

**EQUIPMENT**

# SECRET WEAPON

Transforming the frustrating **FAIRWAY WOOD** into a game-changer



edited by MIKE STACHURA

# W

WHILE EVERY OTHER club in the bag is racing along at hyperspeed on the innovation highway, the poor fairway wood has been treading water, squeezed on one side by the game-saving ease of the hybrid and on the other by the explosive distance gains of the driver.

“It’s the new 2-iron,” says Scott Burnett, director of advanced product development at **Adams Golf**. “You can’t make deep faces, you can’t make the heads overly large, and you can’t change the length of the shaft. So basically you’re stuck trying to make a 43-inch-long club with effectively the same precise impact conditions as a 9-iron. But from a design standpoint, I still think there are some things you can play with.”

Elite players will switch to a new driver instantly, but ask them to try a new 3-wood, and they’ll look at you like you’re trying to steal their dog. “The 3-wood is certainly the hardest club to get in and out of a tour player’s bag, but average players are a lot less likely to say, ‘My 3-wood is the best club in my bag,’” says Luke Williams, director of product design for **Callaway**.

## IT’S A QUESTION OF TRADING WORKABILITY FOR FORGIVENESS.

“So there are different requirements for different levels of players, and it becomes a question of trading workability and forgiveness.”

But there finally might be new design ideas to get players excited about fairway woods again. Throw in the availability of more lofts, adjustability and a focus on fitting, and maybe it’s time to take another look at the game’s most difficult club. “It’s always going to be the longest club with the least loft that you’re still hitting off the ground,” says Tom Olsavsky, senior director of metalwood creation at **TaylorMade**. “The challenge for a designer is that you can do certain things to give them more distance or make them easier to hit, but it becomes a compromise. A club that might be easier to play might not win the distance test, but it’s going to be better for most people with higher than a 5-handicap.”

It’s a difficult problem, but here are four approaches that might get the fairway wood back in the race.



### MATERIAL SOLUTIONS MAKING THE FACE FASTER

THE DRIVER got better the minute designers started experimenting with materials and shapes to increase the speed of the ball coming off the face. Now it’s the fairway wood’s turn. The idea behind the **Adams Speedline F11** (\$200-steel, \$300-titanium, [adams-golf.com](http://adams-golf.com)) is to alter the body design so the face can give more at impact (hence the slots on the crown and sole). **TaylorMade** extended the adjustable R11 fairway line to include titanium models (\$300, [taylormadegolf.com](http://taylormadegolf.com)) that are larger than steel and feature a draw-producing low center of gravity (CG) and a thinner face to help increase ball speed. Meanwhile, the **Wishon 929HS** seeks to maximize springlike effect, yet keep a user-friendly, low-profile shape (\$230, [twgolftech.com](http://twgolftech.com)). The shallow design (the face is barely an inch high) also has a separately welded hosel made of 304 stainless steel to make it easier for a clubfitter to bend the lie angle to suit your game.

ADAMS

SPEEDLINE F11



TAYLORMADE

R11 TI



WISHON

929HS



**NIKE****VR PRO****TITLEIST****910F**

### ADJUSTABILITY FINDING THE RIGHT SETUP

**I**F A FAIRWAY WOOD looks right to you at address, you just might hit it a little better. Certainly, that has been part of the thinking behind the R11 models from TaylorMade but also the **Titleist 910F** and **Nike VR Pro**. “The look actually can be more traditional because it’s adjustable,” says Tom Stites, director of product creation for clubs at Nike. The VR Pro (\$230, [nikegolf.com](http://nikegolf.com)) has 32 face-angle settings as well as a low CG and sole channel to improve low-face impact performance. The Titleist 910F (\$250, [titleist.com](http://titleist.com)) offers an adjustable hosel for independent lie- and face-angle settings.



### HEAD STYLE FORGIVENESS VS. CONTROL

**O**FTEN, THE SHAPE of a fairway wood reveals a lot about the needs of the golfer it’s designed for. It’s why **Callaway’s** Diablo Octane (\$200, [callawaygolf.com](http://callawaygolf.com)) has two profiles (standard and tour) in terms of the size of the face and the length from front to back. “Splitting the line allowed us to focus each of those models on different purposes,” says Callaway’s Luke Williams. “The CG on the tour model is lower, shallower and closer to the face to help control trajectory. When we move the CG back like on the standard model, it helps generate more spin, and it’s better for ball speed on off-center hits.” Williams says the choice doesn’t have to be based on skill or swing speed: “It’s what you think you need most. There’s no substitute for trying them out on the range and on the golf course.”

**CALLAWAY****DIABLO OCTANE****CALLAWAY****DIABLO OCTANE****TOUR****CLEVELAND****LAUNCHER FL****TAYLORMADE****BURNER SF 2.0**

### LIGHTER TOTAL WEIGHT INCREASING SWING SPEED

**L**ONGER AND LIGHTER isn’t just for drivers anymore. And although some will say using a 3-wood with a slightly longer shaft will decrease your chances of making center contact, using a club with an overall lighter weight could increase your swing speed. Two of the more notable options are the 43½-inch **Cleveland** Launcher FL (\$200, [clevelandgolf.com](http://clevelandgolf.com)), which is 30 grams lighter than most fairway woods, and the 43¾-inch **TaylorMade** Burner SuperFast 2.0 (\$200, [taylormadegolf.com](http://taylormadegolf.com)), whose 200-cubic-centimeter head volume is larger than the first “oversize” drivers but has a lower and deeper CG.