

Have You Ever Experienced An Epiphany?



Adam Barr

Well, you're about to experience one! It all has to do with an extraordinary man who produces an extraordinary product. This is a story about one man's quest for excellence – a quest that makes no allowances for compromises!

He hand makes golf clubs that have won majors for the likes of **Jose Maria Olazabal** and **Retief Goosen**. Even the great **Tiger Woods** had his Titleist muscle-backed irons fine-tuned and refined by this master craftsman.

Former U.S. President **Bill Clinton** is an ardent fan of hand-crafted irons made by this genius.

This master has been hand-forging clubs for over 50

years. He comes from a region in Japan that is renowned for pounding steel into katanas – the swords samurai warriors twirled around centuries ago.

Who is this legendary man? Why is so little known about him in Asia? To help clear this mystery, ASIAN GOLF tracked down **Adam Barr**, president of Miura Golf to get an insight to the man many refer to as having the "hands of God" - **Katsuhiko Miura**.

Q&A What is it that makes owners of Miura golf clubs smile every time they play a round of golf? It's as though they have been touched by the "hands of God". Your thoughts?

Adam Barr: It's the feel, or what I like to call the "Purity of the Strike". More than one industry marketing study has concluded that the peerless feel of a well-struck shot is one of the key pleasures golfers seek. Of course, it can be very rare as well. Our clubs, because

of the careful, consistent way they are forged, transmit that otherworldly feel repeatedly.

Q&A It is very apparent that Miura Golf is a niche player in the industry. Give us a sense of how it all started?

Barr: The story of Miura Golf goes back to 1957, when Miura-san, then still a teenager, began to apprentice in the golf club forging houses of the Kansai region of Japan, where he was born. After learning and layering on experience, Miura-san decided to go out on his own and start making clubs. He has been

doing so for decades now, always in Japan, always from one forge and factory. We're not so concerned about the size of our company, just the quality. Growth will follow if we continue to see to quality.

Q&A What is the magic behind Miura Golf clubs – what is it that makes this brand command such fervent loyalty from its users?

Barr: There is no magic in the sense of secrets or tricks. There is great patience, care, and commitment to high standards. For instance, our spin-forging process: by hammering out only the heel-to-toe portion of the head and attaching the hosel later by our exclusive spin-forging process, we maintain a very fine, small, uniform grain structure in the hitting area of every head. No tiny voids or "piping" that could lead to a rough, unpleasant feel. (Watch this video about the Miura spin forging process - http://youtu.be/Kdconj9Y_1Q.)

Q&A In this day where mass production is the language of big business, can a company like Miura Golf whose credo goes against mass production survive for the long haul?

Barr: Yes. We do it every day, and have been for some time now. People crave the anti-anonymous, the opposite of

mass production. We often say, "There is no Mr. X in company Y)." There is, however, a Mr. Miura, and his two sons. I can literally introduce you to the man who made your sand wedge, and you can shake the hands that ground the edges. How many things that you buy nowadays can you say that about?

Q&A There's an intense belief in quality and excellence in everything that this company undertakes to produce. Let's look at clubs – are the clubs, especially the irons all handcrafted?

Barr: Yes. There are some machine processes, as you'll see in the video cited earlier. (After all, the main forging hammer is, necessarily, a machine.) But there are a great many hand processes, and it is these that apply the human touch and expertise to each club, raising it from the status of a mere hammered thing to a work of industrial art.

Q&A If you have to discuss what differentiates Miura Golf from the rest of the manufacturers in the industry, what would it be?

Barr: A great many things, but here are the chief ones:

■ Personal attention to craftsmanship. As noted above, there are many hand processes that make our golf clubs better - and human.

■ No lockstep development calendar. Ideas move around the factory freely and constantly, but you will never see us release a new club simply because it's January, or Masters week, or whenever. When an idea is ready, it comes to market.

■ Quality over quantity. Enough said.

■ Slavish devotion to high industrial standards. Ask any club fitter — he or she will confirm that when we drill a hole in a hosel, it is straight. Every time! And our weight tolerances per club head are about half a gram — 1/56th of an ounce. Most of the rest of the industry is OK with 3 to 5 grams.

■ I'm pretty confident that I'm the only equipment company president in the industry who answers all the consumer emails personally.

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MIURA





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Q&A Given the company’s commitment to product quality and excellence, is Miura Golf equipment being used by professionals on the golf tours of the world, especially the PGA Tour?

Barr: Yes. But since we don’t pay players to use our clubs, we don’t discuss it much. (We do give them the clubs). We are honored when those who make a living at the game choose our clubs. The fact that it’s not an economic transaction makes the implied endorsement that much stronger.

Q&A Let’s talk about the man who this brand is named after – is he still very passionate about making every club himself?

Barr: He is. At 71, Miura-san is healthy, vigorous, and involved every day. To be accurate, he is on the floor of the factory every day working, grinding — but he doesn’t make every club. We make too many heads for every single one to pass through his hands, but he has trained everyone who does touch the clubs. His sons, Yoshitaka-san and Shinei-san, now also have significant roles in the business. Yoshitaka-san, like his father, is a master grinder. Shinei-san is president of the Japanese company, responsible for company direction with the advice of his father and brother, and also an expert in the ways of forging.

Q&A What is puzzling is the extremely low profile of the Miura Golf brand in Asia, which technically is the home turf of Miura. Why do you think this is so?

Barr: Well...we don’t agree that the profile is low. From our perspective, it’s the most respected brand of golf clubs in Japan. While it may not be as big in dollars made or heads sold, the technical reputation is marvelous. And that situation pretty much holds true around the world, not just in Asia.

Q&A What is the future direction of Miura Golf? Do you see the company remaining as a niche player or do you see changes taking place down the line?

Barr: Well, we can’t say too much, being a closely held company. But we have always been committed to the notion that we will never grow too big to make clubs of the highest quality. To do so would defeat the purpose of Miura. We have production capacity to spare, and like any company, plan to grow as well as we can. But we’re not into bigness... just best-ness, if you will.

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In an earlier interview, discussing the future, Mr. Miura is quoted as saying, “I always believed and thankfully my sons have embraced the belief that when you are thinking of making a new model, don’t look at other manufacturers clubs and do not look at pictures in golf magazines - we must remember that each golfer is an individual, thus manufacturing the ‘perfect’ set of irons has to take into account the imperfections we all possess.”

Mr. Miura maintains that while technology has its place, what is paramount is that human beings will be playing with the clubs, not automatons with identical preferences and playing personalities.

“My feeling is that choosing a golf club will, one day, reflect a step back in time. You will pick up a variety of clubs and hit with them. When you find the one that feels the best for you, it will be the one you will want. If you trust your feel, the data will confirm your choice.” And that will be the epiphanous moment!

