

# The Long and Short of Shaft Envy

By Lane Osborne

“Shoot me,” I once told my wife, “if we ever get a minivan.” I was twenty-five, newly married, not yet a father and completely naive as to how my perspective on such matters would change in time. When you’re young, your life is often governed by public perception, but the older you get the more that tends to fade away.

I’ve made lots of concessions in recent years to comfort, convenience, and performance. A few weeks ago, I spent a couple hours on the indoor putting green at one of Myrtle Beach’s golf retailers trying an assortment of Pings, Odysseys, and Taylor Mades. I even tried a SeeMore putter, but deciding that my goal was to “see less” putts I put it back on the rack. I’m always intrigued by the Scotty Camerons which seem like convicted felons under house arrest. They remain under lock and key behind what I can only assume is a bulletproof glass case. You usually have to flag down a salesperson just to request a 15-minute conjugal visit with one of those putters. Even then, the salesperson stands guard and eyes you suspiciously while you stroke putts on carpet grass, trying to determine if the marriage will work in the real world and is worth the \$300 to post bail. But on this day, a 50-inch Scotty Cameron, either too long to fit inside the display or that had Shawshanked its way out, was just propped against it.

I can still roll the rock with the best of them, using the 35-inch Ping Scottsdale Anser that I’ve used for the past twelve years, so I was just looking to look, not looking to buy. So, when I tried this Scotty Cameron Kombi it was more out of curiosity than anything else. Yet, after making a few 20-footers I was debating whether or not I could or would part with my trusty Ping for this new, long, gangly putter.

I have a friend (I’ll just refer to him as “Chad” to protect him from public ridicule) who struggles with the debate between technology versus tradition. You may see “Chad” one week with the 50-inch Odyssey putter he’s dubbed “Big John” draining 10-footers like they’re tap-ins and the next week trying to find the sweet spot on a 34-inch heel shafted Tommy Bolt blade that was used by his grandfather.

I always find the debate between tradition and technology to be an interesting one, particularly when it comes to the stigma associated with long putters. There is a large contingency of “golf purists” who feel as though long putters are an affront to the history of the game. They, however, don’t seem to mind that their bags are filled with other space age materials, like titanium, composites, alloys, graphite, and advanced polymers. The issue seems to really boil down to the length of one’s putter which has, in turn, led to shaft envy.

For years, sweet swinging Slammin’ Sammy Snead had challenges with putting, even resorting to putting sidesaddle. His contemporary, Ben Hogan, often regarded by golf historians as the epitome of golf purism, once suggested that the PGA Tour should count putts as half the value of a full shot. He made this suggestion around the time that the tour was experimenting with the size of the hole, because pure ball strikers like Hogan were losing tournaments to the likes of Paul Runyan who wasn’t the world’s greatest ball striker, but did, at the time, have the greatest short game. When the tour made the holes larger to presumably help poorer putters, like Hogan, it just enabled players like Runyan to make that many more putts. I’m not sure whether Hogan or Snead would have been in favor of using long putters, but their advocacy for larger holes, putts counting as only half a stroke, and using radical putting styles would certainly make them seem hypocritical if they were not.

I ended up getting the 50-inch Scotty Cameron and haven’t suffered from buyer’s remorse yet, but there’s still time. The day may come when I have a midlife crisis, buy another short stick and a cherry red, convertible. But, for now, I’ll keep the long putter in my bag, in the back of my minivan.

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