

2006 U.S. OPEN PREVIEW

LINKS

The Best Of Golf*

A photograph of a golf course with a clubhouse in the background. The clubhouse is a large, multi-story building with a gabled roof and several chimneys. The golf course is lush green with several sand traps and water hazards. The sky is clear and blue.

The Ultimate Test

**Golf's toughest major returns
to Winged Foot**

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Iron Proficiency

Bridgestone's J33 Forged Cavity Back irons definitely belong in the hands of a consistent ballstriker. This gorgeous iron (at address, it looks like a blade, with a touch of offset) is easier to hit than a true blade, but if you don't make a habit of hitting the center of the clubface, look for a more forgiving club.

However, if you have the game, the J33 delivers terrific feedback with plenty of feel, and is workable left or right, low or high. Bridgestone designers also hit a home run with a crucial but often overlooked element: the sole. "Through the bag, I was totally confident that I'd make clean contact, and it was all because of the sole," says a scratch. "Short irons don't dig and long irons don't skip into the back of the ball. I knew I would make solid contact from any lie."

BRIDGESTONE J33 Forged Cavity Back Irons

BOTTOM LINE: Classically designed, precise instruments that accomplished players and consistent ballstrikers will love.

RETAIL PRICE: \$899 (steel)

CONTACT: bridgestonegolf.com, 800-358-6319

Finding Balance

For the past two decades, David Whitlam has designed putters used by Vijay Singh, Fred Couples and Karrie Webb, among many others. The Devon ETBW is milled from mild carbon steel, with weights toward the heel and toe for stability.

At address, the Devon, which is heavier than expected, soles beautifully behind the ball and aligns easily and naturally every time, thanks to Whitlam's subtle sole contouring and refinements to the configuration of the shaft and hosel. "When a putter is weighted and balanced properly, I find it easier to control the length of my stroke and the way I accelerate through impact," says a 2. "I was hitting four-footers dead center with perfect speed."

Although not as forgiving as some of today's rear-weighted mallets, the Devon ETBW's ease of alignment, balance and solid feel (pure, but with a touch more "hit" than soft inserts) won over testers.

WHITLAM GOLF Devon ETBW Putter

BOTTOM LINE: Full of the quality engineering and craftsmanship that is typical of Whitlam's products.

RETAIL PRICE: \$325

CONTACT: whitlamgolf.com, 760-591-9869

