



IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

Words Jeremy Ellwood ↓ Photography Paul Severn, Getty Images

More and more players are employing a science-based approach to putting, thanks to a little Green Book...

Drive for show; putt for dough they say, don't they? While the veracity of that adage is open to debate, ask virtually any pro what the key difference is week-to-week out on tour and almost all will reply "putting". If you putt well you make a decent cheque or save an otherwise mediocre week; if you putt badly you tumble down the leaderboard, or, worse still, give yourself an unwanted weekend off.

It's little surprise, then, that pros will explore every avenue possible to help them get the ball underground in as few strokes as possible, hence the myriad putting strokes and putter styles that have sprung up over the past two decades.

One of the most recent innovations that you may have seen the likes of Rory McIlroy, Andy Sullivan and Matt Fitzpatrick using is not something that actually putts the ball, but something that tells them where to putt it. The Green Book from Clere Golf is a greens-specific course planner that goes into far greater detail than anything any European Tour pro has previously slipped into his back pocket.

How does it differ? That's a question I put to both Paul Homersham, director of Pro Green Book Ltd, and world top-50 player Bernd Wiesberger, one of the big-name tour players now using it. ▶



Andy Sullivan and his caddie consult The Green Book in Abu Dhabi

“When we first started, we were looking to see what had gone before and produce something similar,” Homersham admits. “But what we’ve managed to do that hasn’t been done before is to scan and provide information on a much more detailed level. We’ve also introduced some new features and technologies to make it easier to take a 3D model and represent it on a piece of paper. It’s a graphic communications challenge that we’ve overcome by colouring each of the ‘direction of fall’ arrows depending upon steepness, so you can see fairly quickly where the major slopes are.”

“We didn’t have that many options before,” says Wiesberger. “We had rough arrows in our yardage books that indicated to some degree where the slope was falling towards. But with the option in The Green Book to have arrows every foot, more or less, you get a much more detailed view of the green.”

The Green Book is the fruit of Clere Golf’s ten years of golf industry experience, with this specific product about a year in the making. When it debuted at last year’s Scottish Open, winner Rickie Fowler and runner-up Raphael Jacquelin were among the 40 or so players to take one out, but Homersham admits reaction was a little mixed. “That was quite a surprise,” he says. “Some of the players who had played in the USA had used such books before. But a lot of the European players said they’d never used one, never seen one and thought it looked complicated



and confusing. So it would be fair to say we had a mixed reaction.”

David Horsey was another to turn to the book at Gullane, using it at every event since, including last August’s Made in Denmark victory. “It took me a while to work out how I was going to use it,” he tells me. “But as long as you find that happy medium of not getting too complicated and including a bit of feel, it’s very, very helpful. I’m a linear sort of person, so to see numbers and facts to help me read greens is always going to be a benefit.”

“It’s mainly to double-check a read,” adds Wiesberger. “For me, it’s more a use of the book as a reassurance over my line so I can step over the ball with a feeling that I know what the ball is supposed to do and where it’s supposed to go. Then it’s much easier for me to commit over the putt.

In circumstances where I’m struggling to read the line, or my caddie sees something different to what I do, we’ll step back, take a look at the book and let the science take over.”

There’s no doubt that at first glance The Green Book does look a little bewildering with its sea of arrows, figures and background contouring, though four different versions are available according to player preference – more or fewer arrows and with or without figures. Provided players can accurately plot where the flag and ball are, this wealth of slope data should

Rory McIlroy also uses the Green Book



equip them with all the information needed for a perfect read, although other variables – stroke execution, wind and so on – mean not every putt will then be holed.

“We take something like 300 million data points using a device that sits on a tripod and just fires millions and millions of individual lasers, recording where they are on the surface,” Homersham explains. “This gives us a very complex ‘points cloud’, which a computer then turns into a model. The challenge is to then get that onto something that a player can use, for which we rely on a number of proprietary software packages and our own software that we’ve written.”

“It’s the subtle slopes that it’s very good for,” James Baker, Horsey’s caddie for the past year, tells me. “You can see the majority of slopes, but it’s the ones that are difficult to see or that you’re unsure about where the book becomes very helpful. It took me perhaps a week or so to get used to it, but the more you look at it, the easier it becomes.”

Both Wiesberger and Horsey refer to the added element of trust and reassurance that The Green Book can yield, and renowned putting coach Phil Kenyon, who counts a dozen or so tour pros among his pupils – including Horsey – is not surprised. “There are various benefits,” he says. “First of all, you have the potential to make more accurate reads. ➤

≡
“I STEP OVER THE BALL AND KNOW WHERE IT’S SUPPOSED TO GO”
 ≡



The 17th at Valderrama – a Green Book client

aqua

i-DRY

The i-Dry System from **BIG MAX** guarantees 100% waterproof fabric, fully sealed seams, waterproof zippers, nearly weightless.



GREEN BOOK

Secondly, it can help you be more confident in your read. Golf is very much a mental game, and a lot of the time there can be an element of doubt – have I made the right read? What I've seen with The Green Book is that it often gives them confidence in their original read – confidence in their intuition that the ball is going to break this way, and the book confirms it, so they can then make a more positive stroke.

"I think green reading has been a little bit of a dark art in the past," Kenyon continues. "Some players are either good at it intuitively or they are not. One of the reasons is that the architectural designers of the greens often throw illusions in so you can perceive the slope to be one way, or perceive it to change during a putt, when actually it doesn't. You see a lot of guys whose variability in performance is coming more from their green reading than their ability to start the ball on line or to control speed."

The uptake among tour pros hints at the book's great potential, but for me there are two concerns – is this making golf more of a science than a game, and what is the impact on pace of play?

"We're not trying to play the game for people," Homersham responds when I raise the science concern with him. "We're just giving them good information to make decisions. They've still got to hit the putt, they've still got to use their own sense of feel and judgment to play the game. We're just taking some of that uncertainty out of their minds. We'd like to think it's more fun, if anything."

"Everybody approaches the game in a different way," adds Wiesberger, "and I think that's how it should be. Everybody has views on the golf swing, the putting motion and on approaching golf shots. Some will always try and keep it as simple as possible; some will bring science into it to a

degree, and I think that's the beauty of the game. You get guys like Bryson DeChambeau who is very analytical and very scientific about it and other guys who just step over it, try not to think about it too much and keep it more natural. You will have phases where one will become more popular, but I don't think it will ever be science only."

As for pace of play, Kenyon believes it could be having a beneficial, rather than detrimental, effect. "When you introduce anything, you have concerns about pace of play," he concedes. "But if a player is taught how to use the book correctly, it should improve pace of play through more decisive decision making. If you've got a Green Book and you know roughly where the pin is, you can be effectively reading your putt as you approach the green. You'll know where you may need to look to confirm that read, as opposed to walking all round the putt from high and low trying to get a sense of how it will break."

Expect Green Books, in a slightly simplified format, to start slowly filtering down to club level in the months ahead, initially at some of the premier tour venues. "We're really keen to bring some of the methods and technologies that the players are using to all golfers," Homersham enthuses. "We know from our own experience having developed the product that it makes understanding the breaks on a green quicker and easier when you know how to use it." Valderrama and Woburn are among the earliest clients, with more sure to follow.

"Believe it or not, tour pros do pay us for the books," Homersham tells me, confounding the commonly held belief that, on tour, everything comes free. But there's little doubt that the real commercial side to The Green Book will come via a gradual roll-out at club level.

≡ **"PLAYERS STILL HAVE TO USE THEIR SENSE OF FEEL AND JUDGEMENT"** ≡



Green Books are available with standard or extra arrows. Right: Bernd Wiesberger

The books offer incredible detail



www.bigmaxgolf.com | office@golftech.eu



NEED **BIGGER THINKING**

BLADE+



The newest and first fully automatically collapsible Ultra-Slim trolley from BIG MAX is now much more easier to handle. Contact your local dealer today to test drive the new BLADE+ from BIG MAX.

