ball at the proper height (because of the double-leg configuration)."

Davis is just getting warmed up. The cup on top of his tee is 18 percent larger than the cup of a standard tee. Not only is it easier to position the ball on top of the tee, he insists, but the tee also can be tilted to promote higher or lower shots.

Early versions of the Perfect-Tee sometimes acted like missiles. If the drive went 300 yards, the tee might go 30 yards. Davis solved that problem with a saw-tooth

design on the inside of the legs. This helps hold the tee in the ground.

When I first met Davis several years ago, we played golf with two-time PGA champion Paul Runyan at Annandale Golf Club in Pasadena, Calif.

Although he was 92, Runyan was an articulate and enthusiastic spokesman for the Perfect-Tee. He treated each tee like gold. When one flew into high grass on the side of an elevated tee, he insisted on finding it – even though Davis had thousands in the trunk of his car.

In addition to the 3-inch variety, the Perfect-Tee comes in lengths of 2¼ and 1½ inches. (Herrington sells a package of four 2¼-inch and two 1½-inch tees for \$15.95.)

In my bogey-filled world, the 1.5-inch tee is the big surprise. It is much better than a broken wooden tee on par-3 holes – I never have been fond of using a splintered tee, or placing it in my pocket.

"More than 60 percent of the people who visit our Web site (www.perfecttee.com) end up buying," Davis says. "We have thousands of testimonials from golfers, which to me is the ultimate tribute."

Does this mean the Perfect-Tee is truly perfect?

"Let's put it this way," Davis answers. "It inspires confidence."

The speech ends abruptly when Davis spots a table of diners who look like golfers. This means another visit by the man who just might tee it up with more golfers, figuratively speaking, than any other mortal on earth.



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